



# Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner

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Corporate Plan 2015 – 2017

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## Foreward by the Refugee Applications Commissioner

I am pleased to introduce the Corporate Plan for the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) for the period 2015 to 2017.

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

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

Since the publication of the Corporate Plan 2012 - 2014, the Office, in addition to undertaking our functions under the Refugee Act, 1996 and EU law relating to refugee status determination and family reunification, has also been tasked by the Minister for Justice and Equality with new responsibility for the processing of subsidiary protection applications under the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013 with effect from 14 November 2013. This includes the representation of ORAC at appeals hearings for such cases. This has resulted in a considerable increase in our caseload.

A key feature of our protection determination process will continue to be an emphasis on quality decision making and for this purpose, we will continue to prioritise staff training having due regard to international best practice.

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

In the current economic environment as we implement various public service reform initiatives, we need to continue to ensure optimum use of resources and maximum value for money while always having due regard to our statutory framework and obligations. We must also reinforce the traditional values applied in our organisation of independence in decision making, integrity, professionalism and commitment while also fostering greater openness, accountability and performance at all levels.

This Plan, along with our multi-annual strategy statements and other Corporate documents, provides us with a framework for excellence which we will continue to monitor, review and adjust, if necessary, to ensure its continued relevance.

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

David Costello  
Refugee Applications Commissioner



## Introduction

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner was established on 20 November, 2000, as an independent statutory Office, to consider applications for refugee status and to make recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality on whether such status should be granted. We also consider applications for family reunification from persons granted refugee status in the State under the Refugee Act, 1996. Since 14 November 2013, ORAC has also been tasked with the investigation of applications for subsidiary protection and the issuing of appropriate recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality on such applications. We are also the responsible authority for the operation of the EU Dublin III procedure which determines the contracting State responsible for processing an application for international protection in the European Union.

Since our establishment we have shown that we are a progressive and responsive organisation. Much progress has been made with the elimination of backlogs. We operate in a constantly changing and challenging environment and while we have made considerable progress to date, it is timely for the Office to take a look at what we have put in place and decide on future priorities. As is illustrated by the expansion of our mandate for the processing of applications for subsidiary protection, we continue to demonstrate that we are in a position to respond effectively to new challenges. The same applies with the operation of the EU Dublin III Regulation.

With the enactment of planned new protection legislation (subject to Oireachtas approval) ORAC will likely be subsumed into the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) which will then be responsible for determining applications for refugee status at first instance as part of a wider single procedure which will also consider subsidiary protection and other residence permission issues.

Before ORAC amalgamates with INIS, this Plan has been developed with a view to the Office continuing its mandate as a highly professional organisation committed to providing quality protection determinations and family reunification investigations and with the ability to adapt to forthcoming changes when new legislation is enacted. Notwithstanding the current financial constraints, we need to continue to prioritise and provide an excellent quality service to our customers and stakeholders. We will also maintain a working environment where staff believe that their individual contribution is valued.

Finally, we will continue to be proactive and to focus on excellence. We will also see to it that our processes and procedures are more streamlined and that we have all the necessary skills to enable us continue to develop an organisation capable of fulfilling its statutory role.

Throughout our operational process, we are committed to taking account of international best practice in processing protection and family reunification applications and to have regard to standards set by international organisations such as the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the UNHCR.

Finally, so long as our organisation continues to exist, this Plan will be reviewed to ensure its relevance to the environment in which we operate and our effectiveness as a public service organisation.



The focus of this Corporate Plan will be:

*To deliver high quality refugee status and subsidiary protection determinations and family reunification investigations through an organisation committed to continual improvement where people are valued.*

Its main themes will be:

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

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

The Mission of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner in accordance with the Refugee Act, 1996, the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013 and other relevant national 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<sup>1</sup>,*
- (ii) *to investigate applications by refugees to allow family members to enter and reside in the State and report to the Minister for Justice and Equality on such applications,*  
  
*and*
- (iii) *to investigate applications for subsidiary protection and to issue appropriate recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality*

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> Includes representation of ORAC at hearings at the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.



In delivering our mission we will work closely within our statutory framework with other relevant bodies such as the Department of Justice and Equality/Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT), the Refugee Legal Service (RLS) and TUSLA – the Child and Family Agency. We will also work with the UNHCR and with relevant interests in civil society dealing with protection applicants and refugees.

To deliver this mission ORAC seeks to:

- investigate applications for refugee status, family reunification and subsidiary protection within minimum time frames;
- keep the number of cases on hands to a minimum;
- develop the highest standard of investigation and decision-making;
- contribute to the preservation of the integrity of the asylum, subsidiary protection and family reunification process;

and

- manage our organisation and its resources efficiently and effectively having particular regard to the development of our staff and the delivery of quality customer services.

The key values which guide our work are:

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



## Efficiency and Effectiveness in the Decision-making Process

The most important function of ORAC is decision-making in respect of applications for refugee status, family reunification and subsidiary protection. Service delivery both in quantitative and qualitative terms is the central organisational challenge.

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

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

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

## Quality Customer Service

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

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

ORAC will continue to review Customer Service in the organisation and introduce improvements where deemed necessary. Consultation with customers is a key element in identifying areas for improvement. In this regard, regular meetings with the Customer Service Liaison Panel will continue, at which the views and concerns of non-governmental organisations working with protection applicants and refugees are taken on board as far as practicable. We will also continue to carry out Customer Surveys to obtain feedback on the services we provide and to learn how we might improve service provision.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

- Continue to promote a customer service culture throughout the organisation, founded on an informed assessment of customer needs and driven by staff commitment to excellence.



- Continue to ensure service delivery consistent with best practice and responsive to the needs of a wide and ethnically diverse customer base.

### Effective Communications

ORAC will continue to focus on communications both internally and with external customers and stakeholders.

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

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

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

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

- Ensure comprehensive and effective communication within the organisation.
- Optimise levels of communication with external stakeholders and relevant interests in civil society and ensure a consistent approach.

### Development of Human Resource Management

The continued development of appropriate management and leadership skills and capabilities, as well as fostering practices that facilitate organisational change and service delivery, will continue to be a priority. The development of human resource management in ORAC will take into account various public service reform initiatives as they arise, as well as the impact of ongoing constraints on staff numbers. The organisation also has to have due regard to the way in which Human Resource Management has changed with the introduction of PeoplePoint in March 2013, and the subsequent reorganisation of the HR function across the Department of Justice and Equality and its associated bodies. PeoplePoint is the shared service centre for HR and Pension related administration and queries for the whole Civil Service. While most HRM services are now provided by PeoplePoint and the Department's HR Unit, certain residual staff support functions remain with ORAC.

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

- Continue a strategic approach to human resource management and development



aimed at optimising the availability of well trained and motivated staff required to meet business needs and the flexibility to deploy staff to best effect.

### **Effective Use of Information Technology**

Like all organisations processing large volumes of transactions, modern computer-based information systems have become a central component in managing our information and communication flows. The central IT resource of our organisation is the Management Live IT System which will continue to be supported and developed as our key case management resource. The Asylum and Immigration Strategic Integration Programme (AISIP) has increased functionality and facilitates appropriate data exchanges, within relevant statutory frameworks, across the asylum and immigration areas and provides the required statistical and management information. We also place continued importance on other information technology systems such as:

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

During the lifetime of this Plan, ORAC will:

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

### **International Co-operation**

ORAC continues to recognise the importance of ongoing international co-operation with key partners in the field of protection determination and best practice.

This particularly applies to areas such as:

- Building effective and efficient business processes.
- Quality Assurance.
- Utilisation of Country of Origin Information.
- Staff Training and Development.

We will continue to co-operate with colleagues in other states on protection matters and best practice both bilaterally and in such fora as the European Union, European Asylum Support Office and the Inter - Governmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees (IGC).

Enhancing co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in the context of the delivery of our respective mandates, will also be important.



## Implementation

Our organisation's Corporate Plan will be implemented in accordance with the principles of good corporate governance and best practice in the fields in question. Strategic objectives, actions and time frames will be incorporated in strategy statements and reported on in our business plans. Our partnership arrangements will play an important role in this process.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

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

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

Our Corporate Plan will be subject to ongoing evaluation.

## Reporting

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

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

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



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