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1. Introduction

The mission of the Department of Justice and Equality is to 'maintain community and national security, promote justice and equity, and safeguard human rights and fundamental freedoms consistent with the common good.'

One of the Department’s core objectives is to deliver ‘an efficient, responsive and fair immigration, asylum and citizenship system.’ The goals and actions contained within its Strategy Statement 2015-2017 express how this objective will be met.

<table>
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<th>Goals</th>
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| To provide immigration related services to applicants in an efficient and cost effective manner | • Civilianise frontline immigration controls at Dublin Airport and other major ports of entry  
• Rationalise and civilianise registration function around a small number of hubs  
• Continue to deliver decisions on citizenship applications within a six month timeframe  
• Continue citizenship ceremonies  
• Process visa and immigration applications in a timely manner |
| To maintain the integrity of the immigration system                 | • New immigration and residence legislation  
• Continued rigorous control of Ireland’s borders and immigration procedures to combat immigration abuse  
• Coordinate with relevant Government Departments |
| To maintain the integrity of and implement improvements to the protection and direct provision systems | • Implement improvements to the protection and direct provision systems  
• A Protection Bill to provide for a Single Procedure for Protection applicants with the aim of reducing processing times and, as a result, the length of time spent in the Direct Provision System  
• Working Group to recommend to the Government what improvements should be made to the State’s existing Direct Provision and protection process |
| To maintain and enhance the Common Travel Area with the United Kingdom | • Rollout of British-Irish Visa Scheme (BIVS) commencing with applications from India and China  
• Exchange of immigration information and intelligence with our UK partners  
• Ongoing cooperation with the United Kingdom Government |
1. 2016 in summary: Ireland’s response to international challenges

The growing Irish economy and our positive international reputation have maintained the attractiveness of the country to migrants seeking to work, study and settle here. The number of citizens from non-EU countries legally living here at the end of 2016 rose to approximately 115,000, compared to 114,000 at the end of 2015. Visa applications rose by 7% compared to 2015, to more than 124,000.

On the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 on 31 December 2016, the responsibilities of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) for the investigation of applications for international protection transferred to a new International Protection Office (IPO) within the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service. The same Act established the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT), a statutorily independent body which replaced the former Refugee Appeals Tribunal. Implementation of the Act will simplify and streamline existing international protection arrangements and provide applicants with a final decision on their protection application in a more straightforward and timely fashion.

As part of the Government’s response to the migrant crisis, the Irish Refugee Protection Programme accepted over 760 people into the country in 2016. Ireland will provide a safe haven for up to 4,000 persons under EU Relocation and Resettlement programmes as well as through other measures.

In relation to the Report of the Working Group on improvements to the protection process, including direct provision and supports to asylum seekers,

• over 90% of recommendations are now implemented, partially implemented or in progress.
• the majority of persons identified in the Report as being over five years in the direct provision system and whose applications could be progressed have now had their cases completed.

As part of a programme to civilianise and modernise the delivery of immigration services, the responsibility for registering non-EU residents in Dublin transferred from the Garda National Immigration Bureau to INIS.

10,044 people became Irish citizens in 2016. As part of the Easter Rising commemorations, a special citizenship ceremony took place in Waterford City Hall, marking the first raising of the Tri-colour by Thomas Francis Meagher in Waterford in 1848.

The practical impact of the ‘Brexit’ referendum on the operation of the Common Travel Area, including in respect of non-EU nationals, is being considered in the context that both UK and Irish Governments have expressed the intention that it remain in place after the UK leave the Union.
2. Providing immigration related services in an efficient and cost effective manner

Residence: Living in Ireland for Work, Study or Family Reasons

Non-EEA citizens resident in Ireland

All non-EEA nationals living in the State for longer than 90 days are required to register with An Garda Síochána. In 2016, approximately 96,000 new or renewed registrations of permission to remain in the State were issued.

The provisional 2016 year end estimates of non-EEA nationals with permission to live in Ireland is approximately 115,000, compared to 114,000 at the end of 2015.

The current top 5 registered nationalities, which account for over 48.5% of all persons registered, are Brazil (13.2%), India (12.2%), China (9.2%), USA (7.9%) and Pakistan (6%). The majority of persons with permission to remain in the State are here for work or study purposes.

Applications to INIS for permission to live in the State

Certain types of application to live in the State need to be made to the Minister through INIS. Once their permission is granted, these people must register with An Garda Síochána as a legal resident. The Residence Division of INIS received approximately 14,500 such applications in 2016.
Transfer of Burgh Quay Registration Office to INIS

Citizens from outside the EEA or Switzerland who are resident in the State for more than 90 days must legally register their presence in the State through a process known as ‘registration’.

There were 95,701 foreign national registrations in 2016; approximately 41% of these are first-time applications, the remainder are renewals by existing residents.

For many years An Garda Síochána (AGS) have delivered Registration and Permission services at the main office at Burgh Quay, Dublin and approximately 70 Garda offices nationwide.

As part of a programme to civilianise and modernise the delivery of immigration services, in 2016 the responsibility for registrations in Dublin transferred from the Garda National Immigration Bureau to INIS. The transfer will deliver the following benefits:

- Garda resources will be freed up from managing the registration office in Dublin in order to focus on operational areas in relation to investigation of immigration-related offences.

- It provides the opportunity for INIS to streamline its processes between the frontline registration office and back office units to reduce paperwork and respond more efficiently to customers needs.

The Garda civilian staff working in the registration office transferred to the Department of Justice and Equality in July 2016 and the service is now managed operationally by INIS.

In parallel with the transfer, INIS introduced a number of process changes to manage the demand experienced at the office, especially during September and October, the start of the academic year. For example, an appointment management system was put in place to allow applicants to book a time slot of their choosing for registration rather than queuing.
Visas

Applications processed

Provisional figures indicate that 124,225 entry visa applications for both short and long stays were received in 2016, an increase of 7% on 2015, and a cumulative increase of 41% since 2012.

The overall approval rate for entry visa applications was 90%.

The top 5 nationalities applying for visas in 2015 were India (20%) China (13%) Russia (10%) Pakistan (8%) and Turkey (5%).

The number of re-entry visas applications processed in 2016 was over 45,000, an increase of 12% on the 2015 figure.

Extension of short stay visa waiver programme

In October, the Tánaiste announced an extension to the Irish Short-stay Visa Waiver Programme.

Under the Programme, certain short stay visas issued by the immigration authorities of the UK are recognised by Ireland for the purposes of onward travel to Ireland. The Programme is now extended for a further five years to 31 October 2021.

Under the Programme, tourists or business people who have lawfully entered the UK, including Northern Ireland, on a valid UK visa will be able to travel on to Ireland without the requirement to obtain an Irish visa. They will be allowed to stay in Ireland for up to 3 months or until their UK visa runs out, whichever is the shorter.

This Programme runs in tandem with the British Irish Visa Scheme (BIVS) which provides the additional advantage for short stay visa holders from China and India to enter either Ireland or the UK on a single visa and travel freely between both countries. 18,635 of the visas issued in 2016 were ‘BIVS endorsed’.

These schemes have been regarded by tourism promotion agencies as a success since their inception and have contributed to ongoing increases in tourism. It is expected that they will continue to provide a significant boost to efforts to attract more visitors to Ireland from these countries.
Improvements in customer service

Online appointments

For a number of years, the Burgh Quay Public Office in Dublin saw early morning queues form as people sought to access the registration service and the over-the-counter re-entry visa service, which were delivered on a first come, first served basis.

As part of its customer service agenda, INIS has put in place a number of measures to address this particular issue.

In November 2015, an online booking system, accessible at reentryvisa.inis.gov.ie was launched to allow customers to book a time for their re-entry visa application at Burgh Quay. Customers may use this service in addition to applying by registered post and there is no need for anyone to queue for a re-entry visa.

From the launch of the re-entry visa system to the end of 2016, over 30,000 people have booked an appointment for the service.

In September 2016 an online appointments system for registrations at the Burgh Quay Immigration Office was rolled out. This can be accessed from the INIS website and at burghquayregistrationoffice.inis.gov.ie.

The system went live in time to meet the demands of the busy academic year registration period, and during this time to the end of the year, over 25,000 people booked an appointment for the service.

Both these systems allow customers to select a date and time for the service they require, and have replaced the ticketing systems that had previously been in use.

Improvements to INIS website

Over the course of 2016 INIS has progressed the redevelopment of its website www.inis.gov.ie to deliver content with greater customer focus. The Citizenship, Registration, Asylum and Immigration guidance and Customer Contact information have all been completely overhauled to deliver information to our customers in a much more user-friendly and intuitive way.
Citizenship

Citizenship application processing

10,044 citizenship certificates were issued in 2016. The top 5 nationalities awarded citizenship were Poland (1,328), India (1,028), Nigeria (777), Romania (756) and Philippines (730).

INIS also notes the ongoing success of the citizenship ceremonies of which there were 9 such events in 2016.

Since the implementation of the far reaching reforms to the citizenship process in 2011, decisions have been made in over 100,000 applications and the processing time for the majority of standard applications has been reduced from 31 months to around 6 months, despite a significant increase in valid application volumes in the intervening period.
Celebrating our history and our shared future

The year 2016 was the centenary of the Easter Rising 1916 and marked a very special year in the history of our country. It was a year for all of the people of Ireland; one in which we could all reflect on what it means to be Irish.

Citizenship ceremonies were introduced in 2011. Since then, approximately 90,000 new citizens of Ireland have been welcomed. The citizenship ceremonies are a wonderful celebration of the diversity of culture, vibrancy of spirit and new ideas which these new citizens bring to our country. These new citizens will help to shape Ireland for the next 100 years.

As part of the 1848 Tricolour Celebrations for 2016, on Friday 4th March 100 applicants for Citizenship received their certificates of Nationality at a special ceremony in Waterford City Hall.
Civilianisation at Dublin Airport

In September 2014, Minister Fitzgerald announced a major programme to civilianise immigration functions currently undertaken by members of An Garda Síochána.

One function to be civilianised is frontline immigration checks at Dublin Airport. On 22nd June 2015, Immigration Officers from INIS took on full 24/7 responsibility for passport checks at Terminal 1.

The transfer of functions at Terminal 2 will be completed in 2017, at which time almost 150 civilian staff will be deployed at the airport giving rise to the release of an equivalent number of Garda resources for operational duties, including investigations into immigration-related crime such as people trafficking and fraudulent applications to live in the State.

In 2016 the immigration services at the airport’s two terminals processed 13.8 million passengers. Dublin Airport had its busiest ever year, with a record 27.9 million passengers travelling through its halls, an increase of 11% on the previous year and more than four times the population of Ireland.

The Border Management Service works closely with the Dublin Airport Authority and airlines to ensure an effective and efficient service is provided to customers.

As part of its overall border management programme, in 2016 INIS conducted a competitive procurement for the supply of self-service, automated border control gates. The results of the competition will be announced early in 2017 and rollout in Dublin Airport will commence shortly afterwards.
3. Maintaining the integrity of the immigration system

Controlling Ireland’s borders and combating immigration abuse

Deportations/Removals from the State

Approximately 4,446 persons were deported/removed from the State in 2016. This figure comprises some 3,951 non EU nationals who were refused entry into the State at ports of entry and were returned to the place from where they had come. In addition, 428 failed asylum seekers and illegal migrants were deported from the State, 67 EU nationals were returned to their countries of origin on foot of an EU Removal Order and 42 asylum seekers were transferred under the Dublin Regulation to the EU member state in which they first applied for asylum.

Important changes to the Immigration Acts, provided for in the International Protection Act 2015, will also assist in respect of the State’s capacity to enforce deportation orders in certain circumstances where the subject of the order seeks to evade or frustrate their deportation. These amendments will improve the effectiveness of existing legislative provisions allowing for the arrest, detention and removal of non-nationals against whom a deportation order is in force and removal from the State of persons refused leave to land.

Voluntary Returns

Provisional figures show that a total of 187 persons chose to return home voluntarily in 2016. Of that number, 143 were assisted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

![Chart of Number of Removals/Deportations from the State 2012 - 2016]

![Chart of Top 5 Countries of Origin of Deported/Removed Persons in 2016]

Brazil, 11.5%; Albania, 9.9%; South Africa, 6.9%; Nigeria, 6.7%; USA, 5.8%; Others, 58.9%
Improved security in the immigration process

Ireland continues to progress a broad series of initiatives to strengthen border security. For instance, since November 2016 an automated connection to INTERPOL’s Lost and Stolen Travel Documents database was rolled out by An Garda Síochána to all international airports and seaports in the State. In the first eight weeks of operating systematic checks against this Database over 700,000 documents were searched, with a number of people having been refused entry to Ireland on the basis of an alert on the system having been triggered.

In addition, the introduction of a system to enhance identity document checks as part of the Citizenship process has resulted in the earlier detection of fraudulent claims.

In 2017 the Irish immigration authorities will begin to process Advance Passenger Information on flights into the State from outside the EU and preparations are also underway to implement the EU Directive on Passenger Name Records (PNR). These systems, and other measures, will provide further protection for our borders against crime, terrorism and illegal immigration threats.

The introduction of self-service ‘e-Gates’ at Dublin Airport in 2017 will automate routine immigration checks for EU passengers and provide new channels to pass through the immigration process on arrival. The gates will automate standard border checks and allow passport control staff to assign additional time to more complex cases and identify cases of potential abuse at our borders.
4. Maintaining the integrity of and implementing improvements to the protection and direct provision systems

Implementing the International Protection Act

On 31 December 2016, the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD, commenced the principal provisions of the International Protection Act 2015, providing for the introduction of a single application procedure for people seeking international protection.

The 2015 Act replaces a sequential asylum application system with a single application process, bringing Ireland into line with the processing arrangements of all other EU Member States.

The Act is the most substantial reform in the international protection application area in two decades and the new single application process will determine certainty of status at an earlier stage for those entitled to seek international protection within the State.

All applications for international protection from 31 December 2016 will be processed under the new arrangements in the new International Protection Office of INIS (replacing the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner) and any appeals arising will be heard by the new International Protection Appeals Tribunal (replacing the Refugee Appeals Tribunal).

Three separate stand-alone provisions relating to immigration and deportation were commenced earlier in 2016. Further details can be found on the website of the International Protection Office, [www.ipo.gov.ie](http://www.ipo.gov.ie).
International Protection

Asylum applications

2,244 asylum applications were received in 2016 as compared to 3,276 in 2015 equating to a 32% decrease. The decrease is due, almost exclusively, to the reduction in applications from Pakistan and Bangladesh, with many such applicants showing previous immigration history in the UK.

The top five countries of application in 2016 were Syria, Pakistan, Albania, Zimbabwe and Nigeria.

Subsidiary Protection

ORAC has made substantial progress in addressing its subsidiary protection caseload. In 2016, it processed 641 cases to completion.

At the end of the year, there were 406 cases pending. 64 of these will be processed under the European Union (Subsidiary Protection) Regulations 2013, and the remaining cases will fall to be processed under the transition provisions of the International Protection Act 2015.

Direct Provision System

At end 2016 there were 4,420 protection applicants residing in State-provided accommodation centres under contract to the Reception and Integration Agency. Not all those 4,420 persons were awaiting decisions on their protection application; this figure included approximately 450 with some form of status residing there while they source private accommodation as well as 269 who have been issued with a Deportation Order requiring that they remove themselves from the State.

The figure of 4,420 is 276 less than at the end of 2015 (a decrease of 5.9%). However, this masks the fact that over 1,600 persons entered the system of State-provided accommodation in 2016, while over 1,900 persons left the system over the same period. As the State provided accommodation is entirely voluntary, some of those leaving the system were exercising their right to live elsewhere. In addition, the length of time applicants spend in the system has reduced significantly with only a very small number now in the system for more than 5 years. This is due to a concerted effort to process such cases during 2016.
Update on improvements to the Protection Process

The Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD and the Minister of State for Equality, Migration and Integration, David Stanton TD, provided a progress update on the Report of the Working Group on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and other Supports for Asylum Seekers at a meeting of NGOs on 16 June 2016.

The Report, which was published in June 2015, made 173 recommendations. The Tánaiste reported that a total of 91 have been implemented, a further 49 recommendations have been partially implemented or are in progress, and the balance remain under consideration.

By the end of the year further progress had been made. The Tánaiste was expected to announce in early 2017 that upwards of 90% of the recommendations had at this point been implemented, partially implemented or in progress. This represents significant progress in the past 18 months in taking forward the Working Group recommendations.

A key recommendation of the Working Group was the introduction of a single application procedure for the protection process. The International Protection Act, which provides for such a procedure, commenced on 31 December 2016. The Act responds to 26 of the Working Group’s recommendations and can be expected to positively address the crucial issue of the length of time that applicants spend in the process and in the Direct Provision system; another key concern of the Working Group.

It is estimated that the majority of those identified in the Report as being over five years in the Direct Provision system and whose cases have no impediments to progress, such as pending judicial review proceedings, have now had their cases processed to completion, which has been a key achievement. The Task Force set up to examine important integration supports reported that 87% of people granted status had moved into the wider community within six months of being granted status.

There has also been progress towards improving the daily lives of asylum seekers in Ireland while their application is being processed. In January, an increase to the Direct Provision Allowance for children was announced, the first such increase since the introduction of the payment some sixteen years ago. Prescription fees for all Direct Provision residents, both adults and children, have also been waived. Issues such as access to cooking facilities and increase in living space have also been progressed. By year end arrangements were well advanced in facilitating access for protection applicants to the Offices of the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children.
Irish Refugee Protection Programme

Irish Refugee Protection Programme

The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) was established by Government Decision on 10 September 2015 as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis that developed in Southern Europe as a consequence of mass migration from areas of conflict in the Middle East and Africa. Under this programme, the Government has pledged to accept a total of 4,000 persons into the State, through a combination of the EU asylum seeker relocation mechanism established by two EU Council Decisions in 2015 to assist Italy and Greece, the UNHCR programme refugee resettlement programme (currently focused on resettling refugees from Lebanon) and some other mechanisms.

Cross-Departmental Inter-Agency Taskforce

A Cross Departmental Inter-Agency Taskforce is chaired by the Department of Justice and Equality to coordinate the operational and logistical aspects of the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. The Taskforce is adopting a whole of Government approach. Its membership comprises all the main Government Departments and State agencies that play a role in the delivery of services to refugees as well as the UNHCR and the Red Cross. Among the many issues covered by the Taskforce are – emergency accommodation and housing, education, health, social protection, security, integration as well as pledges of support from members of the public and the voluntary sector. There is scope for operational sub-groups to be established under the auspices of the Taskforce to tackle the more practical issues arising in the delivery of services to refugees and their integration into society.

How the 4,000 people will be taken in under the IRPP

Of the 4,000 people committed to under the Government Decision establishing the IRPP, 2,622 are intended to be taken in under the EU relocation scheme from Greece and Italy and 1,040 are to come from Lebanon under the refugee resettlement programme. The Government has also decided, following an all-party Oireachtas motion to take up to 200 unaccompanied minors who had previously been in the Calais camp with the balance to be allocated through other mechanisms.
Progress under the EU Relocation Mechanism

By the end of 2016, under the EU’s relocation pledge system, Ireland had taken in 240 people, mainly Syrian families, from Greece. The intention is to sustain the pace and size of intakes throughout 2017 at the levels required to allow Ireland to meet its full commitments within the timeframe envisaged by the Programme. The Greek programme is now working very well and Ireland will meet its full obligations to Greece. Unfortunately, because Italy does not permit security assessments on her territory by other police forces, Ireland is currently unable to take asylum seekers from Italy. However, Ireland continues to work with Italian colleagues to try to resolve this aspect of the relocation programme.

Teams from the IRPP and An Garda Síochána have been on the ground in Athens interviewing groups of asylum seekers due to arrive in Ireland. Experienced personnel from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, have also accompanied the IRPP teams in order to interview unaccompanied minors and meet Greek officials regarding a regular intake of unaccompanied minors from Greece.

Progress under the Refugee Resettlement Programme

Under the resettlement part of the Programme, 519 refugees have been resettled in Ireland at the end of 2016. In addition, the Government announced that it is extending the resettlement programme to take in a further 520 refugees from Lebanon in 2017.

Irish Red Cross – Pledged Accommodation

The Irish Red Cross have reported that they have active pledges of accommodation that could be made available in the very near future with nearly 500 offers of accommodation, composed of both shared and vacant offers of accommodation. The Red Cross have advised that given the numbers of relocated asylum seekers now in Ireland they will be in a position early in the New Year, working closely with the Department of Justice and Equality, to temporarily resettle asylum seekers in pledged accommodation.
6. Looking forward to 2017

The targets set for the Immigration Service for 2017 include:

- Continue to meet the demands on the service including processing of a wide range of applications including visas, residence applications, citizenship etc.

- Continue to implement the provisions of the International Protection Act 2015, including the bedding in of the new arrangements necessary to implement the Single Application Procedure for the determination of protection applications. Complete the implementation of the approved recommendations of the Working Group on improvements to the protection system including Direct Provision, and with specific focus on facilities for families as per the Programme for Government.

- Maintain progress on meeting our commitments under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme.

- Transfer the responsibility for passport checks at Terminal 2, Dublin Airport, to INIS during the middle part of 2017, so completing this phase of the overall civilianisation project.

- Roll out Advance Passenger Information checks against passengers arriving at Irish airports, commencing with non-EEA flights.

- Improve customer service through a range of measures including upgrading the INIS website and rolling out online application forms and online payments functionality to our customers, as well as the introduction of electronic border control gates at Dublin airport.

- Continue to enforce immigration laws including removal of persons who have no legal basis for being in the State and revoking or refusal of immigration permissions for those engaged in immigration abuses, including marriages of convenience and abuse of EU Free Movement rights.

- Work with other Government Departments to negotiate with our European partners on immigration related matters, including protection of the Common Travel Area (CTA) when the UK triggers Article 50 as part of ‘Brexit.’ Both Irish and UK Governments have stressed the importance of maintaining the CTA post Brexit.

- Continue to represent the Department at EU and international for a on immigration matters to ensure that Ireland’s interests are represented at international level.