



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection

Annual report of An tArd-Chláraitheoir to the Minister for Social Protection on the operation of the Civil Registration Acts for 2021

30 June 2022

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1. CIVIL REGISTRATION

Purpose of this report

This report has been prepared to comply with Section 11(1) of the Civil Registration Act 2004, as amended, (referred to as “the Act” in this report). The Act provides that An tArd-Chláraitheoir will prepare a report annually on the operation of the Act and provide a copy to the Minister for Social Protection.

The Civil Registration Service (referred to as the “Service” in the remainder of this report) operates under the aegis of the Department of Social Protection (“the Department”). The General Register Office holds records of life events: births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships, stillbirths and adoptions in Ireland. It also holds several sets of records relating to life events which are historic in nature.

Under the Act, local registration services are provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE) through the Civil Registration Service with offices located nationally delivering registration services directly to the public.

The data presented in this report presents the activities of the Service during 2021. Where feasible, the GRO has improved the presentation of data by reflecting both the number of registrations that have been completed in the year and the date in which the life event occurred.

Summary of registration activity during 2021

During 2021, 110,141 key life events were registered and just over 334,000 certificates of current and historic life events were issued by the Service – Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview.

A number of matters of note arose during the year:

- The Covid-19 pandemic continued to impact on the delivery of services throughout 2021. Alternative means of accessing services were put in place and registration services were maintained. These temporary measures expired at the end of September 2021.
- The HSE suffered a cyber-attack in mid-May 2021 resulting in the temporary suspension of registration services for a period of five weeks. The consequences of this attack continued to be endured during the latter part of the year.

- The number of marriages which took place recovered during the year, however, the widespread restrictions on public gatherings continued to have an impact on the overall number of marriages.
- The number of births registered in the year increased by over 4%.
- The number of deaths registered in the year increased by nearly 5%.
- The number of marriages registered increased by 80% but remained 19% below the average number of marriages registered between 2017 and 2019.
- The GRO participated with other Departments and agencies in dealing the recommendations made by the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in October 2020¹; in particular where the findings related to birth registration and adoption practices in the institutions covered by the investigation.
- During 2021, the GRO assisted the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, Disability and Youth in developing statutory proposals to enable birth registrations to be corrected in cases where the original registrations were illegally concluded or contained incorrect, false or misleading information about the parents of a child.

Section 2 of this report provides more detailed information for each category of life event.

Table 1: Number of Life Event Registrations Recorded 2017-2021

Type	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Births	62,919	61,901	60,173	56,145	58,627
Deaths	31,385	32,029	32,084	32,501	34,040
Marriages	22,018	21,052	20,335	9,536	17,231
Adoptions	63	81	79	77	103
Stillbirths	208	223	197	153	140
Total	116,593	115,286	112,868	98,412	110,141

¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d4b3d-final-report-of-the-commission-of-investigation-into-mother-and-baby-homes/>

The Eastern Registration Area, covering counties Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow accounted for around one-third of all life events registered.

Table 2: Life Event registered by Registration Area 2021

Registration Area	Births		Deaths		Marriages	
Eastern	19,767	33.7%	10,456	30.7%	6,115	35.5%
Mid-Western	4,555	7.8%	3,113	9.1%	1,277	7.4%
Midlands	3,899	6.7%	2,066	6.1%	899	5.2%
North-eastern	6,607	11.3%	3,298	9.7%	1,863	10.8%
North-western	3,037	5.2%	2,132	6.3%	1,026	5.9%
South-eastern	6,824	11.6%	4,276	12.6%	1,856	10.8%
Southern	8,421	14.4%	5,244	15.4%	2,603	15.2%
Western	5,377	9.1%	3,393	9.9%	1,591	9.2%
GRO & other registrars	140	0.2%	62	0.2%	1	<0.1%
Total	58,627	100.0%	34,040	100.0%	17,231	100.0%

Certificates issued by the Service are important documents for legal and a range of other purposes. The number of certificates issued during 2021 remained below the average number of certificates issues prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 3: Number of Certificates issued by Life Event Type 2017-2021

Type	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Birth	246,672	247,750	245,734	172,169	198,234
Death	89,365	91,289	92,946	88,710	90,259
Marriage	64,104	63,818	63,213	38,533	45,308
Adoptions	1,969	1,723	1,218	759	807
Stillbirth	336	379	419	270	273
Civil Partnership	77	75	74	60	77
Total	402,523	405,034	403,604	302,521	334,958

Table 4 presents an analysis of the country of origin of the applicant for certificates. Applicants resident in the UK (England, Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man and Channel Islands) constitute the largest source of applications outside of Ireland.

Table 4: Certificates issued by Applicant Country and Life Event Type 2021

Country	Total	Share	Birth	Death	Marriage	Stillbirth
Ireland	289,720	86.46%	163,416	86,283	39,759	262
Great Britain	27,889	8.35%	21,882	2,545	3,462	0
United States	8,840	2.65%	7,657	465	718	0
EU/EEA	3,963	1.19%	3,048	317	591	7
Australia	1,184	0.35%	914	116	154	0
Nrn. Ireland	991	0.30%	316	288	386	1
Canada	956	0.29%	733	82	141	0
New Zealand	198	0.06%	176	6	16	0
UAE	81	0.02%	53	8	20	0
South Africa	76	0.02%	74	2	0	0
All others	1,060	0.32%	772	147	138	3
Totals Issued	334,958	100.00%	199,041	90,259	45,385	273

Note: Birth includes 807 Adoption Certificates: Marriage includes 77 Civil Partnership Certificates issued during 2021.

Civil registration in Ireland

The civil registers create a legal document to establish and protect the identity and rights of the person. Birth registrations automatically result in the allocation of a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) unique to each person which becomes the basis for identity and all other services delivered by the Department and other public bodies.

There is a legal requirement on every person to notify the Service of certain life events, such as births, marriages and deaths and to do this in a timely manner.

Registration data collected and recorded by the Service allows for the compilation of vital statistics and the making of population and related projections by the Central Statistics Office. Data is used for economic, social and infrastructural planning, as well as providing a reliable and consistent data source for other Government Departments, public bodies, and institutions engaged in the provision of services, the management of public health and research.

Ireland has a well-developed and functioning civil registration and identity system. Increasingly, digital technology is enabling easier access for people to use and tailor public services to meet their needs. The GRO is committed to the provision of registration

services via customer focused online technology over the coming years. The civil registration system meets European Union and United Nations obligations.

Focus of work

The Service, and the registration data it collects, compiles, stores and shares, is responsible for, or is a key contributor to:

- Creating a person's official identity through the birth registration process and ensuring integrity through the registration process
- Providing ongoing evidence of life events by means of supplying certificates and verification of events registered and by validating certain life event records to a legal standard
- Ensuring that current and historic records are preserved for future enquiry, enabling research and preserving the value of records for future generations
- Ensuring the quality of registration data for use in the planning and design of public policy and services, such as in the health, housing and education sectors; and
- Supporting the process of providing greater access to digital public services.

Identity

The registration of a birth is a fundamental legal act and the subsequent issue of the birth certificate gives identity to a child in Ireland and in most societies. Following the registration of a child, the Department will automatically allocate a unique Personal Public Service number (PPSN) to the child. The PPSN is a unique reference number that enables access to social welfare benefits, public services and information in Ireland².

² <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/12e6de-get-a-personal-public-service-pps-number/>

Registration ensures that rights, such as an identity, citizenship and travel, can be recognised and facilitated as well as providing access to services such as Child Benefit³, child dependent payments to parents receiving social protection benefit and assistance, other family entitlements, education and health care. As the child grows, they may require a passport or driver licence. Eventually they will want to exercise their franchise to vote and to seek employment.

Credible and verifiable identity enables State authorities to ensure the effective delivery of public, social and legal services and to assist in mitigating the risk of fraud and misrepresentation both domestically and internationally.

Evidence of life events

The provision of certificates of life events to members of the public represents a significant activity for the Service. An average of nearly 370,000 certificates was issued per year over the period 2017-2021 (demand for certificate declined in 2020 due to public health restrictions – especially on international travel).

Certificates issued in Ireland are accepted domestically and internationally as evidence of the facts stated on them. This has been enhanced by the use of multilingual standard forms issued under EU Regulation ((EU) 2016/1191). This Directive became operational in 2019 and requires that member states of the EU provide citizens with a document in the languages of the EU to explain the contents of Birth, Marriage and Death Certificates and other legal documents.

The requirement to produce actual certificates for access to public services, particularly social welfare services, continues to decline as improved digital services are deployed. The nature of how life events are verified, without putting additional burdens on the service user to provide paper certificates, continues to evolve with the development of digital services and reform of how public services are delivered and the use of unique digital identifiers.

³ Child Benefit is a monthly payment made by the Department to support parents and guardians.

An important feature of the work of the GRO is to provide proof that an event did not occur, for example, where proof is required that a person did not marry within the State. The widespread adoption of the Public Services Card⁴ and electronic data-sharing between public bodies provides further opportunities to improve how services can be accessed more effectively and securely by members of the public. This has the additional benefit of significantly reducing the burden on members of the public having to attend public body offices, to repeatedly provide identity documentation and minimises the risk of error.

National statistics

The integrity, completeness and quality of life event data are essential for the preparation and publication of national statistics, particularly those related to population. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) (www.cso.ie) has the statutory function of preparing an annual programme of population and vital statistics. Statistics and analysis published by the CSO include quarterly and annual summaries of vital statistics and popular Irish babies' names collected from the registration process during the previous year⁵, death and mortality.

Alongside periodic population censuses, life event statistics form a central input to estimating population size, population dispersal, family composition and trends considered essential to economic and social planning and the management of public services.

Data recorded in the event of a person's death contributes to identifying trends in diseases and injuries enabling planning of preventive services and contributing to a better understanding of mortality. A key challenge for registration services is to ensure that good quality, complete, and consistent data is collected, stored for posterity and made available in a timely manner to inform current and future design and implementation of public policy.

⁴ The Public Services Card (PSC) establishes and fully authenticates a person's identity for the purpose of accessing a range of public services in an easy and safe manner. See <https://psc.gov.ie/> for more information on the PSC.

⁵ <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/birthsdeathsandmarriages/>

2. ACTIVITY

COVID-19 and Cyber-attack on HSE

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March 2020 presented the Service with its biggest external challenge in the past century of operations. The imposition of restrictions to support public health measures to combat the spread of the virus resulted in the closure of or limitations on the physical access to civil registration offices for significant periods during 2020 and throughout 2021. The persistence on public health measures imposed additional burdens on families who needed to register births and deaths and for couples seeking to marry.

The priorities adopted by the Service ensured that registration services could be maintained for the duration of the pandemic. Legislative measures introduced in 2020 removed the burden on a person registering births and deaths from having to present in person before a registrar to register the event and to sign the register. These temporary measures expired at the end of September 2021 in line with the gradual lifting of restrictions. However, a resurgence in Covid-19 later in the year imposed further difficulties as efforts to contain the pandemic continued.

On 14th May 2021, the HSE was subjected to a serious criminal cyber-attack. The impact on the HSE's IT infrastructure caused widespread disruption and resulted in the loss of registration services for several weeks. The IT systems used for civil registration were successfully quarantined but frontline services were inoperable. When systems were restored nationally by early July, disruption to services continued for the remainder of the year as registration staff attempted to address the absence of face-to-face services and meet the needs of the public.

Births

The Service registered 58,627 births during 2021 – an increase of some 4.4% on the previous year – Table 5. Table 6 provides data on births that occurred in 2021 but were not registered until the first quarter of 2022.

Table 5: Live Births Registered in the Year* - 2017-2021

Year	Total Births	Male		Female	
2017	62,919	32,303	51.3%	30,616	48.7%
2018	61,901	31,737	51.3%	30,164	48.7%
2019	60,173	30,719	51.1%	29,454	48.9%
2020	56,145	28,957	51.6%	27,186	48.4%
2021	58,627	29,922	51.0%	28,705	49.0%

* Includes late registrations

Table 6: Births Registrations by Month of Birth*

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
January	5,215	5,169	5,166	4,977	4,746
February	4,751	4,565	4,438	4,365	4,676
March	5,143	5,128	4,696	4,766	5,093
April	4,816	4,721	4,755	4,496	4,881
May	5,070	5,169	5,008	4,685	4,732
June	5,325	5,020	4,712	4,684	4,918
July	5,331	5,293	5,239	5,079	5,288
August	5,390	5,192	5,278	4,823	5,187
September	5,386	5,249	5,092	4,949	5,334
October	5,278	5,180	5,111	4,828	5,226
November	5,142	5,231	5,015	4,662	5,059
December	5,005	5,130	4,801	4,490	5,218
TOTAL	61,852	61,047	59,311	56,804	60,358

* Includes registrations 1 Jan to 30 Apr 2022 in respect of births occurring in 2021.

Significant amendments to registrations following enquiry

The GRO conducted enquires under section 65 of the Act which resulted in 220 amendments to birth records. Statutory enquiries are undertaken where an error, omission or other difficulty with a registration is identified which cannot be corrected under any other provision of the Act. The following types of cases accounted for the majority of the matters determined:

- Applications to remove the father's details as it was proven that the person registered as the father was not the biological father of the child

- Situations where the forename of a person was not entered in the register at the time the initial birth registration was completed (the majority of these relate to historic cases)
- Cases where the identity of the parents required to be regularised under Irish law, and
- Where the registration particulars, typically historic, required correction to reflect an accurate registration record.

Table 7: Section 65 Enquiries Conducted - Births 2017-2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Section 65 enquiries	270	264	263	233	220

Amendments to a father's particulars will usually be made on the basis of evidence provided by the applicant, including DNA, and statutory declarations made by the persons involved and/or on foot of Family Court orders granted in paternity, custody and maintenance proceedings.

Registration of Donor Assisted Human Reproduction (DAHR) births

The commencement of certain sections of the Child and Family Relationships Act 2015 has allowed the Service to both register and re-register the births of children born following donor-assisted reproduction, (also known as Donor Assisted Human Reproduction - DAHR).

These changes were introduced from 4th May 2020 and facilitate the recording of a non-biological parent in the register of births as a parent of a child born because of a DAHR procedure. The legal framework enables the non-biological parent to be re-registered as the parent of the child whose birth has already been registered. An application recognising the parent must be accompanied by a Court order naming the person as the legal parent of the child.

Children born as a result of a DAHR procedure carried out after the 4th May 2020 can be registered to include the non-biological parent as a parent along with the mother of the child at the initial birth registration stage.

The number of DAHR re-registration applications received in 2021 was 129 (2020: 87): 110 of these births were re-registered in 2021. Of the remaining 13 were re-registered in

early 2022. The number of DAHR registration applications received in 2021 was 158: 137 births were registered in 2021, with 19 of these applications registered in 2022.

Late birth registrations⁶

Section 19 of the Act imposes an obligation on a qualified informant, usually the parents, to register the birth of the child within three months of the child's date of birth. With few exceptions, this legal requirement is complied with. The majority of late registrations are for historic births where either the individual concerned discovered their birth was not registered or where a descendant sought to register a birth, for example in cases involving claims for Irish citizenship or as a result of genealogical research. The data shown in Table 8 mainly relates to registration of historic births.

Table 8: Late Registration of Births 2017-2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of cases	374	358	395	193	203

The number of late registrations remains at relatively low levels.

Stillbirths

Stillbirths are defined in the Act as a child who at birth shows no signs of life, weighs at least 500 grammes or has a gestational age of not less than 24 weeks.

The registration of such births is voluntary - that is there is no legal requirement on parents to register. The number of stillbirths registered in Ireland was 140 in 2021.

Table 9: Stillbirths Registered 2017-2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Stillbirths Registered	208	223	197	153	140

⁶ Late registrations are defined as births registered more than 12 months after the birth occurred – section 20 of the Act.

Domestic adoptions

Under the Adoption Acts, an Adopted Children Register is required to be maintained by an tArd-Chláraitheoir. This register contains particulars of all domestic adoptions notified since the Adoption Act 1952 commenced. This register is maintained in accordance with section 22 of the Adoption Act 1952 and Section 84 of the Adoption Act 2010.

Entries in the register refer to children, who have not reached eighteen years of age, are resident in Ireland and who were adopted by a person or couple also resident in Ireland. The nature and effect of an Irish adoption order is that the child becomes the child of the adopter(s) with all the rights and responsibilities transferred from the birth parents to the adoptive parent(s).

The number of notifications sent by the Adoption Authority of Ireland to be registered during 2021 was 103 – an increase on the 77 orders received in 2020. Further information and the annual reports of the Adoption Authority are available on <https://aai.gov.ie>.

Table 10: Adoptions Registered 2017-2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Domestic adoptions registered	63	81	79	77	103
Of which were:					
male children	34	44	39	37	37
female children	29	37	40	40	66

The legal framework for adoptions provides that the partner of a child's biological parent can adopt a child without the need for the biological parent to also adopt the child. Sixty-nine of the 103 adoptions registered in 2021 used this legal mechanism to adopt.

Table 11: Details of Adoptive Parents 2017-2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Joint adopters (couple)	58	47	24	21	31
Adoption by a partner	-	28	50	54	69
Sole adopter	5	6	5	2	3

Gender Recognition

The Gender Recognition Act 2015 provides that a person can obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate from the Department. A person whose birth has been registered and/or whose adoption is registered in Ireland and has been issued with a Gender Recognition Certificate

may apply to the Service for this recognition to be entered in the Register of Gender Recognition.

Subsequently, a person can be issued with a copy of their birth or adoption certificate reflecting the entry in the Register of Gender Recognition. The register was established in September 2015 with the first entries having been made in the register in 2016. The number of new entries in the register in 2021 was 108.

Table 12: New entries in the Register of Gender Recognition 2017-2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Entries in register	60	75	102	71	108

Marriages

The number of marriages registered in Ireland during the year 2021 was 17,231 reflecting the continuing public health restrictions. As indicated in previous reports, the proportion of religious marriages registered declined over recent years. Given the continued impact of Covid-19 restrictions, particularly in the earlier part of 2021, it is not clear if the changing share of marriage that were religious, civil or secular in nature during 2021 is reflective of any longer term trends.

Table 13: Marriages Registered 2018–2021– Form of Marriage Ceremony

	2018		2019		2020		2021	
Religious	12,760	60.6%	11,906	58.5%	4,747	49.8%	9,727	56.5%
Civil	6,279	29.8%	6,410	31.5%	4,007	42.0%	5,987	34.7%
Secular	2,013	9.6%	2,019	9.9%	782	8.2%	1,517	8.8%
Total	21,052	100.0%	20,335	100.0%	9,536	100.0%	17,231	100.0%

Although marriages are registered relatively quickly, those that occur later in the year are not captured in the data presented in Table 13. The data presented in Table 14 reflects the recovery in the number of marriages that in the latter part of 2021 following the lifting of public health restrictions from the middle of the year (data in this table differs from that in Table 13 in that it includes marriages which occurred in 2021 but were registered during that year and the first four months of 2022).

Table 14: Marriage by Month of Occurrence 2021*

Month in which marriage took place	Number of marriages registered
January	521
February	548
March	609
April	755
May	883
June	1,498
July	2,366
August	2,551
September	2,379
October	2,126
November	1,370
December	1,841

*Marriages in 2021 registered between 1 January 2021 and 30 April 2022

The data presented in Table 15 provides a breakdown of marriages registered in the State during 2021 with respect to the nationality of the parties. The data indicates that just over 93% of marriages involved a party who was an Irish national (this was 95% in 2020). The falls in the number of non-nationals marrying in the State is likely to be reflective of the travel restrictions in force as a public health measure during 2020 and much of 2021.

Table 15: Nationality of Marriage Parties 2019 - 2021

	2019		2020		2021	
Both parties Irish	15,178	75%	8,843	93%	13,391	78%
One party Irish	3,583	17%	213	2%	2,638	15%
Both non-Irish	1,574	8%	480	5%	1,202	7%
Total	20,335	100%	9,536	100%	17,231	100%

Just over 87% (84% in 2020) of all couples whose marriages were registered during 2021 were never previously married. When account is taken of all parties who never previously married at the time of marriage are considered, the proportion of marriages rises to over 96% of all marriages registered in 2021 – see Table 16.

Table 16: Previous Civil Status of Marriage Parties in 2019 - 2021

	2019		2020		2021	
Both parties single	17,646	86.78%	7,968	83.56%	14,998	87.04%
One party single the other divorced	1,752	8.62%	1,013	10.62%	1,498	8.69%
Both parties divorced	569	2.80%	345	3.62%	461	2.68%
One party single the other widowed	136	0.67%	91	0.95%	120	0.70%
One party widowed the other divorced	150	0.74%	81	0.85%	107	0.62%
Both parties civil partners	46	0.23%	13	0.14%	15	0.09%
Both parties widowed	20	0.10%	19	0.20%	26	0.15%
One party single other a civil partner	13	0.06%	7	0.07%	6	0.03%
One party widowed other civil partner	3	0.01%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Total	20,335	100.0%	9,536	100.0%	17,231	100.0%

The Marriage Act 2015 provides for marriage of same-sex couples to be registered in Ireland as marriages. Provisions were also included in this Act for dissolving a civil partnership if the partners marry each other and for recognition in Ireland of marriages between same-sex couples contracted lawfully in other jurisdictions. The number of same-sex marriages registered during 2021 was 500, roughly 3% of all marriages registered in the year for the year – see Table 17.

Table 17: Number of Same-sex Marriages Registered 2017–2021

Year	Total	Female		Male	
2017	767	336	43.8%	431	56.2%
2018	668	294	44.0%	374	56.0%
2019	640	288	45.0%	352	55.0%
2020	314	170	54.1%	144	45.9%
2021	500	248	49.6%	252	50.4%

Objections to marriage

Section 58 of the Act provides that an objection can be made to a proposed marriage and also sets out how objections are to be managed. Other than objections related to a claim that a marriage may be a marriage of convenience; no objections were made during 2021.

Marriages of convenience

A marriage of convenience is defined as a marriage entered into for the sole purpose of securing an immigration advantage and has the effect of circumventing immigration controls. Section 3(b) of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 created a new impediment to a marriage where a marriage would constitute a marriage of convenience. These measures have been operational since August 2015 and have had a significant impact on the number of applications that meet the criteria.

Section 18 of the 2014 Act provides that where a registrar forms an opinion that an intended marriage would constitute a marriage of convenience, the registrar is obliged to make a report of the matter to the Superintendent Registrar. If the Superintendent Registrar decides that the proposed marriage would constitute a marriage of convenience, they are required to notify the Minister for Justice and Equality. The number of notifications that met the criteria set out in the Act is set out in Table 18.

Table 18: Marriages of convenience: Nationality of Parties 2017–2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Irish and non-EU citizens	1,368	1,363	1,397	1,214	1,110
EU (non-Irish) and Non-EU citizens	442	369	426	325	319
Total	1,810	1,732	1,823	1,539	1,429

Since implementation, the number of marriage notifications involving a non-Irish EU national and a non-EU national has fallen over recent years – a drop of three-quarters with similar reductions in the number of marriages subsequently concluded is also notable – see Table 19.

Table 19: Marriages Registered on Foot of Notifications in Table 18 2017–2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Irish and non-EU citizens	1,012	891	951	677	684
EU (non-Irish) and Non-EU citizens	298	234	293	205	205
Total	1,310	1,125	1,244	882	889
Proportion of marriage concluded	72%	65%	68%	57%	62%

Recognition of foreign divorces

An impediment to marriage exists if a divorce is not recognisable under Irish law as the person is deemed to be still married. Foreign divorces and nullities are not automatically entitled to recognition in the State. The Service examines foreign divorces of persons

seeking to re-marry in the State to determine whether the divorce is recognisable under Irish law.

A person with a foreign divorce who wishes to marry under Irish law must have their divorce(s) recognised. Divorces granted in EU member states (excluding Denmark) since 1 March 2001 are recognised in accordance with the Regulation ((EC) No 2201/2003) – known as Brussels II. For divorces covered by the Regulation, the recognition process is relatively straightforward, provided the documentation required by the regulation is in order.

The regulation does not apply to divorces granted in EU member states before they acceded to membership of the EU. Divorces granted outside the EU or before the member state's accession to the EU are recognised in accordance with the Domicile and Recognition of Foreign Divorces Act 1986.

Table 20: Recognition of Foreign Divorces 2017–2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Applications received	1,167	1,142	1,240	982	939
Finalised	981	979	1,074	710	823
To be determined	186	163	166	272	161

Applications for determinations were made in respect of 939 divorces during 2021. Of those, nearly nine in every ten applications were recognisable enabling the person to re-marry in the State. Nearly two-thirds of divorces (530) determined during the year were entitled to recognition under EC Regulation 2201/2003. Examinations were ongoing in respect of cases involving 161 divorces at year end.

In cases where the Service cannot decide or concludes that a divorce is not recognisable, the applicant has recourse to the Circuit Family Court for a declaration recognising the divorce under Irish law. Declarations made by a Court are binding on the State where the Attorney General is joined as a notice party to proceedings.

Register of solemnisers

Marriages conducted in the State can only be solemnised by persons appointed under the provisions of section 51 of the Act. Religious and secular solemnisers are nominated by their religious and secular bodies. Civil registrars must be employed by the Health Service Executive. The Act does not provide for the regulation of solemnisers; however, the form of marriage ceremony must be approved by an an tArd-Chláraitheoir. Solemnisers are required to operate within the rules and conventions of their nominating bodies, religious and secular.

The General Register Office is required to maintain and publish a register of solemnisers. The register is updated and published monthly. This register consists of names and contact details of all solemnisers.

Table 19 shows the number of solemnisers by main grouping at the end of December 2021 and at year end for previous years. Additionally, an tArd-Chláraitheoir temporarily authorised a further 137 religious persons to solemnise marriage during 2021. These authorisations are timebound and typically expire shortly after a marriage has been conducted.

Table 21: Solemniser by Type 2017–2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Religious Solemnisers	5,672	5,674	5,589	5,400	5,412
Civil Solemnisers	120	123	114	117	118
Secular Solemnisers	27	31	37	34	43
Total	5,819	5,828	5,740	5,551	5,578

Places where marriages are conducted

The continuing impact of public health restrictions for the earlier part of 2021 curtailed the choice of venues available to couples to celebrate their marriage. Section 52 of the Act regulates the places where marriages can be conducted and the requirement that the place of marriage must be open to the public. Religious marriages are conducted at churches and places of worship in compliance with the rules in place for each religious body. Secular marriages are generally held at public places selected by the parties to the marriage and approved in advance by a marriage registrar.

With respect to civil ceremonies, a marriage can be held in a Registry Office or some other venue that is approved by a registrar. Roughly three-quarters of civil marriages are conducted in Civil Registry Offices. Other locations include hotels, places of historic or cultural significance, State properties and civic buildings or sites.

Table 22: Venues used for Civil Marriage Ceremonies 2017–2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Registrar's offices	4,294	4,268	4,422	3,253	4,617
Other venues	2,123	2,011	1,988	754	1,369
Total civil marriage ceremonies	6,417	6,279	6,410	4,007	5,986
% at Outside Venues	33%	32%	31%	19%	23%

Research facility

The GRO maintains a family and genealogy research facility at Werburgh Street, Dublin 2 (the Research Room). This office enables members of the public to conduct family research using the indices to the registers. Copies of records identified from the indices are also supplied where required.

The level of activity for this service was significantly impacted by Covid-19 public health restrictions on access to the Research Room during the first nine months of 2021. Notwithstanding the closure of the office to members of the public for nearly three-quarters of the year, staff facilitated research and related activities using other channels of enquiry (mainly, telephone and email). A summary of this activity is set out in Table 21.

Table 23: Activities of the Research Room 2017–2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
General searches undertaken by the public	860	757	770	273	549
Specified searches undertaken by the public	9,857	7,996	6,942	1,881	1,426
Uncertified copies of register entries issued to the public	26,700	20,562	18,370	7,672	10,224

Through a process of digitisation of historic registers, the Service has, with its partner, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, continued during 2021 to prepare historic records for public release. Work on preparing the oldest death registration records, those for 1865 to 1870, for online publication continued to be delayed

due to priorities associated with managing the impact of Covid-19 on other parts of the service and the availability of technical resources.

Annual tranches of register records for birth, marriages and deaths continue to be made available in January each year as they reach the legal threshold for release (designed to protect the privacy of the living). The thresholds are: 100 years for births, 75 years for marriages and 50 years for deaths. Over 16 million civil registration records are now available online for members of the public anywhere in the World to access and research. The service provides free access. The number of site visits researching civil records recorded during 2021 was 4,316,112, broadly similar to levels of activity in the previous year.

Table 24: Visits to civil records on www.irishgenealogy.ie during 2020 and 2021

Year	Number of Visits Recorded
2020	4,613,493
2021	4,316,112

Source: Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

Deaths

The registration of deaths is regulated by Parts 5, 5A and 5B of the 2004 Act. New legislative changes were introduced on 20th November 2020 enabled co-habitants to register and be recognised as qualified informants in the Death Register. The Service was also enabled to issue Certificates showing this relationship. The number of deaths registered during 2021 was 34,050. Of these, 27,671 occurred in 2021. Further analysis of deaths registered are published by the CSO, including detailed analysis of cause of death and vital statistics of the deceased.

Table 25: Annual registrations by year in which a death occurred 2017-2021

Total Registrations Completed in Year		Year in Which Death Occurred					
		2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	Earlier
2021	34,040	27,671	5,376	614	168	46	165
2020	32,501		27,002	4,757	512	65	165
2019	32,087			26,426	4,703	623	334
2018	31,981				26,447	4,658	876
2017	31,302					25,763	5,539
Total Occurrences per Year		27,671	32,378	31,797	31,830	31,169	

The Central Statistics Office is responsible for the publication of official mortality statistics for Ireland. As deaths can be registered up to three months after the date of death, and as registration of a death may be delayed where the death has been referred to a Coroner for investigation or inquiry, the CSO publishes quarterly deaths approximately five months after the end of a reference quarter. These initial quarterly publications are based upon registration data. The CSO subsequently publishes annual statistics based on deaths by date of occurrence, approximately 22 months after the end of a reference year⁷.

To provide greater insight into the occurrences of deaths throughout 2020 and 2021, Table 26 has been prepared. This table presents data for deaths which occurred in the year but which were registered in the period 1st January to the end of April of the following year.

Table 26: Death Registered 2017-2021 by Month of Occurrence*

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Total for year	32,742	32,669	31,895	31,860	31,169
January	3,993	3,061	3,068	3,508	3,448
February	3,204	2,776	2,641	2,878	2,541
March	2,627	2,993	2,713	3,026	2,646
April	2,487	3,665	2,539	2,627	2,455
May	2,549	2,727	2,702	2,436	2,426
June	2,282	2,250	2,446	2,341	2,301
July	2,468	2,276	2,375	2,409	2,302
August	2,437	2,386	2,369	2,315	2,382
September	2,476	2,410	2,467	2,380	2,399
October	2,728	2,762	2,675	2,555	2,643
November	2,758	2,546	2,757	2,628	2,557
December	2,733	2,817	3,143	2,757	3,069
<i>Monthly average</i>	2,729	2,722	2,658	2,655	2,597

*Includes registrations completed to 30th April of the subsequent year.

⁷ <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/presspages/2022/vitalstatisticsyearlysummary2021/>

Deaths are required by law to be referred to a coroner where the death has occurred in suspicious circumstances, was unexpected, unexplained, or the deceased was a resident of a nursing home or died of a hospital acquired infection. Covid-19 related deaths or where death was suspected of having been caused by Covid-19 required to be reported to Coroners.

The number of deaths registered on foot of a coroner's certificate has risen significantly over the years and represented near 40% of all deaths registered during 2021 – Table 27 – in part reflecting the requirement to refer deaths to a Coroner where Covid-19 was suspected as being a contributory factor.

Table 27: Death Registered 2017-2021 by Qualified Informant

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Deaths registered in year	31,385	32,029	32,084	32,501	34,040
As a result of receipt of:					
Information from a qualified informant	22,273	22,507	22,189	20,940	20,692
A coroner's certificate following inquest or post-mortem	5,306	5,262	5,513	4,882	5,340
A coroner's certificate - no inquest or post-mortem held	3,806	4,260	4,382	6,679	8,008

Of the qualified informants noted in Table 27, some 97% registering a death stated that they were relatives of the deceased. Table 28 provides information on the civil status of the deceased.

Table 28: Death registered in 2020 and 2021 - Civil Status of Deceased

Civil Status	2020		2021	
Married	12,573	38.68%	13,602	39.96%
Widowed	10,911	33.57%	11,201	32.91%
Single (not married)	7,083	21.79%	7,183	21.10%
Divorced	976	3.00%	1,054	3.10%
Separated	791	2.43%	822	2.41%
Civil Partner	8	0.02%	16	0.05%
Unknown	159	0.49%	162	0.48%
Total	32,501	100.00%	34,040	100.00%

The nationality of the deceased was recorded in 80% of all registrations with 95% of those recording an Irish nationality.

Delays in death registration

It is not always possible for families to register deaths in a timely manner. During 2021, 1,677 registrations were completed which were more than 12 months after the death of the person and where the death had not been referred to a Coroner for investigation. Although a small number of such deaths relate to registrations of historic deaths, the majority relate to deaths that occurred more recently. Enquiries made by the Service indicate that a significant number of late registrations relate to persons who died and who did not have a close family member, relative or friend who had sufficient knowledge of the deceased to register the death.

Concerns have also been expressed with the delays inherent in the current process for death registration. When a death occurs in the State, the duty to register the death falls on a relative of the deceased, and, if no relative is known or is incapacitated, the Act specifies other qualified informants who have knowledge of the required particulars in relation to the death to register the death within three months of the date of death. Delays will inevitably arise where a death is referred to a coroner for consideration and investigation.

Table 29: Number of late death registrations 2017–2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Late registrations by qualified informants	1,313	1,303	1,472	1,500	1,677

Multi-lingual standard forms

EU Regulation (EU) 2016/1191 is aimed at promoting the free movement of European citizens by simplifying the circulation and recognition of certain public documents between EU and EEA member states. The use of multilingual standards for form and administrative documents is designed to remove burdens and costs for citizens when they engage with the authorities of another member state. The Regulation abolished the apostille⁸ requirement between member states and simplifies formalities relating to certified copies

⁸ An apostille is a legal certification that makes a document from one country valid in another (provided that both are signatories to the 1961 Hague Convention Abolishing the Requirement for Legalization for Foreign Public Documents).

and translations removing costs for the user. Demand has increased three-fold during 2021.

This Regulation covers public documents issued by the Service in the form of birth, marriage, and death certificates. Other legal and administrative documents issued by other public bodies within the State are also covered by the regulation.

Table 30: Multilingual Standard Forms issued by language and type 2021 & language 2020 and 2019

Language	Births	Deaths	Marriage	2021	2020	2019
Bulgarian	43	12	3	58	8	15
Croatian	428	10	41	479	167	181
Czech	41	0	6	47	23	36
Danish	5	0		5	-	1
Dutch	25	3	1	29	12	17
Estonian	1	0		1	-	-
Finnish	1	0		1	-	-
French	314	19	33	366	126	106
German	149	7	41	197	99	81
Greek	57	0	11	68	24	1
Hungarian	19	0	4	23	2	3
Italian	101	16	27	144	51	44
Latvian	2	1	2	5	2	-
Lithuanian	15	4	3	22	7	6
Maltese	1	0		1	-	-
Polish	239	39	26	304	61	32
Portuguese	59	1	12	72	44	31
Romanian	865	19	39	923	122	74
Slovakian	90	6	12	108	34	66
Slovenian	1	0	1	2	3	-
Spanish	185	48	66	299	136	135
Swedish	1	0		1	-	1
Totals	2,642	185	325	3,155	921	830

Public documents issued in any member state must be accepted as authentic in another member state without the need for further authentication or translation from one language to another when accompanied with the translation aid specified by the Regulation. The public documents covered which fall within the remit of the GRO are certificates of births, deaths, marriages, and civil partnerships. The Service has capacity to provide MSFs in 22 EU languages (English excluded).

3....OTHER MATTERS

Department's Strategic Objectives 2020 - 2023

The Department's overall objective for 2020 to 2023 is to continue putting our clients at the centre of all our operations, providing an efficient and effective service and to continue developing our staff, structures and processes.

The Service operates under this Strategy and contributes to the delivery of the objectives. The Department's mission, high-level objectives and key actions are in delivering the policies and priorities set down by the Minister for Social Protection and the Government. The strategy identifies three Strategic Objectives for the Department for the period in order to achieve its overall mission:

1. Put the client at the centre of policy and service delivery
2. Drive cost, efficiency and effectiveness
3. Develop staff, structures and processes.

The General Register Office contributed to the delivery of this strategy during 2021 with particular focus on how it delivers services and supports its staff.

Governance

Ard Chláraitheoir

The functions of an tArd-Chláraitheoir are specified in the 2004 Act. These are to maintain, manage and control the system of civil registration in the State, and to maintain the registers, indexes and other records required to ensure an effective and efficient system. Other functions are assigned under provisions of the Act and other Acts.

Programme Board

The work of the GRO is supported by a Programme Board comprising senior managers of the Department. The Board met at regular intervals during 2021. This Board addresses matters such as project oversight, Departmental co-ordination, policy and strategic development, information technology infrastructure, audit and financial matters. The Board is chaired by a member of the Department's Management Board at Assistant Secretary rank and includes senior staff from across the Department. The GRO reports

to several other Department Boards in respect of procurement, project governance, data protection, internal audit, human resource management and IT development.

Health Service Executive

The HSE is required by the 2004 Act to appoint registrars and a Superintendent Registrar to each of registration area (often referred to as “districts”).

Each Superintendent Registrar is required to exercise functions to manage, control and administer the Service in each registration area, under the overall management, control and supervision of an tArd-Chlárathoir. The Civil Registration Districts and the Superintendents with responsibility for those areas are listed in the Appendix.

HSE Liaison

A standing committee comprising all Superintendent Registrars and management staff of the GRO meet regularly to discuss and co-ordinate operational matters relating to registration processes, customer support and planning of services. Additionally, the GRO engages with senior HSE management on the strategic matters and the operations of the Service.

Civil Registration Policy

During 2021, the General Register Office took on responsibility for the development and co-ordination of civil registration and gender recognition policy. This role involves research, development and the preparation of legislation and input to other areas of public policy development and discussion where it impacts on civil registration matters.

The key areas of policy development over the course of 2021 focused on the following key matters:

- Examination of aspects of the functioning of the Act to identify where improvements could be made to service delivery following the experience gained from operations during the Covid-19 pandemic and the public’s response to the initiatives taken.
- Contingency planning arising from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cyber-attack on HSE services.

- Responding to the recommendations of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, specifically where these were linked to practices around birth registration and adoption in the institutions covered by the investigation.
- Joint working with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, Disability and Youth and other agencies in developing statutory proposals to enable birth registrations to be corrected in cases where the original registrations were illegally concluded or contained incorrect, false or misleading information about the parents of a child. This work was subsequently reflected in the Birth Information and Tracing Bill 2022 introduced to the Oireachtas early in 2022.
- Continuation of work initiated to implement the recommendation of the statutory review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015 (covered in a separate report on the operations of that Act for 2021 prepared by the GRO).

Ombudsman complaints

No complaints were received with respect to the operations of the General Register Office during 2021.

Data Protection

The Act provides that registration data to be made available to a number of Government Departments and bodies for stated purposes. The GRO shares registration data with several public authorities to support their service provision and to comply with statutory provisions. Data relating to birth, marriages and deaths is shared with the CSO under the Statistics Act 1993. Subsequently, the CSO is tasked with the analysis of this data and the publication of reports population on a quarterly and annual basis. All publications and data banks can be accessed on the CSO website under People and Society category.

The GRO reports to the Department's Data Management Programme Board on all data sharing arrangements.

A look back at 100 years ago

The 58th Report of the Register General was presented to Ernest Blythe TD, Minister for Local Government on the 1st December 1922. The report continued to provide registration

data with respect to the island of Ireland, notwithstanding the creation of separate administrative arrangements in Northern Ireland.

The report indicated that marriages registered on the island of Ireland numbered 23,223 (1920: 26,826). The number Roman Catholics marriages reduced to 16,187 from 18,290 registered in the previous year. The report noted that the presence of signatures of the parties in the marriage afforded a rough test of the progress of elementary education in Ireland. It noted that 97.5% of the husbands and nearly 99% of wives signed the register compared with 94% of husbands and 96% of wives who were able to sign their name in 1911.

The number of births registered was 90,720 (1920: 99,536): of which 46,517 were males and 44,203 females. There were 1,165 twin births and 5 triplet births registered in Ireland during the year 1921. This compares with 1,175 twins and 12 triplet births born in 1920.

The deathrate for 1920 was the lowest recorded since death registration was introduced in 1864. The deathrate fell further during 1921 with the reported rate of 0.6 per 1,000 of the population. The report observed that 4,235 of the 63,838 (1920: 66,538) deaths registered during 1921 took place in Infirmarys and General and Special Hospitals; 1,416 in what were then described as public lunatic asylums; and 8,003 in Workhouse Hospitals. The remaining 50,184 reported as persons who died in their own homes or elsewhere.

The report contained an analysis of the principal causes of death and noted deaths from tuberculosis had declined to 7,068 in the year with deaths from bronchitis falling to 5,241 and from pneumonia to 3,502. Various forms of heart disease were recorded as the cause of death in 6,954 cases. Deaths from cancer increased from 3,823 in 1920 to 3,895 in 1921. No case of smallpox was reported during the year.

Reported suicides amounted to 138. Deaths from violence, including self-harm, amounted to 2,760. Twenty-one executions were reported and 10 deaths due to wounds of war reflecting the consequences of the ongoing War of Independence as it progressed throughout 1921. Some 1,199 deaths (1,140 males and 59 females) were defined as homicide, including the deaths of eight male and 13 female infants under one year old. Most male homicides, 1,096, were caused by gunshot. The number of deaths due to accidental causes was stated as 1,392.

With respect to accidental cause, 281 were caused by burns and scalds (151 of these were of children under five years of age). Deaths from influenza had declined to 964 nearly 300 down on the 1920 figure (1,256). This compares with 10,651 for 1918 and 9,406 in 1919 reflecting the epidemic referred to as the "Spanish Flu" for those years.



Appendix

HSE Civil Registration Districts and Superintendents with responsibilities for the delivery of services during 2020.

Districts	Superintendent Registrar	Address
EASTERN Covering Dublin, Wicklow & Kildare	Ms. Lara O'Dwyer Mr. Charles McGuinness (Acting from September 2021)	Civil Registration Office Joyce House 8/11 Lombard Street East Dublin 2
MID WESTERN Limerick, Clare & North Tipperary	Ms. Geraldine McCarthy	Civil Registration Office St Camillus Hospital Shelbourne Road Limerick
MIDLAND Covering Westmeath, Offaly, Longford & Laois	Ms. Breege Doherty	Civil Registration Office Arden Road Tullamore Co. Offaly
NORTH EASTERN Covering Louth, Cavan, Monaghan & Meath	Ms. Geraldine Noonan	Civil Registration Office Old St. Mary's Hospital Dublin Road, Drogheda Co. Louth
NORTH WESTERN Covering Donegal, Leitrim & Sligo	Ms. Louise Mulcahy	Civil Registration Office Markievicz House Barrack Street Sligo
SOUTH EASTERN Covering Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Waterford & South Tipperary	Ms. Ann Boyle Ms. Mary Lyons (Acting from September 2021)	Civil Registration Office Lacken Dublin Road Kilkenny
SOUTHERN Covering Cork & Kerry	Ms. Jennifer O'Neill	Civil Registration Office Adelaide Court Adelaide Street Cork
WESTERN Covering Galway, Roscommon & Mayo	Mr. Sean Cloonan	Civil Registration Office 25 Newcastle Road Galway



Prepared by An tArd-Chláraitheoir

General Register Office

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