



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí  
Department of Social Protection

# Annual report of An tArd-Chláraitheoir on the operation of the Civil Registration Acts for 2019

October 2020



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# 1 Civil registration

## Purpose of this report

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

This report has been prepared to comply with this provision.

The Civil Registration Service (referred to as the “Service” in the remainder of this report) operates under the aegis of the Department Social Protection (“the Department”). The Service has its headquarters in Roscommon Town – known as the General Register Office (GRO). The GRO has a public research office in central Dublin.

The local registration service is provided by the Health Service Executive (HSE) at 61 locations nationally delivering services directly to the public.

## Registration service

Civil registration is the system by which the State records the vital life events (including births, marriages, adoptions, and deaths) of its citizens and residents. The repositories or databases are called the civil registers. The Service is responsible for the registration process, maintaining the registers and providing certificates of entries to members of the public.

The civil registers create a legal document that can be used 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.

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 and research.

Life event data is used within the Department for the operation and control of social welfare schemes and the development and provision of services.

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

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. Our registration system meets our European Union and other international obligations, such as those set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which requires that every child should be registered immediately after birth.

## Focus of civil registration

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 national planning; 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. 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 Benefit<sup>1</sup>, child dependant 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 may want to exercise their franchise to vote and to seek employment.

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<sup>1</sup> Child Benefit is a monthly payment made by the Department to support parents and guardians.

Following the registration of a child, the Department will automatically allocate a unique Personal Public Service number (PPSN) to the child and process the payment of Child Benefit. The PPSN is a unique reference number that enables access to social welfare benefits, public services and information in Ireland<sup>2</sup>.

Ensuring credible and verifiable identity enables State authorities to ensure the effective delivery of public, social, legal and financial services and to minimise the risk of fraud and misrepresentation. It also assists with the integration of public services across technology platforms.

### ***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 407,500 certificates was issued per year over the period 2016-2019.

Certificates of life events issued in Ireland are accepted domestically and internationally as evidence of the facts stated on them. This is due to the independence and integrity of the system of civil registration which has accrued since the mid-1800s in Ireland and which continues to be maintained.

Life event certificates are required for a multitude of purposes - both public and private. In certain circumstances, the actual certificate provides a legal basis to verify certain facts concerning a person and their family, particularly where personal, legal and financial matters are concerned.

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.

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.

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



The widespread adoption of the Public Services Card<sup>3</sup> 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](http://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 annually summaries of vital statistics and popular Irish babies' names collected from the registration process during the previous year<sup>4</sup>, death and mortality.

Along with 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.

## ***Digital services***

The EU eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 sets targets that by 2020, public administrations and institutions of the European Union should be open, efficient and inclusive, providing borderless, personalised, user-friendly, end-to-end digital public services to all citizens and businesses in the EU.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/birthsdeathsandmarriages/>

This imposes challenges on public sector bodies to be innovative in how they design and deliver current and future services that respond to, and meet, the demands of citizens and businesses. The work of the Department in rolling out digital solutions is ongoing and will see a shift in how the Department and the Service deliver its services in the future.

‘MyGovID’ gives citizens a secure “single sign on” to public services which can be used to access Revenue’s ‘MyAccount’ and ‘MyWelfare.ie’ online services from the Department. During 2019, the Service continues to plan and develop its systems and processes to utilise the benefits offered by this new technology and to better meet the customer service standards expected.



## 2 Activity



## Summary

During 2019, 112,868 life events were registered and some 403,600 certificates of current and historic life events were issued by the Service – Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview.

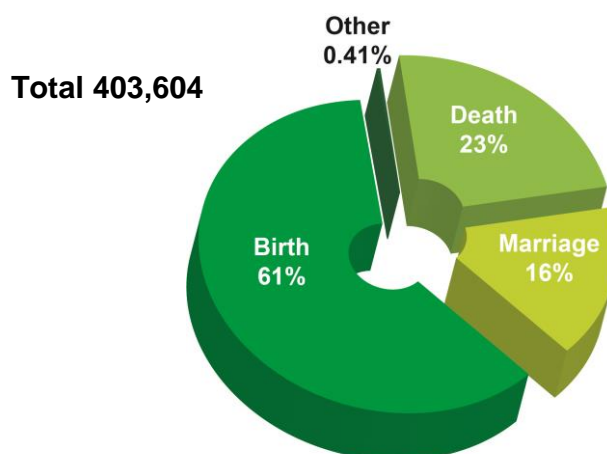
**Table 1: Number of Registrations Recorded 2016-2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Births</b>	64,758	62,919	61,901	60,173
<b>Deaths</b>	31,232	31,385	32,029	32,084
<b>Marriages</b>	22,620	22,018	21,052	20,335
<b>Adoptions</b>	102	63	81	79
<b>Stillbirths</b>	213	208	223	197
<b>Total</b>	<b>118,925</b>	<b>116,593</b>	<b>115,286</b>	<b>112,868</b>

**Table 2: Number of Certificates Issued by Type 2016-2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Birth</b>	259,402	246,672	247,750	245,734
<b>Death</b>	91,843	89,365	91,289	92,946
<b>Marriage</b>	65,144	64,104	63,818	63,213
<b>Adoptions</b>	2,033	1,969	1,723	1,218
<b>Stillbirth</b>	290	336	379	419
<b>Civil Partnership</b>	144	77	75	74
<b>Total</b>	<b>418,856</b>	<b>402,523</b>	<b>405,034</b>	<b>403,604</b>

**Figure 1 - Share of Certificates Issued 2019**



# Births

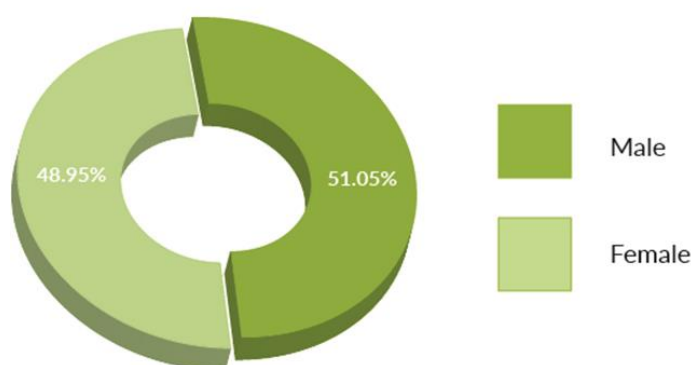
The Service registered 60,173 births during 2019. This was a decrease of 1,728 on the 61,901 births registered during 2018 - a decrease of 2.8%. There continues to be a steady decrease in the number of births registered from the most recent peak year of 2008 when over 75,000 births were registered. Births registered in 2019 were some one-fifth less than the number registered in 2008. The proportion of male children registered has continued to fall, although very slightly, over recent years.

**Table 3: Live Births Registered\* 2016-2019**

	2016		2017		2018		2019	
Total	64,758	100.0%	62,919	100.0%	61,901	100.0%	60,173	100.0%
Male	33,259	51.36%	32,303	51.34%	31,737	51.27%	30,719	51.05%
Female	31,499	48.64%	30,616	48.66%	30,164	48.73%	29,454	48.95%

\* Includes late registrations shown in Table 7.

**Figure 2 – Gender of Births Registered in 2019**



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 (see [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)).

## ***Correction of birth register entries***

Citizen engagement with historic records has seen a considerable growth aided by the availability of register data on [www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie). Such engagement has contributed

to the identification of errors in these records and where quality improvements can be made.

Corrections and revisions to register entries arise in the main from 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century recording practices. Standard spellings of forenames and surnames were often used contrary to family traditions, some older entries are difficult to decipher, and many corrections are to add forenames where this was not done at the time of registration. For some entries, the Irish language forms of names and spellings was not used.

Where incomplete or incorrect information is identified the Civil Registration Act provides families with a mechanism whereby such matters can be corrected or additional details recorded. The number of minor birth registration errors corrected during 2019 was 4,026. The corrections relate to all births registered since 1864.

**Table 4: Correction made to the Register of Live Births 2016-2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Corrections made	3,767	3,897	3,842	4,026

### ***Significant amendments***

However, more significant corrections may be needed.

In addition to the corrections noted in Table 4, 263 additional birth records were amended following a enquiries conducted by the GRO under section 65 of the Civil Registration Act 2004. 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 man registered as the father was not the biological father of the child;
- Cases where the identity of the parents requires to be regularised under Irish law; and
- Where the registration particulars, typically historic, require correction.

**Table 5: Section 65 Enquiries Conducted - Births 2016-2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Section 65 enquiries</b>	294	270	264	263

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

### ***Re-Registrations of a father's details***

Re-registration of birth particulars involves the addition of a father's name and other details relating to the child, usually some years after the original birth registration. The number of birth re-registrations to add the father's details where the parents remain unmarried has decreased over recent years and numbered 593 in 2019 (2018: 644).

Section 24 of the Act provides for the re-registration of the birth of a child where their parents were not married at the time of the initial registration. Where the child's parents subsequently marry each other and wish to regularise the birth registration of their child(ren) they can apply to do so. During 2019, 987 corrections of this nature were made (2018: 975).

**Table 6: Birth Re-registrations by Adding Father's Details 2016-2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Where parents remain unmarried</b>	690	722	644	593
<b>Where parents married after the birth</b>	1,027	1,035	975	987

### ***Late birth registrations<sup>5</sup>***

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. With few exceptions, this legal

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<sup>5</sup> Late registrations are defined as births registered more than 12 months after the birth occurred – section 20 of the Act.

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.

Additionally, as a result of genealogical research, the descendants of persons whose births were not registered seek to have the register details regularised and, in some cases, to enable claims for Irish citizenship to be made.

Every year a number of children are not or cannot be registered within twelve months of their birth. These cases arise for a number of reasons, including where there are disputes over parentage, contested naming of a child, or simply because parents do not fulfil their statutory obligations to register the birth in a timely manner. The data shown in Table 7 mainly relates to registration of historic births that were not previously registered.

**Table 7: Late Registration of Births 2016-2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Number of cases</b>	367	374	358	395

The number of late registrations increased slightly in 2019 after a decline in 2018 but still remain at relatively low levels. Nearly three-quarters of this relate to applications related to the UK's decision to exit the European Union.

## Stillbirths

Section 28 of the Act sets out the requirements in respect of the registration of stillbirths. Stillbirths are defined as a child who at birth shows no signs of life, weighs at least 500 grams 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 197 in 2019, a decrease of 26 or 12% on 2018 but was generally in line with the average for the five year period ending 2019. Seventy-two of the 197 stillbirths registered in 2019 were in respect of stillbirths which occurred in 2017 or earlier.

**Table 8: Stillbirths Registered 2016-2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Stillbirths Registered</b>	213	208	223	197



## 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 2019 was 79 – a decrease of 2.5% on the 81 orders received in 2018. Of these 79 adoptions, eight children were aged under three and 33 were aged 17 when the adoption orders were made.

Adopting a child who is resident in Ireland is called a domestic adoption. If the child is living abroad, the process is called an intercountry adoption. The Adoption Authority of Ireland maintains a Register of Intercountry Adoptions (RICA) and certificates are issued from that register by that Authority.

Further information and the annual reports of the Adoption Authority are available on <https://aai.gov.ie>.

**Table 9: Adoptions Registered 2016-2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Domestic adoptions registered</b>	102	63	81	79
<b>Of which were:</b>				
<b>male children</b>	53	34	44	39
<b>female children</b>	49	29	37	40

**Table 10: Details of Adoptive Parents 2016-2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Joint adopters (couple)</b>	101	58	47	24
<b>Adoption by a partner</b>	-	-	28	50
<b>Sole adopter</b>	1	5	6	5

The Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017, allows the partner of a child's biological parent to adopt the child without the need for the biological parent to also adopt the child. Fifty of the 79 adoptions registered in 2019 availed of this new legislation.

## 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. The number of new entries in the register in 2019 was 102.

**Table 11: New entries in the Register of Gender Recognition 2016-2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Entries in register</b>	77	60	75	102

## Marriages

Registration of marriages is governed by Part 6 of the 2004 Act. The provisions were subsequently amended by the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2012 which extended the range of bodies enabled to solemnise marriages. In addition, the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 made provision for objections to a marriage on the basis that it might be a marriage of convenience and the Marriages Act 2015 removed the impediment to marriage of the parties being of the same sex and made related provisions.

All couples are required to give at least three months' notice of their intention to marry or to provide a court order exempting them from this requirement. They must attend in person before a marriage registrar and obtain a marriage registration form prior to the marriage proceeding.

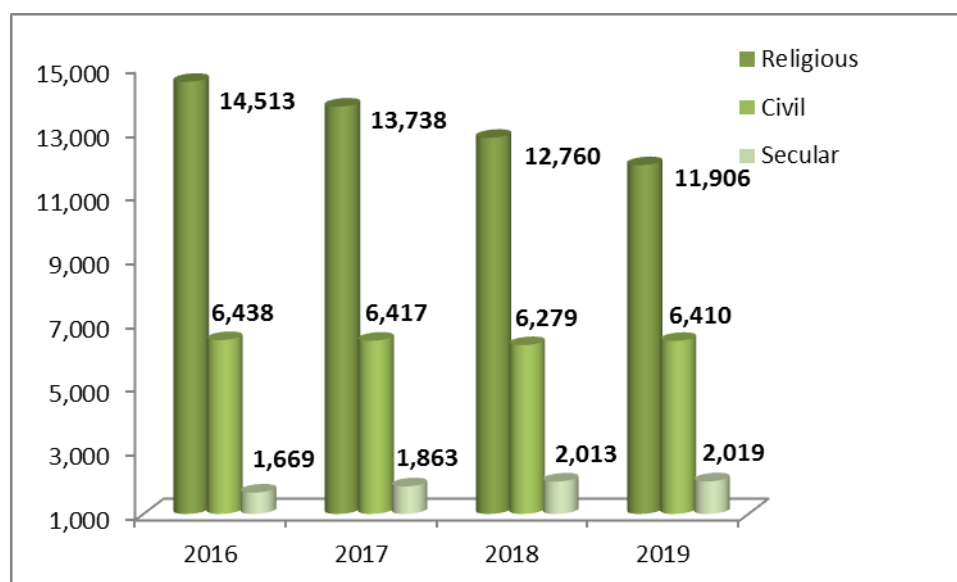
The number of marriages registered in Ireland during 2019 was 20,335 – a reduction of 3.4% on the previous year and 7.7% lower than the average for 2016-2018. The proportion of religious marriages registered has dropped below 60% for the first time and

accounted for 58.5% of all marriages registered in 2019. The proportion of marriages conducted by the local civil marriage service accounted for almost a third of all marriages registered during the year. Ten percent of all marriages registered in 2019 were conducted by a secular body - a more than doubling of the proportion of such marriages registered in 2014.

**Table 12: Marriages Registered 2016–2019– Form of Marriage Ceremony**

	2016		2017		2018		2019	
<b>Religious</b>	14,513	64.2%	13,738	62.4%	12,760	60.6%	11,906	58.5%
<b>Civil</b>	6,438	28.5%	6,417	29.1%	6,279	29.8%	6,410	31.5%
<b>Secular</b>	1,669	7.4%	1,863	8.5%	2,013	9.6%	2,019	9.9%
<b>Total</b>	22,620	100.0%	22,018	100.0%	21,052	100.0%	20,335	100.0%

**Figure 3: Proportion of Marriages Registered 2016–2019**



Some 92% of all marriages registered in the State during 2019 involved a party who was an Irish national.

**Table 13: Nationality of Marriage Parties 2019**

	Number	Proportion
<b>Both parties were Irish</b>	15,178	75%
<b>One party was Irish</b>	3,583	17%
<b>Both parties were non-Irish</b>	1,574	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,335</b>	<b>100%</b>

Just under 87% of all couples whose marriages were registered during 2019 were never previously married. When all parties who never married at the time of marriage are considered, the number of marriages involved rises to 95.5% of all marriages registered in 2019 – see Table 14.

**Table 14: Previous Civil Status of Marriage Parties in 2019**

	Total	Proportion
<b>Both parties single</b>	17,646	86.8%
<b>One party single the other divorced</b>	1,752	8.6%
<b>Both parties divorced</b>	569	2.8%
<b>One party single the other widowed</b>	136	0.7%
<b>One party widowed the other divorced</b>	150	0.7%
<b>Both parties civil partners</b>	46	0.2%
<b>Both parties widowed</b>	20	0.1%
<b>One party single other a civil partner</b>	13	0.05%
<b>One Party Widowed other civil partner</b>	3	0.01%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,335</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The Marriage Act 2015 provides for marriage of same-sex couples and for foreign same-sex marriages 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. Since 16 November 2015, it is possible for same-sex couples to get married and to have the same rights and obligations towards each other as opposite-sex married couples. The number of same-sex marriages registered during 2019 was 640 – see Table 15.

**Table 15: Number of Same-sex Marriages Registered 2016–2019\***

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Same-Sex Marriages</b>	1,055	767	668	640
<b>Both parties female</b>	449	336	294	288
<b>Both parties male</b>	606	431	374	352

*\* Data for 2016, 2017 and 2018 has been revised to remove errors in the recording of a small number of previously reported marriages.*

## **Objections to marriage**

Section 58 of the Act provides that an objection can be made to a proposed marriage and how objections are to be managed. Other than objections related to a claim that a

marriage may be a marriage of convenience; a number of objections to a single marriage were received during 2019. None of these objections were upheld following investigation by the GRO.

### ***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 that 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.

Since implementation, the number of marriage notifications involving a non-Irish EU national and a non-EU national has fallen from 1,584 in 2015 to 426 in 2019 – a drop of three-quarters with similar reductions in the number of marriages subsequently concluded – see Table 16 and Table 17 below.

**Table 16: Notifications of Intention to Marry: Nationality of Parties 2016–2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Irish and non-EU citizens</b>	1,655	1,368	1,363	1,397
<b>EU (non-Irish) and Non-EU citizens</b>	702	442	369	426
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>1,810</b>	<b>1,732</b>	<b>1,823</b>

**Table 17: Marriages Registered on Foot of Notifications in Table 16 2016–2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Irish and non-EU citizens</b>	1,233	1,012	891	951
<b>EU (non-Irish) and Non-EU citizens</b>	416	298	234	293
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,649</b>	<b>1,310</b>	<b>1,125</b>	<b>1,244</b>
<b>Proportion of marriage concluded</b>	70%	72%	65%	68%

## ***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 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.

Determinations were made in respect of 1,240 cases during 2019 involving 1,490 divorces – broadly similar to recent years. Of those, 1,287 (86%) were recognisable enabling the person to re-marry in the State. The remaining 203 divorces had not been determined at year end.

In cases where the Service cannot determine if the divorce should be recognised, the party has recourse to the Circuit Family Court for a declaration under Section 29(1) of the Family Law Act 1995 that their foreign divorce should be recognised under Irish law. Declarations made by the Court are binding on the State where the Attorney General is joined as a notice party to proceedings.

**Table 18: Recognition of Foreign Divorces 2016–2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Applications for recognition</b>	1,299	1,167	1,142	1,240
<b>Finalised</b>	1,119	981	979	1,074
<b>To be determined</b>	180	186	163	166

Of the 1,240 applications received, 1,022 involved the examination of a single divorce related to one of the parties; 191 cases involved the determination of two divorces and 27 involved examination of three or more divorces related to the parties.

The recognition process for other divorces can be highly complex and turns on the domicile of either of the parties to the marriage at the time the divorce proceedings commenced, and on the nature of the divorce itself. Particular challenges arise in respect of divorces granted in the United States where each state is treated as a separate jurisdiction under Irish law.

Further complexities also arise in recognising divorces granted in some jurisdictions due to the nature of their marriage and divorce laws and the reliance on religious practices and customs. Inevitably, such cases will need to be determined by the Courts under the Family Law Act 1995.

## Register of solemnisers

Section 51 of the Act provides that a marriage may only be solemnised by a registered solemniser and sets out the marriage procedures to be followed. Religious and secular solemnisers are nominated by their religious and secular bodies. Civil registrars are employed by the HSE. The Act does not provide for the regulation of solemnisers. Solemnisers are required to operate within the rules and conventions of their nominating bodies, religious and secular.

A register of solemnisers is maintained under section 53 of the 2004 Act, updated and published monthly. This register consists of names and contact details of solemnisers nominated and approved by religious and secular bodies to preside at marriage ceremonies and civil registrars employed by the HSE attached to the Service.

Some 5,740 solemnisers were included in the register in 2019. Further details of these entries are provided in Table 19.

**Table 18: Solemniser by Type 2016–2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Religious Solemnisers</b>	5,630	5,672	5,674	5,589
<b>Civil Solemnisers</b>	113	120	123	114
<b>Secular Solemnisers</b>	23	27	31	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,766</b>	<b>5,819</b>	<b>5,828</b>	<b>5,740</b>

## Places where marriages are conducted

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 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.

With respect to civil ceremonies, a marriage can be held in a Registry Office or some other venue that is approved by a registrar. Of the 6,410 civil marriage ceremonies conducted during 2019, nearly one-third took place at venues other than a Registry Office, such as hotels, places of historic or cultural significance, stately properties and civic buildings or sites.

**Table 20: Venues used for Civil Marriage Ceremonies 2016–2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Registrar's offices</b>	4,324	4,294	4,268	4,422
<b>Other venues</b>	2,114	2,123	2,011	1,988
<b>Total marriage ceremonies</b>	<b>6,438</b>	<b>6,417</b>	<b>6,279</b>	<b>6,410</b>
<b>% at Outside Venues</b>	33%	33%	32%	31%

## Research facility

The GRO maintains a family and genealogy research facility at Werburgh Street, Dublin 2 (the Research Room). At this office, members of the public, for a prescribed fee, may search the indices to the registers and purchase photocopies of the records identified from the indices.

The number of uncertified copies issued by the Research Room has decreased by 59% approximately since 2014. This is largely due to our historic records being made available online for free to the public via [www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie). Research staff facilitated the activities set out in Table 21 and Table 22.



**Table 21: Activities of the Research Room 2016–2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>General searches undertaken by the public</b>	950	860	757	770
<b>Specified searches undertaken by the public</b>	9,961	9,857	7,996	6,942
<b>Uncertified copies of register entries issued to the public</b>	36,259	26,700	20,562	18,370

**Table 22: Type and Number of Research Facilitated During 2018 and 2019**

	2018	2019
<b>Medical relating to cause of deaths</b>	32	13
<b>Family research, mainly related to adoptions</b>	115	118
<b>Total</b>	147	131

Through a process of digitisation of historic registers, the Service has, with its partner, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, continued during 2019 to prepare historic records for public release. During 2019, projects to provide all historic birth and marriage records online were completed. Work on providing the oldest death registration records online is ongoing and they will be made available during 2020.

Historic birth, marriage and death records will continue to be made available free of charge to the public and researchers on [www.irishgenealogy.ie](http://www.irishgenealogy.ie). Annual tranches of register entries are 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. Some 16 million registration records are now available online. The number of site visits recorded during 2019 was 5,187,476.

During 2019, the GRO continued to work on digitising of a number of historic registers maintained by it with the intention to make these publicly available in 2020 and 2021.

## Deaths

The registration of deaths is regulated by Part 5 of the 2004 Act. In 2019, the number of deaths registered was 32,084. Of these, 16,832 (52.5%) were male while 15,252 (47.5%) were female. The number of deaths has shown a slight increase in each of the

years since 2016. Further details are published by the CSO in their annual publication of vital statistics – see <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/>.

**Table 23: Death Registered 2016–2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Deaths Registered</b>	31,232	31,385	32,029	32,084
<b>As a result of:</b>				
<b>Information from a qualified informant</b>	21,901	22,273	22,507	22,189
<b>Receipt of a coroner's certificate following an inquest or post-mortem</b>	5,427	5,306	5,262	5,513
<b>Receipt of a coroner's certificate where no inquest or post-mortem held</b>	3,904	3,806	4,260	4,382

Of the qualified informants noted in Table 23, some 97% registering a death stated that they were relatives of the deceased. Table 24 sets out the civil status of the deceased.

**Table 24: Death Registered in 2019 - Civil Status of Deceased**

Civil Status	Number	Proportion
<b>Married</b>	12,383	38.6%
<b>Widowed</b>	11,008	34.3%
<b>Single</b>	6,926	21.6%
<b>Divorced</b>	912	2.8%
<b>Separated</b>	652	2.0%
<b>Civil Partner</b>	8	>0.1%
<b>Unknown</b>	195	0.6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	32,084	100.0%

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

The number of deaths registered on foot of a coroner's certificate has risen significantly over the years and now represents 32% of all deaths registered. 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.

### ***Delays in death registration***

It is not always possible to ensure that deaths are registered in a timely manner. During 2019, 1,472 new registrations were made which were more than 12 months after the

death of the person. Some of these registrations are due to the inclusion of deaths that occurred some time ago due to the public's engagement with family research. However, a significant number relate to persons who died and who did not have a family member, relative or friend who was able 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.

An analysis of deaths registered in 2017, 2018 and 2019, including those referred to coroners, indicate that the average number of days between the death occurring and the registration is 30 days with a median of 15 days. Similar analysis conducted by the CSO indicates somewhat longer delays.

**Table 25: Late Death Registrations 2016–2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Late registrations by qualified informants</b>	1,248	1,313	1,303	1,472

To address this matter, during 2019, the GRO commenced work on possible revision of the current death registration process with the objectives to eliminate delays, improve information on the medical certification of the cause of death, and develop technology to make it easier for relatives and other qualified informants to register a death.

Any changes to the current process will necessitate revision to the Act.

### ***Correction of death register entries***

As with all register entries, efforts are continually being made to ensure the quality and integrity of the particulars recorded in the death register. Where information is provided to indicate that a previous entry is incorrectly recorded or included in the register, this information can be amended. Such corrections tend to be minor in nature and can relate to the spelling of names and other particulars recorded.

The first death register entries date from 1864. As mentioned earlier, until 2004, register entries were manual paper-based processes which were susceptible to damage, loss

and minor error. The minor errors related in the main to the spelling of forenames, surnames and to revise Irish forms of spelling.

**Table 26: Correction Made to Death Registrations 2016–2019**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Registry entries corrected</b>	1,455	1,489	1,480	1,605

The growth of family research and the making available for open public access of historic records has contributed to a demand for register entries to be corrected. Where incomplete or incorrect information is identified and evidence to support a change is brought to the attention of a registrar, a correction to the register can be made.

The engagement by family members and researchers has contributed enormously to the quality of the historic records maintained and is also ensuring the integrity of more recent register entries. The number of minor death registration errors corrected during 2019 was 1,605 for all deaths registered since 1864.

## Multi-lingual standard forms

EU Regulation ((EU) 2016/1191) became operational during 2019 with the aim of simplifying the circulation of certain public documents between EU/EEA member states. The objective is to reduce administrative burdens and costs for citizens when they need to present a public document issued by the authorities of a member state to the authorities of another member state.

Under the Regulation, public documents issued in any member state must be accepted as authentic in another member state without the need for such documents to bear an authentication stamp (the apostille) or other certification or the need for documents to be translated from one language to another. The public documents covered which fall within the remit of the GRO certificates of births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships, and adoptions. Other public documents issued by public authorities are also covered by the regulation.

Since its introduction in February 2019, the GRO has issued 830 certificates supplemented with the specified Multilingual Standard Form. A breakdown by language and type of certificate of issue is provided in Table 27.

**Table 27: Multilingual Standard Form Issued by Language and Type in 2019**

Language	Births	Deaths	Marriage	Total
<b>Bulgarian</b>	12	-	3	15
<b>Croatian</b>	173	-	8	181
<b>Czech</b>	31	-	5	36
<b>Danish</b>	-	-	1	1
<b>Dutch</b>	12	-	5	17
<b>French</b>	97	1	8	106
<b>German</b>	53	6	22	81
<b>Greek</b>	1	-	-	1
<b>Hungarian</b>	1	1	1	3
<b>Italian</b>	26	3	15	44
<b>Lithuanian</b>	4	-	2	6
<b>Polish</b>	26	2	4	32
<b>Portuguese</b>	20	3	8	31
<b>Romanian</b>	62	2	10	74
<b>Slovakian</b>	55	2	9	66
<b>Spanish</b>	95	18	22	135
<b>Swedish</b>	1	-	-	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	669	38	123	830



## 3 Other matters

## Department's Strategic Objectives 2017 - 2020

The Department's Statement of Strategy 2017-2020 was published in 2017. 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 Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Government. The Department's overall objective for 2017 to 2020 is to promote active participation and inclusion in society through the framework of employment rights and the provision of income supports, employment services and other services.

It 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 2019 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 individual provisions of the Act and other Acts. The Act provides for the function to be exercised by a deputy on behalf of an tArd-Chláraitheoir.

### *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-Chláraitheoir. The Civil Registration Districts and the Superintendents with responsibility for those areas are listed in the Appendix.

### ***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 2019. The terms of reference of the Board address issues of Departmental co-ordination, support for 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. The GRO reports to a number of other Department Boards in respect of procurement, project governance, data protection, internal audit and human resource management.

### ***HSE Liaison***

A standing committee comprising all Superintendent Registrars from the HSE and management staff of the General Register Office 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 operation of the Service and future strategic direction and resourcing.

## **Business Improvement Review**

Progress continues to be made on implementing the recommendations contained in a business improvement review finalised in 2018 to examine the current and future work requirements of the GRO. During 2019, the GRO continued to focus its actions on improving customer services, revising internal processes and procedures, investing in staff development and IT improvements.

## **Civil Registration Policy**

A separate unit within the Department is tasked with the development of civil registration policy development and the preparation of legislation and liaises closely with the GRO on relevant matters. A number of significant pieces of civil registration legislation, which amend the Civil Registration Act, have been enacted in recent years.



During 2019, amendments were made to the terms and conditions applying to an tArd-Chláraitheoir and the deputy position (Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Act 2018). The Unit drafted legislation which was enacted by the Oireachtas in early 2019 related to the registration of births that result from donor-assisted human reproduction and to make arrangements for the registration of the parents of children born as a result of donor-assisted human reproduction.

This Unit provides policy and related advice to the Minister on matters that impinge on civil registration generally, and the Service.

### ***Review of Gender Recognition Act***

The Gender Recognition Act 2015 provides for a statutory review of the operation of the Act to be commenced within two years of the Act coming into operation. The report of the Review Group was published on 18th July 2018<sup>6</sup>. The Minister reported to the Oireachtas on the 26<sup>th</sup> November 2019<sup>7</sup> on the recommendations of the Review Group and published the report in the same month.

The main recommendations of the Review Group contained proposals to remove the age barrier for a gender recognition certificate, subject to parental consent, and third party support, but removing any requirement for medical reports or Court processes.

In addition, there is a recommendation by the review group that similar recognition be provided to those persons who are non-binary. Non-binary is an umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside the gender binary of male or female. This includes individuals whose gender identity is neither exclusively male nor female, a combination of male and female or between or beyond genders.

In her report to the Oireachtas, the Minister set out her response to all of the recommendations in the Review Group Report. This includes the following proposals for legislation that were approved by Government and forwarded to the Joint Oireachtas Committee in the 32nd Dáil to consider for pre-legislative scrutiny:

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/69543/0eadce5530df4a558500887e6fa70c2f.pdf#page=1>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/69547/dd757168e2e44d3faa7196b4b17fc4d8.pdf#page=1>

- Simplifying the path to legal gender recognition for children aged 16/17 years by introducing an arrangement for self-declaration, with parental consent; a simple revocation process; and by making family mediation support available on a voluntary basis.
- In order to bring greater clarity to the fact that legal gender recognition is separate and distinct from any question of medical intervention, it is proposed to identify clearly on a gender recognition certificate for 16 and 17 year olds that it is awarded on the basis of self-declaration only.
- To provide that a gender recognition certificate may be used to provide proof of change of name as well as proof of change of gender.
- To provide that Irish citizens born outside the State and living outside the State (including Northern Ireland) would be allowed to apply for a gender recognition certificate.

No plans were announced to change the arrangements for children aged under 16 years; however, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection undertook to work, in conjunction with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, to commission research to examine issues of concern relating to under 16 year olds.

The Review Group recommended extending legal gender recognition to non-binary people, while also recognising the complexity of the issue and acknowledging that a comprehensive impact analysis may be required. An interdepartmental group has been established that is tasked with carrying out this impact assessment and submitting a report to Government for consideration by the end of 2020. In the meantime, Government Departments and other public bodies will take positive steps to improve the position of non-binary people.

A number of other recommendations are more administrative in nature and are being implemented or will be progressed under Ireland's National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019 – 2021.

### ***Underage Marriage Exemption***

The Civil Registration Act 2004 and the Family Law Act 1995 removed the exemption which enables persons under 18 to marry. This was brought into effect with commencement of the Domestic Violence Act 2018 on 1st January 2019.

## ***Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2019***

This legislation makes provisions for the registration of birth particulars in respect of children born as a result of donor-assisted reproduction, and allowed for further changes to the rebuttal of paternity in line with changes to the Status of Children Act 1987.

The provisions relating to donor-assisted births mainly affect same-sex female couples – they will allow the second partner in the relationship to be registered in the register of births using the gender-neutral term “Parent”. This will assist them in affirming their parental rights in practical day-to-day matters such as passport applications, school enrolment, interaction with medical practitioners, and other situations where demonstration of parental relationship may be required. These provisions came into operation on 6 October 2019 in line with section 12 of the Act.

The Act also deals with other issues such as: a role for a next of kin in providing a Coroner with additional details in relation to a deceased person’s particulars; sharing of civil registration data and records with a body such as the National Library or National Archives; collection of additional details in respect of deceased persons in order that the CSO can comply with obligations under EU Regulations; and other technical amendments.

## ***Civil Law (Presumption of Death) Act 2019***

This legislation makes provisions for dealing with the civil law status of missing persons. It puts in place a statutory framework which would provide for the making of a presumption of death order by the Courts in respect of missing persons. It is designed to assist the families of missing persons in dealing with the management of the missing person’s estate. The Act also introduces provisions in the Civil Registration Act 2004 for the establishment of a register of presumed deaths, providing for registrations to be made on foot of a presumption of death order from the Courts. This will allow family members to obtain a certificate from the register in much the same way as obtaining a death certificate. Establishment of this register will also be of genealogical and statistical value.

## **Ombudsman complaints**

One complaint to the Ombudsman was received during 2019 relating to a birth registration. The complainant gave birth to her baby in her home and attended a

hospital subsequently and sought to register the birth. The Service was not in a position to register that birth as occurring in the home in the absence of a midwife as this was not provided in the data recorded on the birth registration system.

Following the intervention of the Ombudsman, the complaint was resolved and the process has been changed to reflect the circumstances of home births.

## **Data Protection**

The GRO shares registration data with a number of public authorities to support their service provision and to comply with statutory provisions. The Central Statistics Office publishes a range of population and vital statistics annually under the Statistics Acts. The Act makes it lawful for registration data to be made available to a number of Government Departments for stated purposes. The GRO has concluded a data sharing arrangements with a number of bodies as required by the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 and reports to the Department's Data Management Programme Board on all data sharing arrangements.

## **A look back at 100 years ago**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1920 the Register-General for Ireland, the forerunner of the current position, sent a report to the Lord Lieutenant of the day covering details of birth, marriages and deaths registered in Ireland during 1919. The report noted that there were 89,325 births, 2,021 above 1918 levels; 27,193 marriages compared with 21,052 in 1918; and 78,612 deaths - a slight decrease on the 78,695 deaths registered in 1918. These data related to the whole island of Ireland which the Register-General estimated had a population of 4,464,000 people in 1919.

With respect to marriages, it was noted that rate of marriage was the highest recorded to that date on the island of Ireland. The proportion of signatures of the contracting parties in the marriage registers gave a "rough test" of the progress of elementary education in Ireland. In 1919, 96.3% of the husbands and 97.3% of wives wrote their names. The remainder signed by using a "mark".

That 1918 Report mentioned the impact the "Spanish Flu" was having. A feature highlighted in the 1919 Report was the excessive mortality due to influenza and pneumonia with 9,406 cases registered deaths indicating this cause compared with 2,021 cases in 1918. Mortality from tuberculosis was noted as having declined to the lowest level recorded. The report noted:

The prominent figure in the preceding table is 9,406, which represents the deaths which were caused by influenza, this malady re-appearing with virulence during the March quarter of the year. Although the deaths were not so numerous as in the year 1918, when 10,651 were caused by influenza, both the figures for 1918 and 1919 were far in excess of the number in any of the preceding years, the average for the decennial period, 1909-1918 being 2,119.

Of the 89,325 births registered, 46,202 were male children or 51.7% while 43,123 were female or 48.3%. The number of twins born was 1,126 (1918: 1,073) with 10 (1918:12) triplet births registered in Ireland during 1919.

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# 4 Appendix



## Appendix

Civil Registration Districts and Superintendents with responsibilities for the delivery of services during 2019.

Districts	Superintendent Registrar	Address
EASTERN Covering Dublin, Wicklow & Kildare	Ms. Lara O'Dwyer	Civil Registration Office Joyce House 8/11 Lombard Street East Dublin 2
MID WESTERN Covering 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	Civil Registration Office Lacken Dublin Road Kilkenny
SOUTHERN Covering Cork & Kerry	Mr. Thomas Walsh	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**

**2020**