



Registrar General Northern Ireland Annual Report 2020

Publication Date: 21 October 2021



The General Register Office (GRO) for Northern Ireland (NI) is part of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). NISRA is an executive agency within the Department of Finance (DoF) and has been in existence since April 1996.

GRO is responsible for the administration of the marriage and civil partnership law in NI along with the registration of births, deaths and adoptions. The Office is also responsible for the maintenance of registration records and the production, on request, of certificates in relation to these events.

NISRA's core purpose is to support decision makers in the formulation of evidence-based policy and inform public debate through the production and dissemination of high quality, trusted and meaningful analysis; facilitate research and deliver the decennial population census and every day civil registration services.

The overall vision of NISRA is to aspire to:

- be the go-to organisation for an accurate and insightful account of life in Northern Ireland, informing decision making and recognising that our people are our strength;
 - provide comprehensive registration and genealogy services that give our customers what they need; and
 - be motivated and valued people doing excellent work together; innovating, growing, proud of our Agency and our impact.
- The NISRA corporate plan for 2019-2024 is available online at:
www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/NISRA-Corporate-Plan-2019-24



Ninety-Ninth
Annual Report
of the
Registrar General
2020

Laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly under:
Section 34 of the Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order, 2003
Article 3(3) of the Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 1976
Section 154 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004
by the Department of Finance

21 October 2021

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Foreword by the Registrar General for Northern Ireland



I am pleased to present the ninety-ninth Annual Report of the Registrar General to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The report draws on the work of the General Register Office (GRO) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) Vital Statistics Unit (VSU) and provides an overview of Northern Ireland through the analysis of key life events such as births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships registered in 2020. Detailed supporting information (both current and historical) continues to be available on the NISRA website, www.nisra.gov.uk. Should you require information that has not yet been published our customer services team will be happy to consider your requests.

This year has been a challenging one for GRO, VSU and the local council Registrars. Although we provide a role in the most important and often most emotive days of people's lives, this year has demonstrated that our service is not just about the certificates or statistics but also about the personal contact that we have with our customers, often at their lowest point. Throughout the pandemic emergency period, GRO continued with business as usual as well as providing guidance and support to the Registrars and public on the continuous changes. VSU also worked hard to ensure that crucial official statistics on Covid-19 related deaths were published in a timely and transparent way. Registrars continued to provide the most difficult service of the registration of deaths with the next of kin, often remotely.

The registration service plays a pivotal role in supporting evidence-based decision making and the delivery of public services, informing both regional and international comparisons, and underpinning NISRA's population estimates and projections that are integral to policy development and the work of government. The information gathered this year will be especially sought after to help understand the early impact of Covid-19 and to assist how we might plan for any future such events.

In presenting this report, my fifth as Registrar General for Northern Ireland, I greatly appreciate the work undertaken by the 13 Registrars and 83 Deputy Registrars in the District Registration Offices across the eleven councils (noting that the number of Deputy Registrars increased to 102 during the pandemic period). I also greatly appreciate all of the GRO and NISRA personnel involved in the delivery of civil registration services. Without their collective commitment, professionalism and support particularly in this year of uncertainty and pressure, the production of this important information simply would not have been possible.

I trust that you will find the report both informative and useful. Your feedback on content and format continues to be welcomed.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Siobhan Carey". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Siobhan Carey

Registrar General for Northern Ireland

21 October 2021

The General Register Office (GRO) is part of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) with the Registrar General having overall responsibility for the work carried out by the GRO. GRO functions are set in legislation, and the main areas of responsibility are:

- the administration of the births, deaths, marriage and civil partnership law in Northern Ireland through the District Registration Offices (DRO);
- policy development, oversight and regulation of the DROs;
- casework relating to name changes, registration of adoptions and re-registrations;
- the maintenance and access to the online official registration records; and
- production, on request, of certificates in relation to these events.

Main Activities in the calendar year 2020. (These figures, mostly reduced from 2019, must be considered in the context of the national pandemic):

- Almost 43,000 life events registered through the DRO offices.
- GRO processed 59,000 certificate applications. Almost 20,000 certificate applications related to priority (fast-tracked) certificates.
- Just over 80,000 certificates were produced by the GRO certificate production team in 2020. Applications and certificate numbers decreased this year due to the pandemic and the restrictions this imposed as the public did not require certificates for the usual purposes such as passports, as foreign travel was not possible.
- Different channels are used by the public to submit certificate applications. Online (which includes telephone applications) is by far the most popular. The number of certificates

produced from applications received by the different channels were:

- ◆ Postal - 4,755
 - ◆ Counter - 2,870
 - ◆ Online - 172,380.
- Additionally, GRO processed over 2,000 registration related cases including re-registrations, adoptions, name changes and corrections.
 - GRO shared information with Business Services Organisation, Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Infrastructure and Department for Communities.
 - Over 15,000 new accounts were registered on the GRO Family History website. There were over 1.1 million searches carried out – the most popular being the basic index search which accounted for almost 1 million searches. There were over 1 million credits purchased by online

users with almost 475,000 credits used for the enhanced and full index searches.

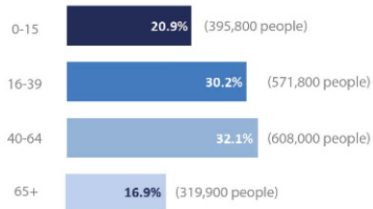
- There were 319 visits to the GRO Public Search Room in Colby House in 2020. Due to pandemic restrictions, the Public Search Room was closed for six months of the year and visitor numbers were limited during the opening period.

Northern Ireland Population Estimates 2020

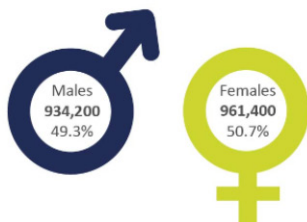
Population of Northern Ireland at 30 June 2020

1,895,500

Population by Age



Population by Gender

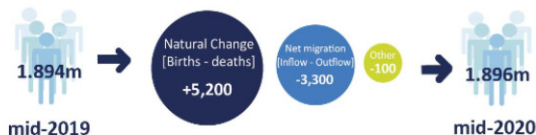


Figures may not always add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: 2020 Mid-year Population Estimates for Northern Ireland

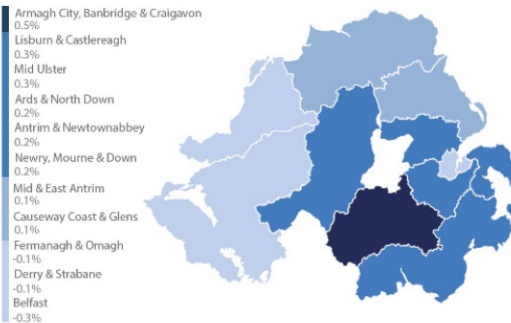
How has the population increased since 30 June 2019?

+1,800 people

(0.1% growth)



Population Change by Local Government District (Mid-2019 to Mid-2020)



In 2020:

- The population of Northern Ireland was estimated to be 1.90 million people, an increase of 1,800 people (0.1 per cent) from [mid-2019](#).
- Natural change was the driver of population growth, adding 5,200 people (21,900 births minus 16,700 deaths) to the population.
- Over the year, the number of people leaving Northern Ireland (24,500) was greater than the number of people coming to live in Northern Ireland (21,200), leading to a net migration loss of 3,300 people*.
- The population continues to age with the number of those aged 65 and over increasing by 1.7 per cent to reach 319,900 people (16.9 per cent of the population). In contrast, the number of children aged 0 to 15 decreased slightly (by 100 people) to 395,800 children (20.9 per cent of the population).
- The population of Belfast, Derry City and Strabane and Fermanagh and Omagh LGDs decreased in the year ending mid-2020. Belfast LGD experienced the largest percentage decrease (0.3 per cent). Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon LGD experienced the largest population growth over the year (0.5 per cent).

2018-based Population Projections:

- The Northern Ireland population is projected to increase by 3.7 per cent to 1.95 million in the next ten years to mid-2028, reaching the 1.99 million mark by [mid-2043](#).
- Projections also indicate a continued ageing population here, with the number of people aged 65 and over projected to grow by 25.1 per cent in the 10 year period to mid-2028.
- The number of people aged 65 and over is projected to overtake that of children by mid-2028, with the proportion aged 85 and over projected to double by mid-2043 (up from 2.0 per cent to 3.9 per cent).

* Figures may not add back due to rounding

20,815
births



10,772 males 10,043 females



Average age of mothers

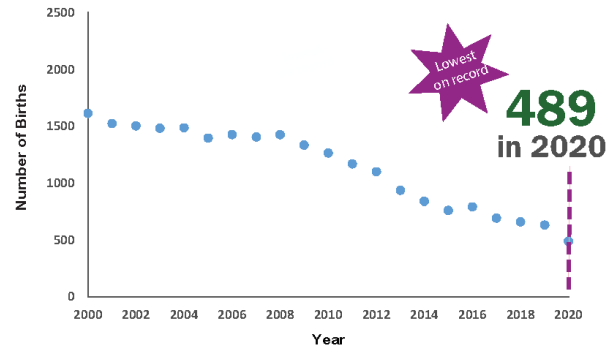


31.1 years



40.6% of births were to
first time mothers

Trend in live births to teenage mothers*



*Teenage mothers are defined as mothers who are under the age of 20

In 2020:

- Due to the pandemic in 2020 it was necessary to close some registration services for a short time during the initial lockdown. This included unavailability of some services such as birth registrations and marriage ceremonies. Since then there has been an effort to bring all birth registrations up to date. However, it should be noted that the number of births registered, which usually gives a fairly accurate representation of births occurring (within less than +/-0.5 per cent), is varying more than usual from the number of births that took place in 2020 (2.7 per cent less).
- There were 20,815 births (10,772 males and 10,043 females) registered to Northern Ireland mothers, 1,632 fewer than in 2019.
- However, looking at the date of birth shows that 21,412* births occurred in 2020 (note this total is provisional).
- 3 January and 30 September were the most common birth dates, with 86 babies born on each of those days.
- The average age of mothers was 31.1 years, a slight increase on 2019. By way of comparison, in 1990 the average age of mothers was 27.9 years.
- 24.9 per cent of all births were to mothers aged 35 years or over, up from 10.2 per cent 30 years ago.
- Births to mothers under 20 years of age (teenage mothers) decreased from 631** in 2019 to 489. This is the lowest number on record and is noticeably lower than a decade previously (1,265) and three decades ago (1,853).
- First-time mothers (i.e. mothers with no previous live born children) accounted for 40.6 per cent of all births.
- Only 9.5 per cent of mothers already had three or more live born children. This compares with 12.8 per cent in 1990.
- The average age of first-time mothers was 29.2 years, almost four years older than in 1990 (25.3 years).
- 45.1 per cent of births occurred outside of marriage/civil partnership, compared with 18.0 per cent three decades ago.
- Of the 20,270 maternities, 1.5 per cent resulted in multiple births with 304 sets of twins and two sets of triplets being born.
- 10.3 per cent of births were to mothers who were born outside of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. This compares with 2.5 per cent 20 years ago.

*Correction notice: 25 October 2021, the original number stated (21,512) included births to non-residents of Northern Ireland, the corrected number excludes them to be consistent with the total number of births registered.

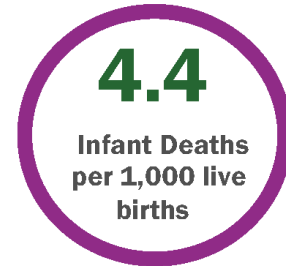
**Correction notice 18 November 2021: corrected from 613

Stillbirths* & Infant Deaths

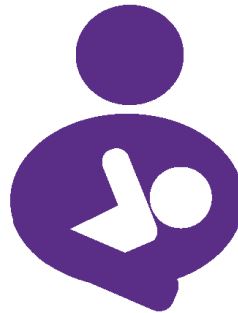


69
Stillbirths

93
Infant Deaths



This stillbirth rate
has **increased**
from 3.0 in 2019



36.6%
of infant deaths occurred
in the first day of life

69 stillbirths registered



than the 2019 figure

93 infant deaths registered



than the 2019 figure

In 2020:

- 69 stillbirths (36 males and 33 females) were registered. This was 2 more than in 2019 and equates to a stillbirth rate of 3.3 per 1,000 total births (both live and still).
- The stillbirths number was the second lowest on record for Northern Ireland, the lowest being 67 in 2019. By way of comparison, in 1979, there were 246 stillbirths registered.
- Conditions originating in the perinatal period were the cause of 72.5 per cent of stillbirths, whilst congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities and symptoms, signs and abnormal clinical and laboratory findings, not elsewhere classified were the cause of the remaining 27.5 per cent.
- 93 infant deaths (i.e. deaths in the first year of life) were registered, representing a decrease of 17.0 per cent on the previous year (112). This equates to 4.4 infant deaths per 1,000 live births.
- This was 5 more than the lowest number of infant deaths registered in one year on record, which was 88 deaths registered in 2017. By way of comparison, in 1979 there were 417 infant deaths registered.
- 36.6 per cent of infant deaths occurred during the first day of life.
- Two thirds (66.0 per cent) of infant deaths occurred in the first week of life. (The first week of life is considered to be between zero and six days.)
- Conditions originating in the perinatal period were the cause of 53.8 per cent of infant deaths, whilst congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities were the cause of a further 35.5 per cent. The remaining 10.8 per cent of infant deaths were due to other factors.

* The Stillbirth (Definition) Act 1992 redefined a stillbirth, from 1 October 1992, as a child which had issued forth from its mother after the 24th week of pregnancy and which did not breathe or show any other sign of life.

17,614 deaths in 2020

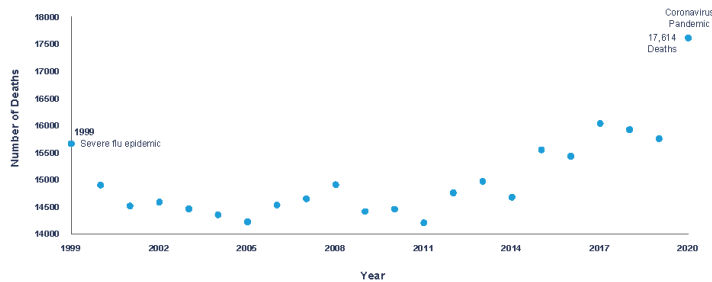
Average age at death



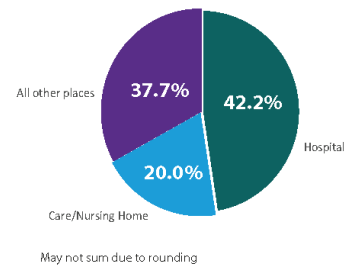
2/3 deaths were of people aged 75 and over

138 deaths were of people aged 100 and over

Number of deaths over time



Place of Death

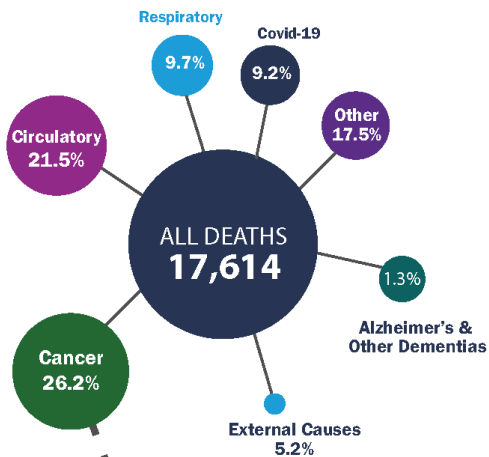


In 2020:

- 17,614 deaths (8,733 males and 8,881 females) were registered, an 11.8 per cent increase on the 2019 figure (15,758) and 18.2 per cent more than two decades ago when the severe flu epidemic occurred in 2000 (14,903).
- There were 102 female deaths for every 100 male deaths, slightly less than the female to male ratio in the population as a whole (103 females for every male).
- There were 138 deaths of people aged 100 or over, 3.8 per cent higher than 2019 (133) but over 3.5 times higher than over 30 years previously (39 in 1990).
- The average age at death for men was 74.7 years and 79.7 years for women. This compares with 69.3 years and 75.4 years respectively three decades ago.
- Approximately two out of every three deaths (65.6 per cent) were of people aged 75 or over.
- 42.2 per cent of deaths occurred in hospitals, whilst a further 20.0 per cent of deaths occurred in care homes or nursing homes. The remaining 37.7 per cent of deaths occurred at home or in other places (note: percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding).
- Approximately four out of every five deaths (82.3 per cent) in a hospital was a person aged 65 or over.
- 88.7 per cent of deaths were of people born in Northern Ireland and 9.2 per cent were born in the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The remaining 2.1 per cent were born in the rest of the world, including Poland (0.3 per cent), Lithuania and the United States of America (0.2 per cent each).
- Life expectancy* for females (82.4 years) was almost four years higher than for males (78.7 years). This gap has however been closing, down from over six years three decades before.

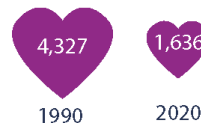
* These figures have been produced by the [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS). Official life expectancy figures for Northern Ireland are produced by the Department of Health, NI, with 2018-2020 estimates due for release on 8 December 2021.

Cause of Death



**MOST COMMON
CANCER SITE
WAS THE
BRONCHUS OR LUNG**

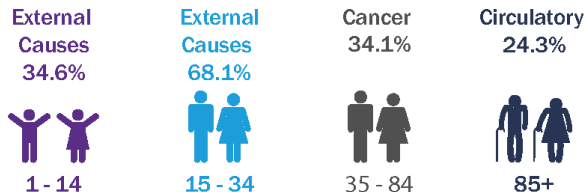
Heart disease ↓ 62.2% over 30 years



Alzheimer's & other dementias ↑ 2.5% from the 2019 figure



Most prevalent cause of death by age



Data on suicides not available at time of publication due to ongoing Suicide review. It will be published at a later date.

In 2020:

- Of the 17,614 deaths, the leading cause of death was cancer (26.2 per cent), followed by circulatory disease (21.5 per cent) and respiratory disease* (9.7 per cent). These have been the three leading causes of death since 2012.
- For both males and females, the most common cancer site was the bronchus or lung (22.8 per cent of all cancers); the breast was the second most common cancer site in females (14.2 per cent of all cancers in females), whereas the prostate was the second most common cancer site in males (11.4 per cent of all cancers in males).
- 62.2 per cent fewer people died of heart disease than three decades ago with 1,636 deaths compared with 4,327 deaths in 1990. However, this was a 1.4 per cent increase from 2018 (1,613).
- External causes of death (for example accidents and suicides) were the leading cause of death in people aged 15-34, accounting for 68.1 per cent of deaths in this age group. External causes accounted for 5.2 per cent of all deaths. *A breakdown of external causes of death was not available at the time of publication but will be provided as an addendum in due course.*
- Cancer was the leading cause of death for those aged 35-84, accounting for 33.5 per cent of deaths in this age group. Circulatory disease was the leading cause for those aged 85 or over, accounting for 24.3 per cent of all deaths in this age group.
- Covid-19 was added to the list of possible causes of death in 2020 and accounted for 9.2 per cent of all deaths that year (1,625). People aged 85 or over accounted for almost half of these deaths (44.5 per cent).
- The number of deaths due to Alzheimer's disease and other dementias increased by 2.5 per cent on the previous year, from 1,942 in 2019 to 1,991.

* Excludes deaths from Covid-19.

Marriages

Most popular dates



Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

*May not sum due to rounding



2.0%
Male
partnerships



2.3%
Female
partnerships



95.8%
Opposite-Sex
Marriages

Average age at marriage



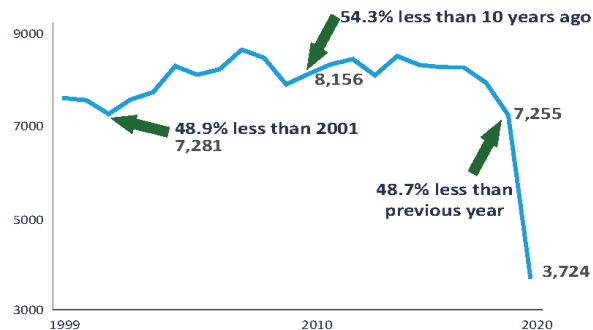
Males
36.3 years



Females
34.0 years



3,724 marriages



In 2020:

- The impact of the pandemic and associated restrictions in relation to social gatherings, businesses and close contact with people from different households can be seen in the reduced number of marriages registered in 2020.
- 3,724 marriages were registered, equivalent to just under 1 every 2 hours, close to half the amount registered in 2019 (7,255). Same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland has been legal since 13 January 2020, following the enactment of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, therefore, this figure includes both opposite sex and same sex marriages.
- October was the most popular month to get married. Saturday 10 October was the most popular day, with 65 couples married on this day. However, it should be kept in mind that marriage dates in 2020 were heavily impacted by lockdown restrictions relating to the pandemic. In previous years, the most popular month for weddings has generally been August.
- Grooms were on average over two years older than brides (36.3 years and 34.0 years respectively). Compared with 30 years previously, the average age of both brides and grooms increased by more than seven years (28.3 and 26.2 respectively).
- Three in four marriages (77.7 per cent) were first-time marriages for both partners while for 9.9 per cent of marriages both partners had been previously married.
- 9.2 per cent of marriages were of couples who both resided outside NI. Of these couples, 39 were both born in NI and returned to get married.
- Almost three in four religious marriages (72.3 per cent) were held in a religious building. St Mary's Church, Ballymena was the most popular religious venue for religious marriages, with 62 marriages having taken place there over the year.
- The remaining 27.7 per cent of all religious marriage ceremonies were held outside of religious buildings, in approved venues.
- Almost two-thirds of all civil marriages (62.7 per cent) were held in a registrar's office. The Belfast Registration Office was the most popular venue for civil marriage ceremonies.
- The remaining 37.3 per cent of civil marriages were held in approved venues.

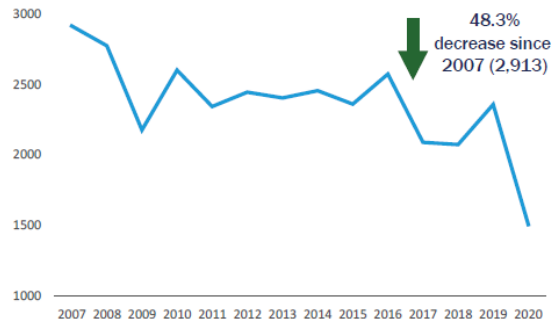
1,507

Divorces



Average length of marriage at divorce

18 Years



Average age at divorce



47.7 years for males



45.7 years for females

Children affected by divorce



2,635 children/stepchildren affected
1,145 of which were under 16

16

Civil Partnership Dissolutions

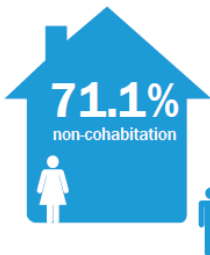


4 Dissolutions were male partnerships



12 Dissolutions were female partnerships

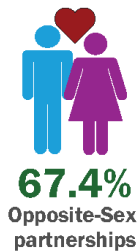
Grounds for divorce



In 2020:

- There were 1,507 divorces granted. This was a decrease on the previous year (2,357), and 48.3 per cent lower than the peak number of 2,913 in 2007.
- Non-cohabitation remained the most frequently recorded reason for divorce, accounting for 71.1 per cent of all divorces.
- Those marriages that ended in divorce had lasted an average of 18 years, compared with 15 years three decades previous.
- The average ages of the men and women concerned were 47.7 years and 45.7 years respectively.
- For approximately one in five men and women who divorced (17.5 per cent), this was not their first divorce.
- 2,635 children/stepchildren were connected to the divorces that were granted, of which 1,145 were under the age of 16.

Civil Partnerships



Average age at partnership



Most popular month

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

9 civil partnerships took place in October



civil partnerships



than the 2019 figure

Location of civil partnership ceremony

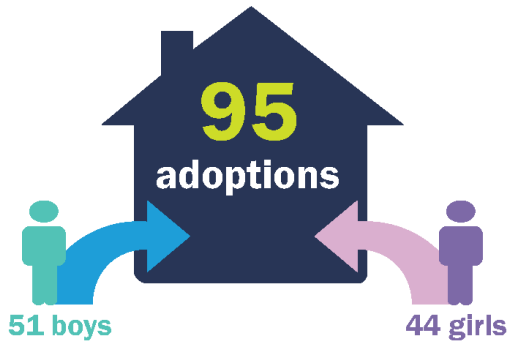


90.7% registrar's office

9.3% approved venue

In 2020:

- As with marriages, the impact of the pandemic and associated lockdowns was reflected in the number of civil partnerships registered in 2020.
- The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 enabled opposite-sex civil partnerships to take place through the Civil Partnership (Opposite-sex Couples) (NI) Regulations 2019. The regulations came into force on 13 January 2020.
- There were 43 civil partnerships registered (10 male partnerships, 4 female partnerships and 29 opposite-sex partnerships), 60 fewer than in 2019.
- The average age of males entering a male civil partnership was 45.6 years, while for females it was 44.1 years. The average age of a partner in an opposite-sex civil partnership was 50.2.
- Over 90% (39) of civil partnership ceremonies were held in a District Registration Office. The remaining 4 ceremonies were held in an approved venue.
- October was the most popular month for civil partnership ceremonies, with 9 held in that month.

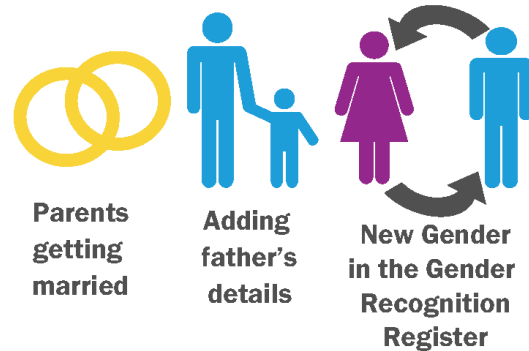


↓ 30 less adoptions than in 2019

69.5% of adopted children were aged between 0 and 5 years

351 re-registrations

Reasons for re-registering a birth include:



370 fewer re-registrations than in 2019

In 2020:

- 95 children (51 boys and 44 girls) were adopted, a decrease of 24.0 per cent from the 2019 figure of 125.
- The average age of the adopted children was five years.
- 66 children adopted were aged five or under. A further 19 children were aged between six and ten, with the remaining 10 children aged 11 or over.
- 351 births were re-registered, 51.3 per cent less than the 2018 figure of 721.
- There were five adults in Northern Ireland who re-registered their birth with a new gender in the Gender Recognition Register.

¹ **Basic index search:**

Births – displays forename and surname, date of birth, sex, mother's maiden surname, registration number and district of registration.

Deaths – displays forename and surname of deceased, date of death, sex, date of birth or age at death, registration number and district of registration.

Marriages – displays surname of bride and groom, forename of either bride or groom, date of marriage, registration number and district of registration.

Civil Partnerships – displays surname of both partners, forename of either partner, year of civil partnership, registration number and district of registration.

² Enhanced index search:

Births – displays basic index information along with date of birth, district of birth, father’s forename and surname and mother’s forename and surname.

Deaths – displays basic index information along with date of death, date of birth and marital status.

Marriages – displays basic index information along with date of marriage, place of marriage, date of birth of bride and groom and age at marriage of bride and groom.

Civil Partnerships – plays basic index information along with date of civil partnership, place of civil partnership, date of birth of both partners and age at civil partnership of both partners.

³ Full Index Search:

View full registration details (image or data).

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All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is NISRA's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

All of the data in this report are available on the NISRA website www.nisra.gov.uk.

Any queries or requests for further information should be addressed to:

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