



ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND

Údarás Uchtála na hÉireann
Adoption Authority of Ireland

Tuarascáil Bhliantúil 2020
Annual Report 2020



To ensure the provision of the highest possible standards of adoption related services, throughout the life-long adoption process, with the best interests of children as the first and paramount objective.



**Report of
Údarás Uchtála na hÉireann
Adoption Authority of Ireland
for 2020**

**To: Roderic O’Gorman
Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.**

AAI Annual Report 2020

Key points



Rapid adaptation to COVID-19.

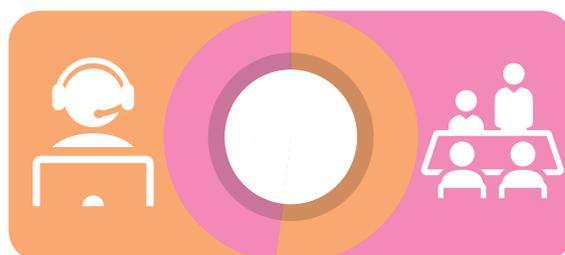
AAI operated and delivered a full service throughout the pandemic.

On 12 May, for the first time since its establishment in 2010, AAI held adoption hearings and orders using remote technology – Zoom.



New Minister, Roderic O’Gorman, appointed to the newly formed Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) in June.

39 adoption orders granted via Zoom during lockdown and 42 granted in person under strict social distancing protocols.



81 domestic adoptions granted.



Welcome to AAI’s new Board Chairperson, the former Deputy Orlaith Traynor; new Deputy Chair, Sean O’Brien; and new Board member, Dr Sheila Greene, appointed 1 November 2020.

Commemorative booklet published in December to mark AAI’s ten-year anniversary.



AAI continued its oversight of intercountry adoptions.

353 new registrants applied to the voluntary adoption contact preference register

77 potential matches identified between new registrants and previously registered family members.



The Board of the AAI held 24 meetings throughout the year.

6 Accredited Bodies remained on register.

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Foreword

Along with the rest of the world, the Authority found itself adapting rapidly to a frightening and unprecedented situation - COVID-19.

The Authority, its staff and Board continued to operate and deliver a full service throughout the pandemic, having equipped the office with supplies of sanitiser, masks and other PPE and social distancing measures as soon as the seriousness of the pandemic became clear. The Authority operated a restricted service when Ireland locked down 30 March-14 April. Before staff returned under staggered working arrangements as designated essential workers, the office space was deep-cleaned and reconfigured to ensure social distancing. In-person meetings, travel and visitors all ceased.

On 12 May, for the first time since its establishment in 2010, the Adoption Authority held adoption hearings and orders using remote technology. With the Zoom hearings led by Chairman Dr Geoffrey Shannon, the Authority upheld its commitment to ensuring that adoption applications were processed without delay as it carried out its functions as a quasi-judicial body under these challenging new circumstances. Of the total of 81 adoption orders granted in 2020, 39 adoption orders were granted via Zoom during lockdown, and 42 were in person under strict social distancing protocols.

The Authority saw some governance changes in 2020. At the end of June a new Minister, Roderic O’Gorman, was appointed to the newly formed Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). And in November, the Authority welcomed a new Board Chairperson, Orlaith Traynor, former Deputy Chair; a new Deputy Chair, Sean O’Brien; and a new Board member, Dr Sheila Green, and bid farewell to departing Chairman Dr Geoffrey Shannon and Board member Anne O’Flaherty. The Authority thanks Dr Shannon and Ms O’Flaherty for the skill and expertise they have dedicated in their roles over the past several years.

Dedicated research work continued in 2020, and Research Officer Dr Judy Lovett issued several publications: a research report on 28 years of Intercountry Adoption (January) and an intercountry adoption briefing on Russia (October) and, in December, a commemorative booklet to mark the Authority’s ten-year anniversary. The Research Sub-Committee continued to meet, and provided expertise

to the Authority’s research function chaired by Dr Helen Buckley.

In terms of accreditation, in June the agency Here2Help closed, as a result of the increasing costs and challenges for a small agency to continue to provide a professional social work service.

Under COVID-19 restrictions, no travel was permitted to any jurisdiction or country to effect an intercountry adoption, and the Authority and Helping Hands engaged with the Central Authorities and embassies of several sending countries to support prospective adoptive parents who were in the middle of the process of adopting from overseas.

A new online secure Board Pack system was launched – Decision Time – giving much greater flexibility for Board members to access key documentation.

The [statistics section](#) displays figures for operational matters in 2020 and previous years for all the key areas of work in the Authority. The data indicates how numbers of domestic adoption orders, intercountry adoptions, requests for birth certificate releases, applications to the NACPR and matches between adopted persons and birth relatives in 2020 compare with other years, and how many Parliamentary Questions and Data Protection requests the Authority processed.

We would like to express our appreciation to the Board Members and Executive of the Authority for their commitment and dedication to the work of the Authority. We also wish to acknowledge the continued support and assistance of the Minister Roderic O’Gorman and the staff of the Department, particularly in the Adoption Policy Unit.



Ms Orlaith Traynor
Chairperson



Ms Patricia Carey
CEO



Overview

The Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI), established on 1 November 2010 under the Adoption Act 2010, is an independent quasi-judicial body under the aegis of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). The Authority is also, in line with The Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, the central authority for intercountry adoption in Ireland. The purpose of the Adoption Act 2010 is to improve standards in both domestic and intercountry adoption.

Legal adoption was first introduced in Ireland under the 1952 Adoption Act. The 1952 Act was enacted on 1 January 1953 and the Adoption Board was established under this Act. The Adoption Board had the sole right to grant or refuse to grant Adoption Orders. This right is now vested in the Adoption Authority of Ireland under the current 2010 legislation.

The functions of the Authority are set out in Section 96 of the Adoption Act 2010. These include functions of an operational, judicial and quasi-judicial nature in relation to the adoption process itself, as provided for under the Act, but also relating to the Authority's designation as the Central Authority for the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. In addition, the Authority has registration and regulatory functions. Finally, there are reporting, advice and research functions set out.



**Statement
of Mission,
Vision and
Values**

Mission Statement

“To ensure the provision of the highest possible standards of adoption related services, throughout the lifelong adoption process, with the best interests of children as the first and paramount objective.”

Vision Statement

“To be recognised as the centre of excellence and the principal authoritative source of information on all aspects of adoption and as a provider and regulator of high quality adoption services.”

Principles and Values

The Authority has adopted a set of principles and values which underpin its approach to its mission, vision, goals, objectives and daily operations. These are concerned with

Child-Centeredness

- We focus on the best interests of children and ensure that their lifelong needs are considered as paramount when they engage in adoption services.
- We are committed to the best interests of the individual child and will strive to ensure that children’s needs are paramount and the voice of the child is heard and responded to in a meaningful manner throughout the adoption process.

Quality Services

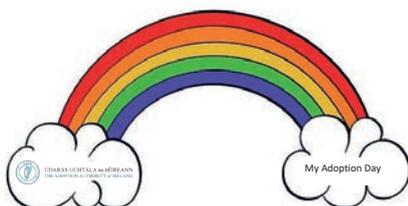
- We seek to provide the highest quality service in all areas of our work, in line with law and best practice in adoption.
- We are committed to developing and retaining a highly skilled and knowledgeable staff through leadership, training, development and commitment to continuous improvement in the delivery of our services.

Accountability through Ethical Practice and Transparency

- We are guided by honesty, propriety, accountability and ethical adoption practice in all of our actions and decisions.
- We operate in a manner which is open to scrutiny and which will be characterised by impartiality and equity.
- We are committed to delivering our services in the most efficient and effective way possible so as to achieve value for money.

Respect

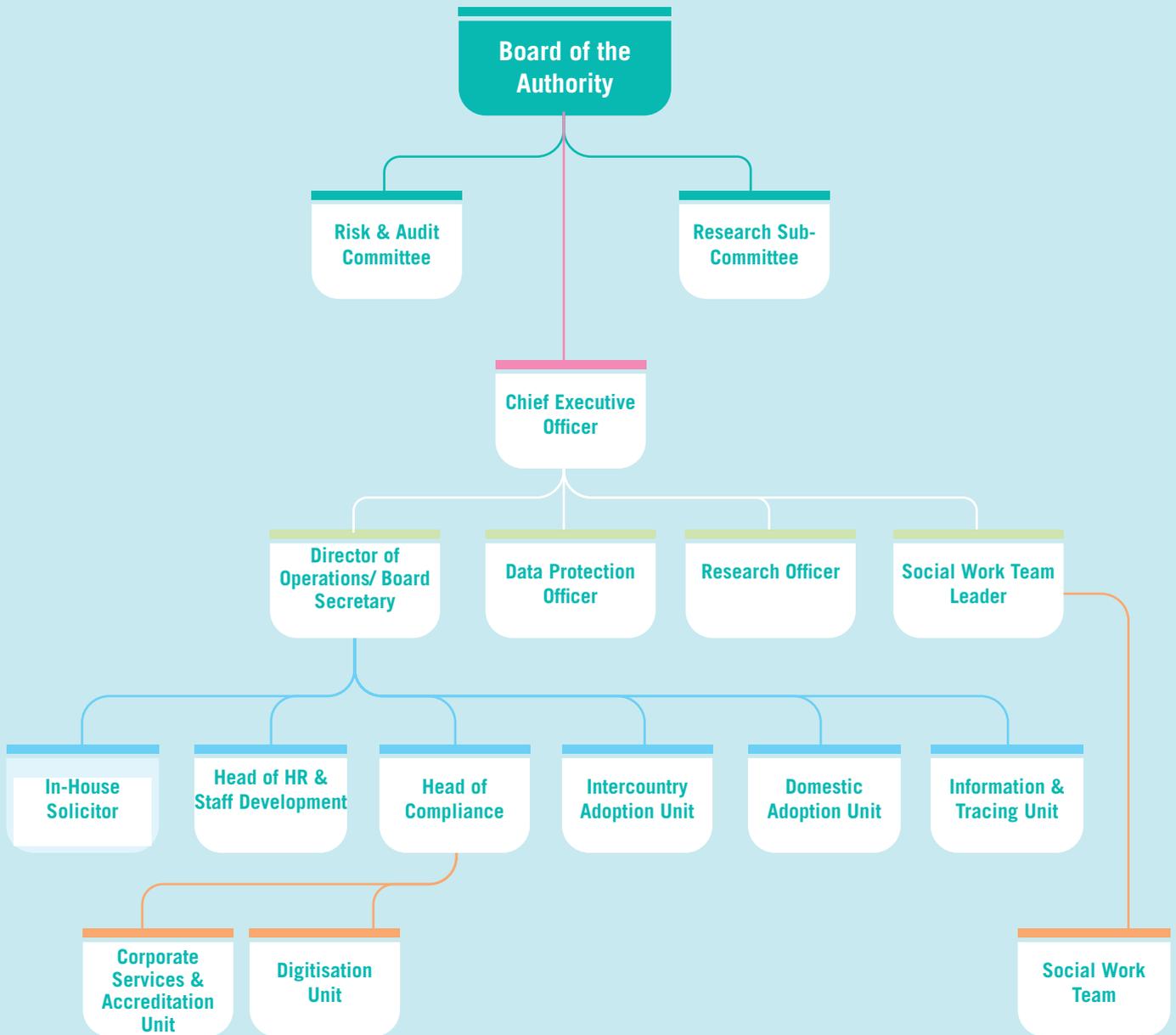
- We are committed to treating all with whom we deal with dignity, respect and courtesy.
- We are a listening, learning and empowering organisation for all those who work in adoption services, or are affected by adoption.
- We listen to the ideas and concerns of our own staff and use their knowledge and experience to make the Authority a good place to work.



This Annual Report is a summary of the main pieces of work undertaken by the Adoption Authority of Ireland in 2020. You can read and download information about our accounts and publications on www.aai.gov.ie.



**Organisation &
Management
Structure 2020**



Chief Executive Officer and Senior Management Team 2020

Chief Executive Officer	Patricia Carey
Director of Operations/Board Secretary	Tara Downes
Head of Human Resources and Staff Development	Fiona Monaghan
Head of Compliance	Kate O'Hara



**Board of
the Adoption
Authority**

Membership of the Board to 31 October 2020

Dr Geoffrey Shannon, Chairperson
Ms Orlaith Traynor, Deputy Chairperson
Dr Helen Buckley
Mr Paul Harrison
Judge Patrick McMahon (Retd.)
Ms Anne O'Flaherty
Dr Margo Anglim

Membership of the Board since 1 November 2020

Ms Orlaith Traynor, Chairperson
Mr Sean O'Brien, Deputy Chairperson
Dr Helen Buckley
Mr Paul Harrison
Judge Patrick McMahon (Retd.)
Dr Margo Anglim
Prof Sheila Greene

In accordance with the Adoption Act 2010 the Board shall consist of seven members, being the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson and five ordinary members, appointed by the Minister. The term of office of the Board is for a period not exceeding five years. An appointed member who completes a term of office is eligible for reappointment to the Board, but may not serve as a member for more than two consecutive terms. During 2020 a new Board was established (see above). Ms Orlaith Traynor was appointed as Chairperson on 1 November 2020.

The attendance of the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson and two ordinary members, one of whom shall be a social worker, shall constitute a quorum.

In accordance with the Adoption Act 2010, the Board may appoint committees to advise it in relation to the performance of its functions as it thinks fit.

Committees of the Board

1. Risk and Audit Committee to 31 October 2020

Ms Claire Byrne (Chair of Risk and Audit Committee)
Ms Tara McDermott
Dr Geoffrey Shannon, Chairman of the Authority
Judge Patrick McMahon (Retd.), Member of the Authority

Risk and Audit Committee since 1 November 2020

Ms Claire Byrne (Chair of Risk and Audit Committee)
Ms Tara McDermott
Mr Paul Harrison, Member of the Authority
Ms Orlaith Traynor, Chairperson of the Authority

2. Research Sub-Committee to 31 October 2020

Dr Helen Buckley (Chair of Research Sub-Committee), Member of the Authority
Dr Geoffrey Shannon, Chairman of the Authority
Prof Sheila Greene (TCD)
Prof Gordon Harold (University of Sussex)
Ms Patricia Carey, CEO of the Authority
Dr Judy Lovett (Secretary), AAI Research Officer
Ms Claire McGettrick (UCD) (Appointed November 2019)
Ms Anne O'Flaherty, Member of the Authority
Ms Orlaith Traynor, Member of the Authority
Ms Nicole Scannell (Social Work Team Leader) (Appointed November 2019)
Mr Mark Kirwan (Manager Intercountry Unit) (Appointed November 2019)
Mr Des Tracey (Manager Domestic Unit) (Appointed November 2019)
Ms Joan Groves (Manager Tracing Unit) (Appointed November 2019)

Research Sub-Committee since 1 November 2020

Dr Helen Buckley (Chair of Research Sub-Committee),
Member of the Authority

Ms Orlaith Traynor, Chairperson of the Authority

Prof Sheila Greene, Member of the Authority

Dr Margo Anglim, Member of the Authority

Ms Claire McGettrick, UCD (Extern)

Dr Richard Sullivan, Professor Emeritus, University of
British Columbia (Extern)

Ms Patricia Carey, CEO of the Authority

Dr Judy Lovett, AAI Research Officer

Ms Nicole Scannell, AAI Social Worker

Ms Joan Groves/Ms Mary Coffey, AAI Head of
Information and Tracing

Mr Mark Kirwan, AAI Head of Domestic Adoption

Ms Orla Bolger, AAI Head of Intercountry Adoption

Governance

The Board of the Adoption Authority of Ireland was established under the Adoption Act 2010. The functions of the Board are set out in Section 96 of this Act. The Board is accountable to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and is responsible for ensuring good governance. It performs this task by setting strategic objectives and targets and taking strategic decisions on all key business issues. The regular day-to-day management, control and direction of the Adoption Authority of Ireland are the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the senior management team. The CEO and the senior management team must follow the broad strategic direction set by the Board, and must ensure that all Board members have a clear understanding of the key activities and decisions related to the entity, and of any significant risks likely to arise. The CEO acts as a direct liaison between the Board and staff and management of the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

Board Responsibilities

The work and responsibilities of the Board are set out in the Adoption Authority of Ireland's Code of Governance. Standing items considered by the Board include

- Declaration of interests;
- Reports from sub-committees;
- Financial Reports/Management Accounts;
- Performance Reports; and
- Reserved matters.

Section 112 of the Adoption Act 2010 requires the Board of the Adoption Authority of Ireland to keep, in such form as may be approved by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth with consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, all proper and usual accounts of money received and expended by it.

In preparing these financial statements, the Board of the Adoption Authority of Ireland is required to

- Select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently;
- Make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that it will continue in operation; and
- State whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements.

The Board is responsible for keeping adequate accounting records which disclose, with reasonable accuracy at any time, its financial position and enables it to ensure that the financial statements comply with Section 112 of the Adoption Act 2010. The maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information on the Adoption Authority of Ireland's website is the responsibility of the Board.

The Board is responsible for approving the annual business plan and budget. Evaluation of the performance of the Adoption Authority of Ireland by reference to the annual business plan and budget is regularly considered at Board meetings.

The Board is also responsible for safeguarding its assets and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.



**COVID-19
and the
Adoption
Authority of
Ireland**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the work of the Authority during 2020. Prior to the pandemic, the vast majority of the Authority's work was conducted on site at Authority's offices in Ballsbridge. The COVID-19 crisis raised a number of legal and practical challenges for the Authority.

Contingency planning commenced in Q1 2020. The Authority conducted a detailed review of its scheduled work. Of primary concern were time critical applications for adoption. Under the Adoption Act 2010, adoption orders cannot in law be made after a minor has reached the age of 18. As a consequence, these children can never be adopted if the applications are not dealt with in time. If no decision is made, then by default the possibility of adoption is lost. The Authority's absolute priority was to identify solutions which would allow these applications to be dealt with in a timely manner, notwithstanding the COVID-19 crisis.

S.I. No. 335 of 2020 designated the Adoption Authority of Ireland as a state body for the purposes of holding remote meetings under Section 29 of the Civil Law and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020. This Instrument also designated the Adoption Authority of Ireland as a body for the purposes of holding remote hearings under Section 31 of the Civil Law and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020.

During 2020 the Authority devised new ways of holding Board meetings, hearing the voice of the child and other parties involved in the adoption process, as well as the granting of final Adoption Orders. The implementation of new technology to enable service access was critical to the successful functioning of the Authority. During 2020, meetings were held both remotely and, when permitted, face to face with all relevant COVID-19 protocols in place. In the Authority's experience, many of the persons who attend before it have various vulnerabilities, and relevant steps were taken ensure that a vulnerable person was in a position to participate remotely. Considerable innovation was shown by the Authority to ensure that these essential services continued to be delivered.

Legacy ICT challenges and the paper based nature of much of the Authority's work meant that remote working was not a viable option for Authority staff. An S.I drafted under the Health Act 1947 set out exemptions for specified classes of persons permitted to attend work for essential services. Adoption was identified as an essential service. An external COVID-19 risk assessment was completed by SHEQ Centre Of Excellence, as well as a full health and safety risk assessment. COVID-19

protocols were put in place. Staff were positioned as far away from each other in the office as possible and all return-to-work protocols were strictly adhered to. Those deemed vulnerable to attend Authority offices were set up to work remotely where possible.

The COVID-19 crisis continues to have a significant impact on the work of the Authority.

Events and Travel 2020

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, international travel was suspended for the majority of 2020.

Meetings of the Board of the Authority

In accordance with the Adoption Act 2010 the Board shall hold as many meetings as are necessary for performing its functions, but shall hold at least 12 meetings a year. The Board held 24 meetings during 2020.

As outlined above, the operations of the Authority were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. From April 2020, the majority of Board meetings were held via remote technologies (including teleconference and video conference). In some cases, a minimum number of Board members attended meetings in person while other Board members joined via teleconference or video conference. At all in person meetings the appropriate COVID-19 protocols were in place to protect Board members and Authority staff.

Meetings of the board are scheduled in such a way to facilitate one 'full' Board meeting each month at which matters other than the granting of Adoption Orders are dealt with. In general, the second meeting of the month is reserved for the granting of Adoption Orders and any other urgent business which may need to be dealt with on the day. In general, only a quorate Board is required to attend on the Adoption Order days and this is reflected in the attendance report in Appendix A.

Standing items on the agenda for 'full' meetings of the Board include:

- Declaration of conflict of interest;
- Minutes of the previous meeting;
- Risk and Governance;
- Accredited Bodies;
- CEO Report;
- Domestic Adoption;
- Information and Tracing;
- Intercountry Adoption;
- Other Business.

The Board passed a resolution to have a minimum of one meeting each year for Governance matters only. One Governance meeting was held during 2020, on 22 September. The work load associated with the COVID-19 pandemic meant that Adoption Orders and Hearings had to be prioritised during 2020.

The CEO Report on the agenda provides information and updates to the Board on the operation of the Adoption Authority of Ireland, the implementation of Board policy, the implementation of the annual Business Plan, expenditure and budgetary matters and other relevant issues and/or developments.

Part 4 of the Adoption Act outlines the powers vested in the Board including

- The power to issue Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability to prospective adopters;
- Hearing applications in relation to adoption orders and making adoption orders;
- The power to recognise intercountry adoptions effected outside the State.

These matters form part of the agenda for meetings of the Board and are dealt with under the Domestic and Intercountry sections of the agenda.

As required under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, the Board met without the Executive (that is, the CEO, the Board Secretary and any other member of staff or management) on one occasion in 2020. On 22 September (Governance Day) the meeting was conducted in the absence of the Executive. On each of the 'full' board meeting dates the Board met without the Executive from 9.45am for such period as was required to discuss matters. This practice will continue in 2021.

Meetings of Committees of the Board

1. Risk and Audit Committee

The Committee meets at least four times a year, with authority to convene additional meetings as circumstances require. The attendance of two non-executive committee members shall constitute a quorum. In 2020 the Committee met four times.

The Committee invited members of the Executive, auditors or others to attend meetings and to provide pertinent information, as necessary. The Chief Executive Officer and the Head of Compliance attend all meetings. Secretarial support is provided by Crowleys DFK.

Meeting agendas were prepared and provided in advance to committee members along with appropriate briefing materials. The Risk and Audit Committee (RAC) maintained minutes or other reports of its meetings and activities. Audits commissioned by the RAC included a review of the effectiveness of internal financial controls and for the first time a review of the Risk Management Framework at the Authority. The 2020 Annual Report of the RAC was formally presented to the Board at their meeting on 13 April 2021. Further details of the work of the RAC are provided [here](#).

2. Research Sub-Committee

The Research Sub-Committee met on three occasions in 2020. All meetings were held remotely.

The frequency of meetings of the Board and its committees and the attendance of each Board member at Board meetings is reported in Appendix A in compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

Board Stipend

An annual fee is payable to Board members in the sum of €7,965 together with travel and subsistence expenses at rates sanctioned by the Department of Finance. In accordance with Department of Finance regulations, fees are not paid to Board members who are public servants. From November 2020, in recognition of the quasi-judicial nature of the Board of the Authority, €57,646 per annum is paid to the Chair. All payments are made quarterly in arrears.

Roles and Responsibilities

Chairperson

The primary role of the Chairperson is providing leadership to the Board and the Adoption Authority of Ireland in discharging the responsibilities assigned to it under its establishment statute. The specific duties of the Chairperson relate to

Managing the Authority by

- Appropriate agenda setting, management and support of Board meetings;
- Chairing Board meetings characterised by clear decisions and the balancing of contributions from Board Members and the CEO/Executive;
- Ensuring that the minutes of the meeting accurately record the decisions taken;
- Conducting all meetings of the Board in accordance with the Authority's Code of Business Conduct and appropriately evaluating the Board's performance;

- Ensuring Board members understand their respective roles and responsibilities and that the Board works effectively and efficiently;
- Furnishing a Comprehensive Report to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in conjunction with the annual report and financial statements of the State body in compliance with Financial and Reporting arrangements under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

Managing key relationships/communications with

- The CEO; including performance evaluation of the CEO;
- The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the DCEDIY;
- Other key external parties and by promoting the work and mission of the Authority;
- The Board, reflecting a tone of respect, trust and candour that allows for challenging questions and inputs;
- The appropriate Oireachtas Sub-Committee(s).

Chief Executive Officer

The Adoption Act 2010 provides that the CEO is the Accounting Officer for the Adoption Authority of Ireland and clearly defines the accountability framework in which the Adoption Authority of Ireland operates. This is supported by the governance framework and corporate governance arrangements within the organisation.

The Board is accountable to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and through the Minister, to the Government. It is also accountable through the CEO as Accounting Officer to the Oireachtas under the Committee of Public Accounts and other committees of the Oireachtas. The Board must submit an annual report and such other information as the Minister may require.

The CEO is responsible for

- The implementation of policies approved by the Board;
- The day-to-day management of the staff;
- Administration and business of the Adoption Authority of Ireland;
- Preparation of the annual budget for approval by the Board and its submission to the DCEDIY;
- Providing updates to the Board, and other committees of the Board, in regard to the management of the Adoption Authority of Ireland;
- Implementation of policy and progress on the Strategic Plan.



**Corporate
Governance**

General

The Adoption Act 2010 is the legislative basis for the establishment of the Authority.

The Authority operates in accordance with best practice corporate governance principles in line with the Adoption Act 2010 and, where applicable, the guidelines as set out in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016.

Financial Control

The budget of the Adoption Authority of Ireland is allocated through the DCEDIY. In 2020, the financial allocation of the Adoption Authority was €5.628 million.

As set out in Section 112 of the Adoption Act 2010, the Chief Executive Officer is responsible for preparing Financial Statements and for ensuring the regularity of the Authority's transactions.

The functions underpinning these responsibilities include authorising and monitoring payments for goods and services, tendering processes and compilation of monthly returns to the DCEDIY.

The Financial Statements are subject to audit by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (OC&AG). Financial Statements for a particular year are generally not audited at the time of the relevant annual report's publication. The audit of the 2020 accounts commenced in April 2021. Once approved by the OC&AG the 2020 Statements will be published on the Authority's website.

Crowleys DFK Chartered Accountants provided accountancy services to the Authority during 2020. At the end of 2020 the Authority re-tendered for the provision of Accountancy Services.

Internal Financial Control

The Board has overall responsibility for the internal financial control of the Adoption Authority of Ireland. It delegates responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of risk management and the internal control environment to the RAC. The committee receives regular reports from management, the Chief Risk Officer, internal audit, and external auditors. Such arrangements are designed to manage rather than eliminate the risks facing the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

Budget Management

The CEO and the senior management team prepare an annual budget based on the operational and developmental needs of the Adoption Authority of Ireland. The annual budget is recommended for approval by CEO to the Board. Day-to-day responsibility for managing expenditure within budget limits is assigned to CEO and Head of Compliance with support from the Authority's finance consultants Crowleys DFK. Budgets are monitored closely with monthly reports furnished to the DCEDIY and the CEO.

Risk and Audit Committee

The Committee is chaired by an external person and includes the Chair of the Board, a member of the board and one other external member with significant business expertise and experience within the public and private sectors.

The CEO and the Head of Compliance attend all meetings of the committee. The RAC sat four times during 2020 and met with representatives from the OC&AG as well as internal auditors. In their Annual Report 2020 the Committee expressed satisfaction with the general financial control environment operating with the Authority.

The Committee plays a fundamental role in ensuring that the Adoption Authority of Ireland functions according to good governance, accounting and auditing standards and adopts appropriate management and risk arrangements. It does this by overseeing and advising the Board and the CEO as Accounting Officer on the following matters:

- The strategic processes for risk, internal control and governance;
- The accounting policies, the financial statements, and the annual report of the Adoption Authority of Ireland, including the process for review of the financial statements prior to submission for audit, levels of error identified, and management's letter of representation to the external auditors;
- The planned activity and results of both internal and external audit;
- Adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit activity, including external audit's management letter of representation;

- Assurances relating to the management of risk and corporate governance requirements for the Adoption Authority of Ireland;
- Proposals for tendering for either internal or external audit services or for purchase of non-audit services from contractors who provide audit services;
- Anti-fraud policies, protected disclosure processes, and arrangements for special investigations; and
- The Risk and Audit Committee periodically reviews its own effectiveness and reports the results of that review to the Board.

The Committee's agenda in 2020 included

- Review draft Annual Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2019;
- Discussion and approval of 2020-2022 Internal Audit Plan and Internal Audit Charter;
- Approval of 2020 Procurement Plan;
- Draft Governance Statement and Board Members' Report;
- Draft Statement of Internal Control 2019;
- OC&AG Audit of 2018 Financial Statements;
- COVID-19;
- Accredited bodies;
- External Evaluation of Board and Risk and Audit Committee;
- 2020 Budget and draft 2021 Budget;
- Review of the effectiveness of the system of internal financial controls;
- Checklist of Internal Controls;
- Results of the self-assessment review of effectiveness;
- Review year to date budget vs actual variance analysis;
- Discussion and approval of Risk Management Policy and Risk Register;
- Draft RAC Annual Report to the Board.

Internal Audit Function

Internal audit is an independent appraisal function whose role is to provide assurance to the Board, RAC, CEO and all levels of management as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the systems on governance, risk and internal controls operating within the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

The Internal Audit function is outsourced. It operates in accordance with an audit charter approved by the Board and an annual audit plan approved by the CEO and the

RAC. In carrying out audits, the contractor complies with the Institute of Internal Audit Standards, as adapted by the Department of Public Reform and Expenditure for use in government departments.

All audit reports are submitted directly to the CEO and to the RAC who also receive periodic reports showing progress against the plan. The internal auditors completed a review of internal controls in 2020, as well as a review of risk management practices at the Authority. The audits resulted in 'satisfactory' ratings. Recommendations made were accepted. The AAI procured for Internal Audit services in 2019 through the Office of Government Procurement using their established framework for accountancy and auditing services. This contract will run until 2022.

Risk Management

Effective risk management supports good governance. The Authority has a proactive management-led risk management process as part of its governance framework. The Board, supported by the RAC and the senior management team, provides the leadership in promoting risk management. The risk management framework and policy of the Adoption Authority of Ireland is approved by the Board. This provides for a planned and systematic approach to identifying and managing a range of risk categories: financial, service delivery, infrastructure (buildings and ICT), people, compliance and governance, and projects.

The Chief Risk Officer is a member of the senior management team and reports directly to the RAC and the Board. The Risk Register sets out the major risks facing the Adoption Authority of Ireland together with existing controls and actions to mitigate them, and identifies owners and target dates for completion. Risks are categorised High, Medium and Low. A report on the High Risk items was provided to the Board each month in 2020.

Procurement

The Adoption Authority of Ireland operates under the Public Procurement Guidelines which provides the direction for all procurement policy activity and ensures that the objectives and key principles of competition, equality of treatment and transparency which underpins national and EU rules are complied with and observed.

The Adoption Authority of Ireland avails of centralised managed contracts that have been put in place by the Office of Government Procurement including the

provision of stationery and office supplies, photocopying, and foreign travel. The Adoption Authority of Ireland continues to engage with the Office of Government Procurement for advice on current and future procurement requirements. In 2020, a number of contracts were successfully procured in conjunction with the Office of Government Procurement in line with the Authority's 2020 Procurement Plan.

Annual Report of the Adoption Authority of Ireland under the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014

The Protected Disclosures Act 2014 facilitates workers in raising a concern regarding wrongdoing or potential wrongdoing in the workplace by providing them with certain forms of protection from action which might be taken against them for so doing.

The Act provides for different methods of protected disclosure depending on the circumstances and protects disclosures by workers including current or former employees, contractors, consultants, trainees, agency staff and interns.

A policy on protected disclosures was approved by the Board at their meeting in May 2017. The policy was brought to the attention of all staff, it is published in the Authority's Operations Manual and information on the policy is also provided in the Employee Handbook.

Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 requires the publication of an Annual Report each year relating to the number of protected disclosures made in the preceding year and any actions taken in response to such disclosures.

Pursuant to this requirement, the Adoption Authority of Ireland confirms that no reports were received and/or are under investigation in accordance with the provisions of the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014 for the financial year from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2020.

External Board Evaluation

Under Section 4.6 of the 2016 Code of Governance of State Bodies 2016, there is a requirement for the Board of all State bodies to undertake an annual self-assessment evaluation of its own performance and that of its committees. The code requires that an external evaluation proportionate to the size and requirements of the State body should be carried out at least every three years. In 2020, the Authority's first ever external evaluation was conducted with the Institute of Public Administration (IPA). An external review of the

Authority's RAC was also included as part of this review.

Board Induction

A new Board was appointed on 1 November 2020 for a period of five years. A Board induction programme was subsequently commenced for all Board members. Topics covered included Culture, Ethics and Governance; Controls and Oversight; Finance and the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies; Roles, responsibilities and relationships as well as a number of legal briefings. This programme will continue during 2021.



**The
Authority's
2019-2021
Corporate Plan
and 2020
Business
Plan**

Overview

The Authority is required under Section 108 of the Adoption Act, 2010, to prepare and submit a Corporate Plan. The Adoption Authority's Corporate Plan 2019-2021 was laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas on 3 April 2019. When devising the 2019-2021 Corporate Plan, the Adoption Authority of Ireland identified four key principles which would guide its mission, its high level goals, its objectives and the work that was to be carried out.

By applying these principles, the Adoption Authority of Ireland would ensure that all of its decisions had the welfare of the child as its first and paramount consideration, in accordance with Section 19 of the Adoption Act 2010. The four principles identified were

- Child-Centeredness
- Quality Services
- Accountability through Ethical Practice and Transparency
- Respect

Goals

A number of strategic goals and as well as specific objectives were identified and are incorporated into the Authority's Annual Business Plans. These goals were identified as being the primary drivers of the Authority for the three-year duration of this Corporate Plan.

Business Plan

The Annual Business Plans are designed to focus on the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan by identifying tasks to be completed throughout the year. The business plan is reviewed periodically and updated as required. Business Plan reviews and updates were submitted to the DCEDIY on a quarterly basis in 2020 in compliance with the Authority's Performance Delivery Agreement with the Department.

Progress Report 2020

This section of the Annual Report gives details of the progress to the end of 2020 on the three-year Corporate Plan.

Goal 1

To ensure that the best interests of the child are paramount and the voice of the child is heard and responded to in a meaningful manner throughout the adoption process.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2020
1.1) The Authority's procedures and policies ensure that all adoption orders incorporate the views of the child giving due weight having regard to the age and maturity of the child.	All applications that proceed to adoption order have a report of child consultation.	In 2020 the Adoption Authority of Ireland continued to engage effectively with service users and their advocates, service providers, policy makers and the Government to bring about continuous quality improvements in our adoption services. COVID-19 created a number of challenges for the Authority. All Orders and Hearings were conducted remotely via online video conferencing from Q2 2020.
1.2) The Authority will facilitate all requests from a child to be heard by the Board during the adoption process.	All requests acknowledged promptly and notified to Board at next scheduled meeting. All requests for a hearing before the Board are facilitated.	Every Adoption Order before the Board is reviewed to ensure the views of the child have been heard. At all Board meetings with children held during 2020 the voice of the child was heard. All such hearings were conducted remotely via online video conferencing.
1.3) To ensure the Authority provides sufficient and appropriate information to enable the child to make a free and informed decision regarding the adoption.	All relevant information is provided to children and families directly as part of their adoption application.	In 2020, the AAI continued to review its website on a quarterly basis.
1.4) Liaise with other relevant public bodies in ensuring consistency in practice when hearing the voice of the child.	Consistent high standards are maintained in hearing the voice of the child.	During 2020, there was ongoing interaction with the DCEDIY, Tusla and other relevant stakeholders to ensure the voice of the child was considered in all applications.
1.5) Ongoing engagement with the Department and Minister in ensuring the voice of the child is given sufficient consideration in all adoption proceedings.	Full compliance with Section 19 of the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017.	The voice of the child was heard using remote technologies during 2020.

**Goal
2**

To ensure all relevant parties to the adoption process are heard and their respective rights are balanced appropriately.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2020
2.1) Ensure that all relevant parties (the child; applicants; mother of the child; father of the child; relevant non-guardians; guardians; person having charge or control over the child) are fully informed of their right to be heard.	All parties are aware of their right to be heard before the Board.	Review of Domestic Adoption Guidelines progressed during 2020.
2.2) Facilitate requests to be heard from any of the above relevant parties.	All requests for a hearing before the Board are facilitated and scheduled.	During 2020, S.I. No. 335 of 2020 designated the Adoption Authority of Ireland as a state body for the purposes of holding remote meetings under Section 29 of the Civil Law and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020. This Instrument also designated the Adoption Authority of Ireland as a body for the purposes of holding remote hearings under Section 31 of the Civil Law and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020. Hearings are scheduled on a monthly basis to facilitate all requests. All hearings were conducted via online video conferencing.
2.3) The Authority's procedures and policies ensure that all adoption orders incorporate the views of all relevant parties.	All relevant parties' views are considered and recorded.	Internally during 2020 the Authority's Operations Manual was updated as required.
2.4) Ensure the Authority provides sufficient and clear information to enable all relevant parties to make a free and informed decision to engage in the adoption process.	Receive feedback from relevant parties as to whether they felt they were adequately informed to enable them to make decisions.	On an ongoing basis, each adoption application is reviewed by the Board to ensure all decisions are free and informed. This continued during 2020.

**Goal
3**

To achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of adoption services in Ireland.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2020
3.1) To support and oversee the development of comprehensive, high quality and integrated adoption services with our key statutory and non-statutory partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accuracy of documentation and reports received against standards. • Accuracy, comprehensiveness and timeliness of submissions to Court. • Reduced delays. 	In 2020, the COVID-19 emergency impacted the work of the Authority. A case triage system was put in place. Remote hearings were operational by Q2 and facilitated in all cases.
3.2) To engage effectively with service users and their advocates, service providers, policy makers and government to bring about continuous quality improvements in our adoption services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adherence to planned schedule of meetings/ consultations. • Timely response to unscheduled meeting requests. 	During 2020, regular meetings with accredited bodies, support and advocacy groups as well as other service providers and state bodies were convened via remote technologies.
3.3) Maintain active oversight of all accredited agencies, including reaccreditation and registration against approved regulations.	Statutory Reports filed on time.	During 2020, all statutory reports were filled on time.

Goal
4

To apply informed and balanced decision-making in adoption services, in accordance with national and international law and evidence-based best practice.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2020
4.1) Make informed and timely decisions regarding: A) The granting of declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt; B) The making of adoption orders; C) The recognition of intercountry adoption orders; D) Article 17 referrals.	A) Turnaround time of 6 weeks. B) Before age 18. C) Two weeks for routine and 8 weeks for non-routine. D) One week.	During 2020, all applications were reviewed by the Executive as soon as all documentation was complete and referred to the Board for a decision.
4.2) Ongoing engagement with the Department and Minister on all adoption related matters.	Full and constructive engagement with Department and Minister on all relevant matters.	In 2020, regular meetings were held with the Adoption Policy Unit to discuss the Authority's reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other policy and operational matters.
4.3) Maintain all statutory and non-statutory Registers in line with agreed requirements.	Registers are up to date and accurate.	All up to date and complete in 2020. Substantial work on migrating the NACPR database to a more sustainable solution was completed in Q4 2020.
4.4) Make informed and timely decisions regarding the release of identifying information to adult adoptees and birth parents.	Routine Applications 1-2 weeks.	During 2020, requests were reviewed by the Board on a monthly basis. COVID-19 greatly impacted the number of applications received by the Authority in 2020.
4.5) Maintain constructive relationships with all partners and develop national and international relationships that promote the highest possible standards in adoption and adoption related services.		COVID-19 greatly restricted international travel and domestic events. In 2020, communication continued with international parties via remote technologies. More regular communications with Tusla due to COVID-19 emergency.

**Goal
5**

To inform adoption policy and service delivery by reason of a practical understanding of the operations of the legislation through the provision of a comprehensive information, research and communications framework.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2020
5.1) Engage proactively and communicate effectively with all stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular engagements with stakeholders. Timely response to stakeholder issues. Continuing Intelligence gathering and reporting. 	<p>During 2020, continued progress was made with all stakeholders.</p> <p>All meeting requests were relied to promptly. All meetings were held remotely from Q2 2020.</p>
5.2) Website to be the prime source of information for all stakeholders and the public at large.	Website redesign.	<p>Post Adoption Services Directory published and updated as required.</p> <p>The Authority's website continues to be reviewed and updated on a quarterly basis. All COVID-19 posts were published without delay.</p>
5.3) Undertake and promote research opportunities and research capacity.	Recruit in-house researcher.	<p>Development of the Authority's research strategy was completed in 2020. In October the Authority published a report on adoptions into Ireland from Russia as part of a wider study on Intercountry Adoption: https://aai.gov.ie/images/2020/Intercountry_Adoption_in_Ireland_-_Experiences_Supports_Challenges_-_Russia.pdf In December the AAI released a special publication marking ten years of operation</p> <p>https://www.aai.gov.ie/en/component/k2/item/304-celebrating-ten-years-of-the-adoption-authority-of-ireland-2010-2020.html</p>
5.4) Support Government Departments in the development of adoption related policy and legislation.	Timely response to all requests.	All requests for information were dealt with promptly in 2020.
5.5) Promote informed and considered analysis and debate on adoption issues.	Hold a number of briefings, seminars and fora.	Due to the COVID-19 restrictions no fora were held during 2020.

**Goal
6**

To plan and implement the changes required in organisation policies and operational procedures in line with emerging legislative changes.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2020
6.1) To plan and implement the changes required in organisation (including transfer of functions) and operational procedures in line with proposed Information and Tracing legislation.	Effective implementation of project plan.	Implementation plan in place for commencement of legislation. Budget set aside for implementation of plans subject to progress of legislation.
6.2) Be prepared to adapt to a) donor-assisted human reproduction (DAHR) and Surrogacy legislation b) any other relevant legislation.	Effective roll-out of implementation plan.	Awaiting the commencement of Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationship Act 2015. Implementation plan in place for commencement of legislation.

**Goal
7**

To be proactive and responsive to change and maintain an efficient, competent, accountable and learning organisation.

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2020
7.1) Ensure full compliance with the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.	Ensuring full compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.	Internal Audit plan includes annual compliance checks against the Code. In respect of financial accountability, variance analysis reports are provided to DCEDIY monthly. The Authority's procurement policy is adhered to, is reviewed annually and subjected to Internal Audit Check. The Internal Audit Plan was approved by the Risk and Audit Committee and is being implemented. The Annual Report of the Risk and Audit Committee was formally presented to the Board. An external evaluation was 2020 as required under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.
7.2) Collaborate with OPW in obtaining fit-for-purpose accommodation for the Adoption Authority.	Identification of a fit-for-purpose premises.	Throughout 2020, the Authority collaborated extensively with the OPW on securing new office accommodation. A six-year lease was signed for Shelbourne House. Work was ongoing during 2020 to secure additional space for the Authority's files and records.
7.3) Maintain robust Risk Management Framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold minimum of four RAC meetings each year. • No open recommendations from Internal Audit Reports. 	In December 2020, internal audit reviewed risk management at the Authority in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.
7.4) Maintain highest standards in data confidentiality and data integrity and compliance with GDPR.	Strict compliance with all data protection policies.	During 2020 The Adoption Authority of Ireland continued to develop policies, systems and procedures, placing considerable emphasis on staff awareness and training, aimed at ensuring our compliance with the requirements of data protection legislation.
7.5) Authority to maintain a learning environment where competencies and training requirements are fully met.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competency and skill gaps are met. • Adherence to training policy. 	COVID-19 restrictions resulted in many pre-booked training courses being deferred. During 2020, staff attended a number of training courses, workshops and networking events online. Since October 2019 the Authority have a dedicated HR and Staff Development resource.
7.6) Maintain Board and Executive Succession Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No gaps between staff leaving and new appointments. • Ensure there are no competency gaps. 	<p>A new Board was appointed on 1 November 2020. Board induction was completed with all members of the Authority.</p> <p>Performance review and goal setting continued for all staff during 2020.</p>

Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2020
7.7) Ensure full value for money in discharge of allocated resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with DPER guidelines. • Adherence to procurement and financial policies. • Operating within budget. 	<p>The Authority's financial procedures manual was reviewed and updated in 2020.</p> <p>The Authority now has a dedicated resource with responsibility for Finance and Audit.</p>
7.8) Full implementation of Corporate Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Plan implemented in full, in line with agreed objectives. • Annual Business Plan fully aligned to Corporate Plan. 	All units complete quarterly task planner review and updates were submitted to the Department.



Domestic Adoption

Activity Analysis

Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability

In all adoption cases it is a requirement that the applicants have a valid Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability. In total, 93 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted in 2020, a decrease of 11 from the 2019 figures. The amount of Declarations extended remained the same, at 14 again in 2020. In most cases Declarations were granted within three to four weeks of receipt of the application.

Of the Declarations granted, 84 were granted in respect of married persons or couples, 7 in respect of co-habiting persons or couples, and 1 in respect of a single applicant.

Standards and guidelines produced by the Authority for use by the various stakeholders are informed by trends compiled from reviews of all applications for Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability. They are also informed by best practice nationally and internationally; and by the Adoption Act 2010, the Adoption Amendment Act 2017, statutory regulations; Hague Convention standards in adoption; and international research such as that of the International Social Services.

Adoption Orders

The AAI received 92 adoption applications in 2020, and 81 Adoption orders were granted during the year. Four applications did not proceed, any other cases were still in progress by the end of the year. The majority of orders granted were made in stepfamily adoptions (58). The number of adoption orders made in respect of children who had been in long-term foster care in 2020 was 16. The balance (7) was made up of a combination of adoptions of infants placed for adoption in Ireland (5), and 2 cases where the child was in the care of extended family members.

Adoption Orders cannot be granted once a child turns 18 years of age and is legally considered an adult. Of the 81 Adoption orders granted in 2020, in 40 cases the child was 17 years of age; in 23 cases they were aged between 12 and 16 years, in 13 cases they were aged between 7 and 11 years, in 3 cases they were aged between 2 and 6 years, and in 2 cases the child was 1 year old.

All applications were assessed and facilitated by the adoption services of Tusla, Child and Family Agency. In 3 applications, the assessments were facilitated in part by the accredited agency PACT.

Applications to the High Court

Under the Adoption Act 2010, the Authority is obliged to obtain a High Court order before certain adoptions can proceed.

The Authority must make an application to the High Court seeking to dispense with birth father notification and consultation in the following instances:

- Where the Authority does not know the identity of the birth father, or
- Where the Authority has been unable to locate the birth father in order to notify and consult him, or
- Where due to the nature of the relationship between the birth mother and father it would be inappropriate to notify and consult the birth father.

In 2020, 15 applications were made to the High Court under Section 30 of the Act to allow an adoption application to proceed without consultation with the birth father. All 15 applications were granted.

Of these applications, 6 orders were made by the High Court in circumstances where it was deemed inappropriate to notify and consult with the birth father. The remaining 9 orders were made in circumstances where the identity of the birth father was unknown.

To allow the Authority to make an adoption order, Tusla – Child and Family Agency (or in certain instances, the applicants), must make an application to the High Court under Section 54 in the following instances:

- Where parental consents are not forthcoming,
- Where there is an issue with regard to the circumstances of the placement of the child with the prospective adoptive parents.

and it can be demonstrated that the parent(s) have failed in their duty to their child and adoption is in the child's best interests.

In 2020, 11 applications were made to the High Court under Sections 54 of the Act. These 11 applications were granted in 2020. Each of these cases was taken as the birth mother's or guardian's consents could not be obtained.

In 2020, 3 applications were made to the High Court under Section 18 of the Act. This is required in circumstances where the birth father cannot be consulted regarding his child being placed for adoption shortly after birth. In all 3 cases the identity of the birth father was unknown and the order was granted.

Please see [statistics section](#) for further information.



Information and Tracing

Activity Analysis

Requests for the Release of Birth Certificates

During the course of 2020, the Authority received 51 applications from adoptees seeking their original birth certificate, all of which are either in process or have resulted in the release of the requested document. In 2020, a total of 11 birth certificates were released and 4 requests were rejected. Of the 11 certificates released, 10 of the requests were placed in 2020 and 1 was made prior to the beginning of 2020. All 4 rejected requests were received before the beginning of 2020.

Moving to a New System for Managing the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR)

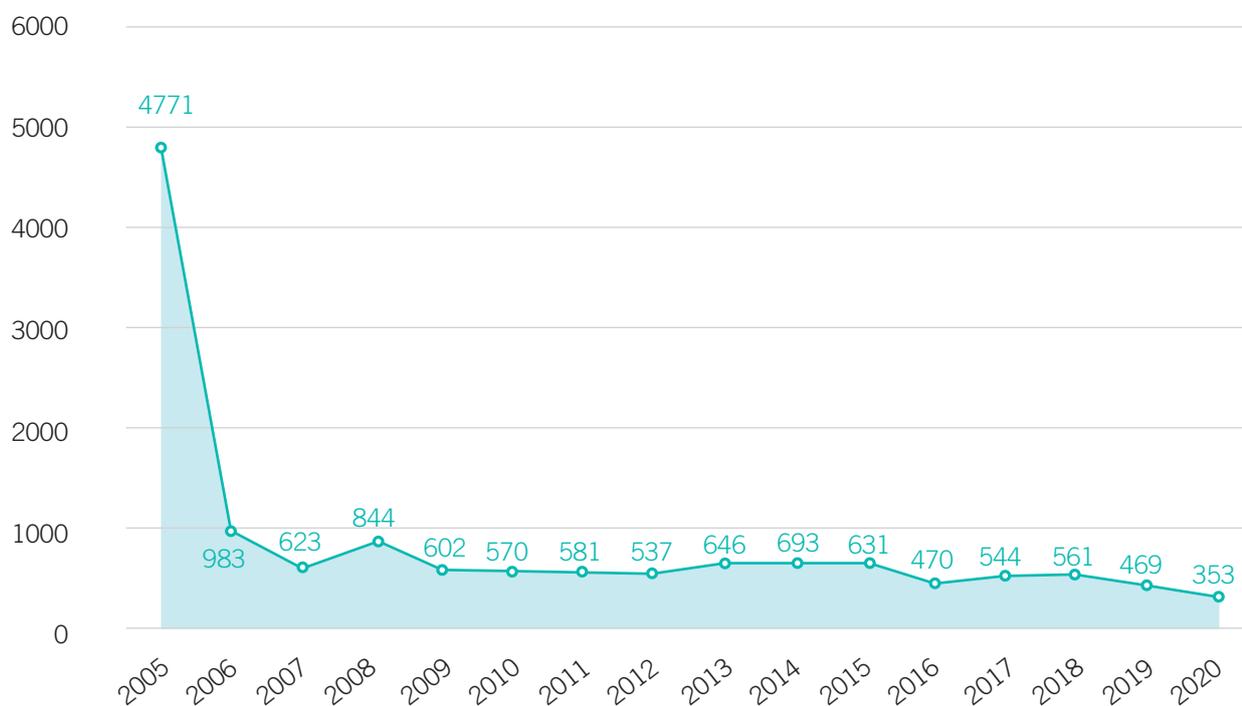
During the closing months of 2020, the Adoption Authority developed a new system for managing the NACPR and began the process of transferring all data held on the existing NACPR database to this new system. The new NACPR database will have improved functionality and will be more versatile and should result in improved reporting. See further details in [System Upgrades](#).

In 2020, instead of focusing on the number of applications received, the Authority moved to a registrant based system (i.e. the number of new individuals who joined the NACPR). Previously published NACPR statistics reported the number of applications received (a method that traditionally included second and, in some cases, third applications received from the same applicant). The figures reported from 2020 onwards will reflect this change in reporting methodology.

National Adoption Contact Preference Register

Since its conception in 2005, the NACPR has been operated and maintained by the Adoption Authority of Ireland. The register works on a voluntary basis and serves as an effective method of enabling agreed contact between adoptees and birth relatives. By the close of 2020, there were over 13,800 registrants on the NACPR with over 1,270 matches. In keeping with the overall move toward online correspondence, the majority of applications received during 2020 were sent via email.

In 2020, 353 new registrants applied to join the NACPR, a slight decline when compared to previous years, where 469 new registrants joined in 2019 and 561 in 2018 (see Figure 1 and Table 1). In part, this decline can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and is most obviously reflected in the figures taken during the initial wave of the virus (March–June), whereby the Authority received 100 new applications compared to 143 for the same period in 2019. It is anticipated that this trend will be reversed over the coming years. This anticipation is predicated on a number of factors, such as the release of adoption related government commissioned reports and proposed legislative changes, especially relating to historical adoptions and the release of hitherto sealed documents, such as original birth certificates. The net effect of these changes may generate renewed public interest in the issue of adoption, especially from those directly affected by the process.

Figure 1 Number of new registrants who joined the NACPR 2005–2020*

*The implementation of a new database has allowed for more accurate reporting of figures. Some statistics published in previous years have been adjusted accordingly.

Table 1 Breakdown of NACPR Applications by year 2016–2020*

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Adoptee	333	366	403	300	211
Birth Father	17	16	10	19	11
Birth Mother	60	69	66	54	50
Cousin	7	10	18	8	8
Grandparent/Grandchild	4	3	3	6	5
Sibling	43	61	48	63	50
Uncle/Aunt/Niece/Nephew	6	17	13	19	16
Other/Unknown	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	2
Total	470	544	561	469	353

*The implementation of a new database has allowed for more accurate reporting of figures. Some statistics published in previous years have been adjusted accordingly.

In the main, the Authority receives more applications from adoptees than birth relatives and this trend is once again reflected in the yearly totals for 2020, whereby 211 (60%) adoptees joined compared to 142 (40%) birth relatives (see Table 2).

Table 2 Adoptee/Relative Breakdown*

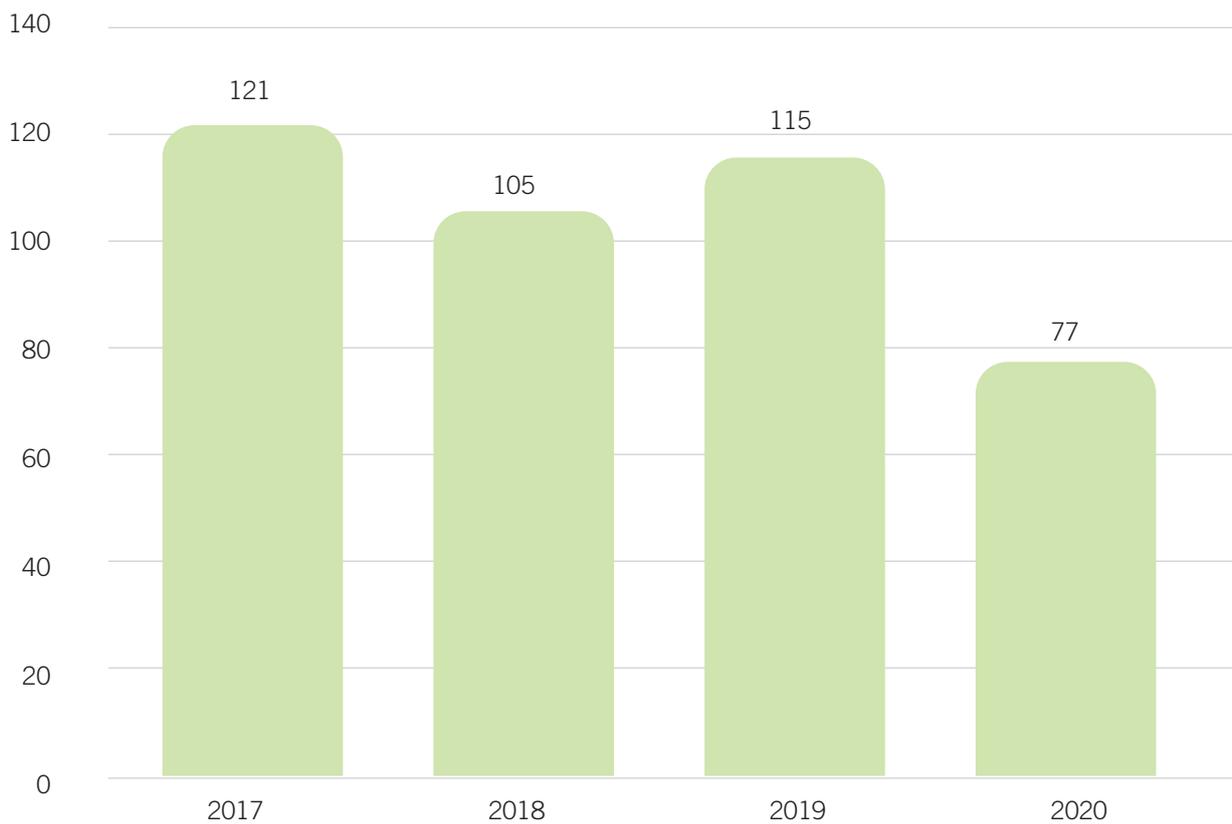
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Adoptees	71%	67%	72%	64%	60%
Relatives	29%	33%	28%	36%	40%

*The implementation of a new database has allowed for more accurate reporting of figures. Some statistics published in previous years have been adjusted accordingly.

NACPR Matches

In terms of matches recorded on the NACPR during 2020, a total of 77 potential matches were identified between new registrants and previously registered family members. Again, these figures are down from previous years, where the Authority recorded a total of 115 matches in 2019 and 105 in 2018 (see Figure 1). As mentioned above, this drop may be attributed to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2 Breakdown of NACPR Matches by year 2017–2020



Traditionally, the majority of matches recorded on the NACPR relate to birth mothers and adoptees (26 in 2020). The second highest category is between siblings who were both adopted out (18 in 2020), while the third highest relates to adoptees and birth siblings (17 in 2020). For a concise breakdown of recent figures, please see Table 3:

Table 3 *Matches by Relationship by year 2017–2020*

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Birth Mother	46	38	32	26
Birth Father	5	1	6	7
Cousin	2	4	0	1
Cousin (adopted)	0	3	1	0
Grandparent	1	2	4	0
Sibling	20	8	14	17
Sibling (adopted)	37	40	49	18
Uncle, Aunt	10	7	9	6
Other	0	2	0	2
Total	121	105	115	77

Going Forward: Draft Birth Information and Tracing Legislation

As referenced above, the government is currently in the process of drafting Birth Information and Tracing legislation. Draft legislation proposes to allow adoptees access their original birth certificates. It may also be the case that the National Adoption Contact Preference Register is placed on a statutory basis. The Information and Tracing Unit continues to liaise with its counterparts in the Child and Family Agency and welcomes any changes that may assist those affected by adoption.



**Intercountry
Adoption**

Activity Analysis

Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability

The Authority granted 35 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability in 2020 to applicants seeking to adopt abroad and extended 25 existing Declarations by 1 year.

Register of Intercountry Adoptions

In 2020, a total of 184 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions (RICA) in respect of all relevant sections of the Adoption Act 2010. Of these, 21 entries were in respect of adoptions into Ireland carried out under the terms and conditions of the 1993 Hague Convention.

Matching of Children

Social workers work with administrative staff and a medical advisor, to advise on the matching of children's needs with the abilities of prospective adoptive parents. In 2020, 25 children were referred into Ireland from other countries. All referrals of children for adoption are reviewed by the Authority's multi-disciplinary team which comprises the Principal Social Worker, the Medical Advisor and the Manager of the Intercountry Adoption Unit.

Country Specific Issues

Bulgaria: In 2020, no Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Bulgaria; no Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and no Adoptions completed in Bulgaria were entered in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in 2020. There was 1 'live' application in Bulgaria at the end of the year.

China: In 2020, no Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in China; no Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 15 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions. There were no 'live' applications in China at the end of the year.

Haiti: In 2020, 1 Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability was granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Haiti; no Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and no Adoptions completed in Haiti were entered in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in 2020. There were 3 'live' applications in Haiti at the end of the year.

In 2020, significant civil unrest continued in Haiti which necessitated the temporary suspension of Haiti programme. The Authority is continuing to closely monitor the situation there and is hopeful that the programme can resume in 2021.

India: In 2020, 1 Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability was granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in India. 1 adoption was effected in India by Irish residents in 2020. There were 2 'live' applications in India at the end of the year.

Philippines: Under current arrangements, Filipino children may be placed with prospective adoptive parents under Filipino guardianship provisions for the purposes of them being adopted subsequently in Ireland. In 2020, 2 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in the Philippines; no Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention).

HHAMA has been approved by the Authority to mediate adoptions from the Philippines and received provisional approval accreditation from ICAB, the Central Authority in the Philippines. The AAI hope to meet with ICAB on their visit to Ireland in Q2 of 2022.

Poland: In 2020, 1 Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability was granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Poland; 1 Agreement to Place was granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and no entries were made in the RICA in respect of adoptions effected in Poland. Adoptions from Poland are generally by Polish nationals living in Ireland. There was 1 'live' application in Poland at the end of the year.

Thailand: 6 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Thailand in 2020; 2 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 5 entries were made in the RICA. There were 22 'live' applications in Thailand at the end of the year.

United States of America: In 2020, 6 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in the USA; 3 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 30 entries were made in the RICA. There were 12 'live' applications in the USA at the end of the year.

Vietnam: In 2020, 17 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Vietnam; 15 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 9 entries were made in the RICA. There were 15 'live' applications in Vietnam at the end of the year.

Register of Gender Recognition of Intercountry Adoptions

Persons holding a valid Certificate of Gender Recognition issued by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and whose adoption is registered in the Register of Foreign Adoptions (RFA) or the RICA may apply to the Authority for an entry in the Register of Gender Recognition of Intercountry Adoptions.

Applications should be made in writing to the Authority and should be accompanied by:

- The original copy of the Gender Recognition Certificate as issued by the DSP;
- A copy of the notification letter from the DSP which accompanied the Gender Recognition Certificate;
- A copy of the entry in the RFA or the RICA (if available).

No entries were made in the Register in 2020.



**Social
Work Team**

Staffing

In Q1 2020, a recruitment campaign took place to fill three permanent professionally qualified social worker positions. By Q4 2020, the social work team was as follows:

- One Team Leader
- One Senior Social Work Practitioner
- Two Professionally Qualified Social Workers

Each member of the social work team is individually registered with CORU.

Overview of Social Work Role

All adoption services are regulated by the Adoption Authority of Ireland. As part of that regulation, the social work team reviews and monitors social work practice at all stages of the lifelong adoption process, including

- Provide mediation and counselling in search and reunion;
- Crisis pregnancy support through to decisions about adoption;
- Review of assessment of prospective adoptive parents;
- Respond to requests for the release of an original birth certificate;
- Respond to requests for the release of non-identifying information.
- Review of matching children with suitable prospective adoptive parents;
- Advice on talking with children about adoption;
- Providing post adoption support;
- Organise fora for adoption social workers and other professionals;
- Collaborate on the research sub-committee;
- Accreditation and inspection of adoption services; and
- Act as Children First Child Protection Officer.

Social Work Phone Service

The social work team manage a rota for the social work phone line and email address.

Callers and emailers sought information on their adoption history and/or searching for their relatives. Other callers requested information on adopting a child. A number of calls were also received from pregnant women thinking of adoption.

In 2020, the on call Social Worker received and dealt with approximately 262 phone calls and emails.

Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT)

Adoption Authority social workers, administration staff and the Adoption Authority Medical Advisor work together to review and monitor each application for adoption.

Reviews cover all aspects of adoption practice, including

- Counselling and consultation with birth parents;
- Consent to adoption;
- Assessment for a Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability to adopt;
- Selection and matching process leading to the placement of a child with a specific family for adoption;
- Post placement reports;
- Applications for adoption orders;
- Requests for the release of an original birth certificate;
- Requests for the release of identifying information.

Social Work and Domestic Adoption

Domestic adoption refers to the situation where a child who is resident in Ireland is adopted by a couple also resident in Ireland. There are four different types of domestic adoption – step family, extended family/relative adoption, domestic infant adoption, long-term foster care to adoption.

Social workers review all domestic adoption files for eligibility and suitability under the Adoption Act 2010 and the Adoption Amendment Act of 2017.

Social workers are an integral part of the MDT in the matching of domestic infants through the national matching panel in Ireland.

Social workers review all domestic infant placements in Ireland until the adoption order is finalised.

Social workers liaise with Tusla and private agency social workers on all domestic adoption issues.

In 2020 the Team reviewed 175 domestic adoption files for a Declaration.

Social Work and Intercountry Adoption

Intercountry adoption refers to the situation where a person resident in Ireland decides to adopt a child who is resident in a country other than Ireland.

Intercountry adoption was given a statutory basis in 1991 with the passing of the Adoption Act in that year and the most recent principal legislation in this area which is the Adoption Act 2010.

Social workers review all intercountry adoption files for eligibility and suitability under the Adoption Act 2010.

Social workers are an integral part in approving the matching of children during both the Proposal in Principle stage as well as the Article 17 stage.

Social workers liaise with the mediation agency in Ireland to ensure best practice is being carried out.

In 2020 the Team reviewed 57 intercountry adoption files for a Declaration.

Social Work and Information/Search and Reunion

In 2020 the Team had 238 new referrals relating to information/search and reunion.

Referrals in this area were the following:

- Adopted adults or birth relatives seeking information;
- Birth certificate requests;
- Adopted adults or birth relatives seeking search and reunion service and
- Connections made between relatives on the NACPR.

The Adoption Authority Social Work Team provides mediation and counselling to people who have been involved in some third-party and family adoptions. The team also offers information, advice and support about adoption related issues. Queries are welcome from members of the public, as well as professionals.

Social Work Fora

The social work team organises professional development fora each year. The purpose of SW fora is to

- Provide current information on issues in Information and Tracing work, and on medical issues related to adults and children in adoption;

- Achieve professional and best practice consensus from in-depth discussion on ethical dilemmas in assessment and support services;
- Share professional practice experience and form connections with social workers and other professionals in the area of adoption work; and offer continuous professional development opportunities for practitioners in adoption.

COVID-19 significantly impacted the Authority's ability to organise and run social work fora. Plans to run such events remotely will be prepared during 2021.

Social Work and Accreditation and Inspection

Most national adoption services are delivered through local Tusla - Child and Family Agency offices and bodies accredited by the Adoption Authority. The social work team is involved in reviewing applications for accreditation of adoption agencies.

The services of Tusla are reviewed and monitored by the multi-disciplinary team on an ongoing basis through desk top reviews of all documents requiring Adoption Authority authorisation.

Services provided by accredited bodies are reviewed at six-month intervals by self-reporting. On-site inspections of the accredited bodies also take place in compliance with the Adoption Act 2010 and the Regulations.

Children First Act, 2015 and the Authority's Role as a Relevant Organisation

The Children First Act, 2015 was fully enacted in December 2017. The guidelines which accompany the Act are *The Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 2017*.

The Authority is a Relevant Organisation under the Act.

The Children First Act together with the Guidelines requires that each Relevant Organisation ensures that children are safe from harm while using their services. Each relevant organisation carries out a Risk Assessment to identify whether a child or young person could be harmed when using the services; and has a Child Safeguarding Statement outlining the policies and procedures that are in place to manage identified risks.

A delegated Relevant Person or designated liaison person is to be the first point of contact in relation to the Child Safeguarding Statement and all matters of child protection. The Act and Guidelines also specifies Mandated Persons to formally report child welfare or protection concerns to Tusla. Tusla has an online portal for mandated reporters: <https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/web-portal/>

The nominated Relevant Person or Children First Child Protection Officer is Katie Harrigan, Senior Social Work Practitioner, tel 01 2309 318 or email katie.harrigan@aai.gov.ie. Katie is the first point of contact in relation to the Child Safeguarding Statement and all matters of child protection.



Research

The research unit consists of one Research Officer, who commenced work in August 2019. The research officer serves as Secretary to the Research Sub-Committee, which is a sub-committee of the Board. Its purpose is to advise and make recommendations on issues relating to research conducted by the Authority.

After the appointment of the new Board, a new Research Sub-Committee¹ was appointed by the Chair of the Authority in November 2020.

Strategy

In 2019, the Research Sub-Committee agreed upon a three-year research strategy which included a number of short, medium and long-term research projects. It was underpinned by the central aim that outputs produced would be of use to a number of stakeholders in both domestic and intercountry adoption.

Following a number of developments, some amendments were made to the strategy in 2020. Details of specific projects were adjusted in Q2 to account for COVID-19 restrictions. Proposed direct research methods were changed from in-person to phone/teleconferencing/written submissions where possible. One study which was due to be put out to tender was instead re-designed to be implemented directly by the Authority to ensure that it would still be completed within the specified timeframe.

A proposed follow up to a large-scale 2008 study on intercountry adoption was re-designed for a variety of methodological, data protection and practical, COVID-19-related reasons. The redesigned study will be more targeted, with desk-based research allowing for the production and faster rollout of shorter, country specific reports. This was to ensure that we could produce meaningful work while still operating within the restrictions.

All studies are now progressing as anticipated.

External Communications

In addition to implementing the research strategy, in 2020 the research unit also dealt with a small number of queries from domestic and international university-based research teams, PhD students and other postgraduates. A mailing list has been developed

to enhance communication between the Authority's research unit and interested stakeholders, and this has been used to send a number of updates throughout the year. We have also disseminated our work through actively seeking publication in local and international research bulletins.

Ethics Committee

A Research Ethics Committee (REC) was formed in Q3 to review larger studies involving direct research with participants. The Chair of the Research Sub-Committee also serves as Chair of the REC, alongside three other REC members.² A number of core documents were developed by the Research Officer in consultation with the REC members – terms of reference, an ethical protocol, and ethics application and amendment forms. These were agreed upon at the second meeting of the REC in Q3, and will be used to guide the work of the REC going forward. In Q4, the REC reviewed and subsequently approved an application from the research officer for one study.

Outputs

All of the outputs listed below were conducted by the Research Unit and published in 2020. They are all available to view/download on the research section of the AAI website:³

1. Late-age adoptions from long-term foster care: January 2014–December 2019

This is a brief report on recent domestic adoption trends, published to the website in January 2020. It contains information on late age applications for adoption from long-term foster care across a 6 year period up to 2019, broken down by region and child age. It also illustrates the number of these applications which required high court decisions.

2. Intercountry Adoptions by parents habitually resident in Ireland: 1991–date

This report outlines the number of children adopted into Ireland from other countries by parents who were habitually resident in Ireland from 1991–2019. It is broken down into 2 sections, which respectively cover the time before and after the Adoption Act 2010. It includes a breakdown of figures re child age, country of origin and annual trends.

¹ For details of committee members, please visit <https://aai.gov.ie/en/what-we-do/research/research-sub-committee.html>

² These members included the then Chair of the Authority (Dr. Geoffrey Shannon), Professor Sheila Greene and one external member from the DCYA.

³ <https://aai.gov.ie/en/what-we-do/research/aai-research/>

3. Intercountry adoption in Ireland: Experiences, supports, challenges: Country Briefings, Report 1: Russia

This report is the first in a series of 5 planned country-specific briefings. It looks at intercountry adoptions from Russia into Ireland between 1992 and 2014, and provides information on the current ages of this cohort, a breakdown of the adoptions by county, and a brief review of the literature regarding adoptions from Russia, including domestic and international research on child development, outcomes and possible challenges.

4. Celebrating ten years of the Adoption Authority of Ireland 2010–2020

This was a commemorative booklet, published to acknowledge ten years since the establishment of the Adoption Authority. It contained a summary of work conducted, key events and activities, and a brief overview of annual adoption statistics. It was distributed to key stakeholders in hard copy and digital form, and was uploaded to the Authority's website in Q4.

Research Supports

The Library

The Library continues to be maintained by the research officer, with any new books classified, catalogued and shelved. Unfortunately the intern who had been recruited to help set up and maintain the library had to leave Ireland in March 2020 due to COVID-19, and due to the restrictions she was not replaced. The facility for staff to consult/browse the library in person has been curtailed due to COVID-19 restrictions, however all staff and Board members were provided with a library login username and password so that they could search the online library catalogue remotely. Any staff member wishing to then borrow a book can still physically do so by contacting the research officer directly, who arranges a contact-free book collection.

The reconfiguration of the library led to the provision of a dedicated meeting/study space. This has been repurposed in 2020 as a facility for individuals attending Adoption Authority Board meetings, to ensure the appropriate social distancing within the Authority's offices.

Journal Access

The research officer manages a subscription to two different EBSCO products: SocIndex and EBSCO Discovery, both of which were rolled out to all members of the executive and Board in 2020. The research officer worked closely with representatives from the library management organisation and EBSCO to combine their respective search tools in one secure search page, creating a 'one stop' portal for research by the Authority staff. This has helped to speed up and simplify the online research process.

Research Participant Database

In collaboration with the Domestic and Intercountry Adoption Units, in Q4 of 2019 the Authority began writing to adoptive parents who had engaged with it in the previous 14 months, introducing the Authority's research function and inviting them to consent to receiving more information about taking part in research in future. Continuing into 2020, this has led to the establishment of a database of potential participants which will be a useful resource to the Authority as restrictions lift.



**Corporate
Services and
Accreditation**

Website and Information Technology

In 2020, the website continued to be an important source of information and news from the Adoption Authority. Service updates in light of COVID-19 arrangements were posted on the website responsively throughout the year, ensuring that customers and other stakeholders continued to receive accurate and timely information as to the Authority's activities and services.

The use of Google Analytics to provide monthly reports on web traffic continued, and has provided an overview of website use for the entire year. This information has helped to identify key trends and the most visited sections of the site, and will provide guidance to customer service provision improvements that can be made in the coming year.

Parliamentary Questions (PQs)

In total, 15 Parliamentary Questions were received and responded to in 2020.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

The Authority publish details of FOI requests received, in accordance with the requirements of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Code of Practice for Freedom of Information for Public Bodies.

In 2020 the Adoption Authority received 11 requests under the Freedom of Information Acts.

- 9 were granted/part granted;
- 2 were declined.

The reason for the declined requests is that the 2014 Act designates the Adoption Authority of Ireland as a 'Partially Included Agency'. This means that the Freedom of Information Acts do not apply to "records concerning, or arising from, the making of an adoption order or in the recognition of an intercountry adoption effected outside the State, within the meaning of the Adoption Act 2010."

Press/Media

All press queries and requests for interviews are handled by the CEO and Chairperson.

The Authority continued to monitor adoption-related news reports in the local, national and international media to keep updated with developments on adoption-related matters in 2020.

Energy Management

Overview of Energy Usage in 2020

Ireland's third National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP 3), published in 2014, reaffirmed Ireland's commitment to delivering a 20% reduction in energy demand across the whole of the economy by 2020, along with a 33% reduction in public sector energy use.

The value of the contribution of improved public sector energy efficiency and its pivotal importance was further underpinned in June 2019 with the publication of the first Climate Action Plan. This governmental strategic plan sets a more ambitious target of 50% improved energy efficiency to be achieved by public sector bodies by the end of 2030.

In 2020, The Adoption Authority of Ireland reported on its 2019 energy use and had improved on the previous years' performance with an energy saving of 37.2% since a baseline level in 2009. At this level of savings, we are on track to meet our 2020 target of 33% savings.

Accreditation

Activity Analysis

The maintenance of a 'Register of Accredited Bodies' by the Authority is provided for under Section 126-135 of the Adoption Act 2010 and S.I. No. 524 of 2010, Adoption Act 2010 (Accredited Bodies) Regulations 2010. By the close of 2020 there were six registered accredited bodies (unchanged from 2019) including Cúnamh who are closed and will be formally deregistered from the register of accredited bodies in due course.

Table 4 Accredited Bodies 2020

Accredited Body	Date of accreditation
PACT 18D Nutgrove Office Park Rathfarnham Dublin 14	Reaccredited 22 February 2019
Cúnamh CPRSI House 30 South Anne Street Dublin 2	Reaccredited 8 March 2019 Closed in 2019 – to be removed from Register – in progress.
Barnardos Post Adoption Service 23/24 Buckingham Street Dublin 1	Reaccredited 1 June 2019
Arabella Counselling, t/a Here2Help 18D Nutgrove Office Park Rathfarnham Dublin 14	Reaccredited 18 October 2019 Closed in 2020 – to be removed from Register – in progress.
Helping Hands Adoption Facilitation Agency t/a Helping Hands Adoption Mediation Agency The Loft, Bessboro Centre Blackrock Road Cork	Reaccredited 12 June 2020
St Brigid's Information and Tracing Agency Holy Faith Sisters Aylward House Glasnevin Dublin 11	Accredited 1 December 2016 Due to expire in 2021

Accreditation Procedures

In line with statutory requirements, The Adoption Authority of Ireland actively engages with all accredited bodies throughout the year.

For each calendar year two six-monthly activity reports are required to be submitted by each accredited body. These reports are summarised by the Executive and presented to the Board of the Authority. In 2020 all five relevant bodies submitted two six-monthly reports each.

In line with legislation audited accounts for the year ending 31 December 2019 were also submitted by the five relevant bodies.

As per Section 128 of the Act, the initial period of registration is for five years and renewals shall not exceed three years. No new applications were made in 2020. One successful renewal application was made in June 2020 by Helping Hands Adoption Mediation Agency.

A monthly report is submitted by the Executive to the Board of the Authority detailing all accredited body activity. A monthly report is submitted by the Executive to the Board of the Authority detailing all accredited body activity.

Cessation of Accredited Bodies

Arabella t/a Here2Help are currently in the process of transferring their files to the Adoption Authority and will be formally deregistered from the register of accredited bodies in due course.



Digitisation

Over the last few years, the Authority has been progressively moving towards a more digital way of working. This body of work has been gaining significant importance and priority, as well as pace and volume. In early 2020 a new role was created in the Authority, that of Digitisation Manager. The role of Digitisation Manager is to oversee all digitisation projects in the Authority and lead the Authority's progress towards a more digital way of working. During the year, the Digitisation Manager commenced the new Professional Diploma in Public Service Innovation with the IPA and DPER. The knowledge and skillsets acquired in this Diploma will be used by the Digitisation Manager to encourage and support innovation in the Authority, to complement on-going digitisation work.

Document Management at the Adoption Authority of Ireland

In 2020 the extensive reconfiguration of the electronic Document Management System (eDMS) was completed, integrating all databases from all sections of the Authority. This work was vital to allow the successful import of digitised adoption records into the system. All staff were trained in the use of the eDMS, so now all sections are fully operational within this system.

System Upgrades

During 2020, the process of migrating the National Adoption Contact Preference Register from a no longer supported software package, into the eDMS was initiated. This was a very complex process as the NACPR database not only holds the data of all those who have registered in the NACPR, but it also has the ability to search new applications against existing ones, therefore identifying possible matches between birth relatives looking to make contact. The previous system, although adequate, had some restrictions in terms of its ability to generate particular statistics and searches and so these needed to be calculated or searched for manually. A data cleanse was conducted prior to the migration to the new system and new functionality added, which allowed improved data analysis, automation and efficiency. It will also mean that the NACPR is on the same eDMS as the rest of the Authority's databases, allowing future linkages for related files, such as adoption agency files as and when these are received and brought into the eDMS.

Moving to a Digital Way of Working at the Adoption Authority

The Authority holds a vast number of highly sensitive and irreplaceable historic adoption records in hard copy. Early in 2020, following a successful public tender

process, Kefron were contracted by the Authority for the scanning and indexing of all post 2010 Adoption Authority adoption records into a searchable electronic database. The majority of these files were domestic adoption, intercountry adoption and NACPR files which had not previously been digitised. This project involved the careful preparation, scanning, indexing and physical archiving of approximately 4,400 adoption records and is due to be completed early in 2021.

The Authority contracted Kefron to carry out further related work, cataloguing and preparing an additional 55,500 files for archive storage. These files are Adoption Board files, i.e. adoption files generated prior to 2010 when the Adoption Act (2010) was enacted. This work will ensure the preservation in perpetuity of these delicate and important physical adoption records. Pending operational changes from proposed Birth Information and Tracing legislation, there may be increased demand on the Authority in terms of storing and searching adoption records. The on-going work by Kefron places the Authority in a very favourable position in preparation for these potential changes.

The Board of the Authority meet twice a month, once for a full Board meeting and once for the granting of Adoption Orders. The volume of papers that Board members are required to review for each meeting is very significant. On average, each Board pack consists of no fewer than 1,000 pages. The process of preparing these Board papers is also very time, resource and paper intensive.

In 2020 it was decided to move to an electronic Board meeting solution and Decision Time was selected through a competitive tender process. Decision Time is a Board Meeting software package that allows all Board papers to be digitally prepared and uploaded. It also allows for meetings to be run and attended remotely which proved incredibly useful due to COVID-19 restrictions. It was initially anticipated to pilot Board meetings with paper and Decision Time in parallel, however, after the initial training, Board members had adapted very quickly and were keen to cease using paper files as soon as possible. Due to their enthusiasm for this new way of working and ability to quickly adapt, the use of paper for Board meetings ceased earlier than planned and the Board were fully using Decision Time remotely by November. To complement the use of Decision Time, all Board members were issued with the required technology, making the process of reviewing the large number of documents much more efficient and also acting as a second screen to allow remote

video meetings to be run more effectively while using Decision Time.

In 2020, an agreement was entered into with Nitro Pro, a pdf software package to allow all staff access to more advanced pdf editing tools. This software complements the now extensive use of the eDMS and Decision Time. It also crucially allows for efficient permanent digital redaction of sections of files, where required, ensuring that sensitive third-party data is fully protected.

Following the various advances towards digital working this year, there were still a considerable number of staff using some paper based processes where digital ones were possible. A design thinking approach was applied to this issue, interviewing users, ideating, prototyping and testing and the resulting solution was a digital literacy plan. This will be brought forward in early 2021.



**Data
Protection**

The year 2020 was the second full year of the application of the GDPR and the Law Enforcement Directive (LED), a transformative period. It presented unique challenges for the Adoption Authority, which soon emerged after the first three months of the year in terms of front-line service provision, because of the unexpected arrival of COVID-19. Despite these challenges, service provision was maintained throughout the year. There was no negative effect on response times or service levels incurred as a result of remote and staggered working, and engagement was commensurate with pre-COVID rates. This year the Authority have also had to deal with the impact of UK exiting the EU and the resulting uncertainty. The Authority have yet to consider (before mid-2021) the implications of the UK becoming a “third country” and its effect on the functions of the Authority and our data transfer with our nearest neighbour.

In 2020, The Adoption Authority of Ireland continued to develop policies, systems and procedures, placing considerable emphasis on staff awareness and training, aimed at ensuring our compliance with the requirements of data protection legislation.

The role of the Data Protection Officer in the Adoption Authority is

- To assist in monitoring internal compliance;
- To inform and advise on data protection obligations;
- To provide advice regarding Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs);
- To act as a contact point between data subjects (who will request ‘access’ to personal data) and the Adoption Authority.

On the Adoption Authority website www.aai.gov.ie under customer information, there is a dedicated section on data protection & GDPR. A dedicated email address (dataprotection@aai.gov.ie) has been put in place to facilitate data protection queries.

Processing ‘special category’ data carries more risk than any other personal data, so vigilance is of prime importance in the Adoption Authority with data regarding children and health/medical information.

The advent of GDPR has impacted greatly on the area of Subject Access Requests in particular. A Subject Access Request (SAR) is the Right of Access allowing an individual to obtain records to their personal information, held by an organisation. GDPR, which became applicable in May 2018, provides individuals with the right of access to this information. The volume of requests for information and for data is four times greater than pre-GDPR.

Applicants may request data in two ways: Formal & Informal

Option 1: Informal Request or request for information	Option 2: Formal Request or Subject Access Request (SAR)
This is very often the first approach and is a good starting point for applicants who cannot identify what information they require or if AAI have the information they are searching for.	A formal request is a legal structured process which must be completed within 30 days or a valid extension requested. This is called a SAR (or subject access request). Applicants make this request under Article 15 GDPR.
<p>Applicants can make a simple informal request for personal details in one of the following three ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Email us at aai.gov.ie/en/contact-us.html 2. By emailing the data protection officer at dataprotection@aai.gov.ie 3. By telephoning 01 2309300 during office hours 9.30am-4.30pm <p>Applicants will be directed to the person who can best help them with their request. In general, these types of requests are for assistance tracing a child, parent or sibling, joining the voluntary database (NACPR), they are sometimes looking for medical information only or may want pre-birth or early post birth information which the Adoption Authority will not hold. Many of these types of requests will be dealt with appropriately by either the Information & Tracing Section or the Social Work Team.</p>	<p>Applicants may make a formal request in one of three ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete a Subject Access request form available on the AAI Website, print and post it to our offices; 2. Email the form as an attachment to www.aai.gov.ie or dataprotection@aai.gov.ie 3. Alternatively, write to AAI, telephone or email and state, "I wish to make a Subject Access request." <p>These formal requests are usually for ALL personal information that the Adoption Authority hold on an individual.</p> <p>These requests will always be dealt with by the Data Protection Officer.</p>

Data Protection Requests

In 2020 the AAI received 32 Data Protection requests and all were responded to.

Table 5 Requests for Personal Data 2013-2020

	Number Received	Number Refused /Declined	Internal Appeals received	Appeals to Data Protection Commissioner	Decision of Data Protection Commissioner
2013	10	0	0	0	n/a
2014	7	0	0	0	n/a
2015	8	2	0	0	n/a
2016	8	2	0	0	n/a
2017	6	0	0	0	n/a
2018	3	1	0	0	n/a
2018*	12	5	0	0	n/a
2019	26	5	5	1	Awaiting decision
2020	32	3	6	0	n/a

* after GDPR was introduced 18 May 2018



**Human
Resources**

The year 2020 was a busy year for HR both in terms of recruitment, retirements and the additional work which was created by COVID-19. The unit has only one staff member at AP level.

Recruitment

In February 2020, the Authority conducted a Clerical Officer competition to fill an existing vacancy. The post was filled in mid-March the week before the COVID-19 lockdown.

Towards the end of February a competition commenced for the recruitment of three permanent social work posts, the interviews which were due to be held in March had to be postponed as a result of the first lockdown. The Authority was not in a position to proceed with the interview stage until May due to a number of factors including availability of interview panel members and continued staggered attendances in the office and working from home arrangements. A panel was created from this competition and two candidates took up the posts, the filling of the third post will be addressed in early 2021.

In early March, the Authority conducted a competition at Executive Officer level to create a panel to fill a number vacancies, one which arose as a result of a resignation and two to fill impending retirements. A second resignation occurred later in the year at EO level and the panel created was used to fill that vacancy.

Two of the successful candidates in the EO competition were Clerical Officers in the Authority resulting in two further vacancies at Clerical Officer level; these vacancies will be filled in early 2021.

The Authority had a panel in place for Higher Executive Officers from a competition in 2019. This panel was used to recruit two new HEOs to fill vacancies created by the retirement of two HEOs in Q4 2020 and one due in Q1 2021.

Pension/Retirements

2020 saw a significant increase in retirements compared to earlier years. Two Executive Officers and one Higher Executive Officer retired between October and December with further retirement at Higher Executive Officer level due in early 2021. These retirements result in a combined loss of over 40 years' experience in adoption for the organisation.

The number of staff in the Authority on the Single Public Pension Service Scheme (SPSPS) had increased due to the recruitment of new staff. Annual Benefit Statements were provided to all members of the SPSPS as required under the legislation.

HR and COVID-19

In March 2020, the Authority had commenced a staggered attendance pattern for staff in line with concerns that were being raised about the spread of COVID-19. Due to the national lockdown which was announced HR had to contact all staff at their personal numbers and obtain their personal email address and consent to use them to communicate with them over the initial weeks. Throughout the period March to December 2020 HR, in conjunction with the senior management team, disseminated information provided by DPER/HSE in relation to COVID protocols and implemented the protocols as required. HR monitored and managed protocols around absences due to COVID or related issues such as isolation for close contacts. The management of staggered attendances/rotas/more flexible starting and finishing times created additional work for the HR function.

Employee Assistance Service

The Authority continued to provide a dedicated Employee Assistance Service which is available to all staff and their family members as required. The Authority's service provider adapted their services to facilitate phone and video conference calls for those who availed of the service.



Statistics

Table 6 Birth and Domestic Adoption Trends in Ireland 1953-2020

Year	Total Births*	Non-Marital Births*	% of Total Births	No. of Adoptions
1953	62,558	1,340	2.14	381
1954	62,534	1,310	2.09	888
1955	61,662	1,234	2.00	786
1956	60,740	1,173	1.93	565
1957	61,242	1,032	1.69	752
1958	59,510	976	1.64	592
1959	60,188	959	1.59	501
1960	60,735	968	1.59	505
1961	59,825	975	1.63	547
1962	61,782	1,111	1.80	699
1963	63,246	1,157	1.83	840
1964	64,072	1,292	2.02	1,003
1965	63,525	1,403	2.21	1,049
1966	62,215	1,436	2.31	1,178
1967	61,307	1,540	2.51	1,493
1968	61,004	1,558	2.55	1,343
1969	62,912	1,642	2.61	1,225
1970	64,382	1,709	2.65	1,414
1971	67,551	1,842	2.73	1,305
1972	68,527	2,005	2.93	1,291
1973	68,713	2,167	3.15	1,402
1974	68,907	2,309	3.35	1,415
1975	67,178	2,515	3.74	1,443
1976	67,718	2,545	3.76	1,104
1977	68,892	2,877	4.18	1,127
1978	70,299	3,003	4.27	1,223
1979	72,539	3,337	4.60	988
1980	74,064	3,723	5.03	1,115
1981	72,158	3,914	5.42	1,191
1982	70,843	4,358	6.15	1,191
1983	67,117	4,552	6.78	1,184
1984	64,062	5,116	7.99	1,195
1985	62,388	5,282	8.47	882

Year	Total Births*	Non-Marital Births*	% of Total Births	No. of Adoptions
1986	61,620	5,946	9.65	800
1987	58,433	6,347	10.86	715
1988	54,600	6,483	11.87	649
1989	52,018	6,671	12.82	615
1990	53,044	7,767	14.64	648
1991	52,718	8,912	16.91	590
1992	51,089	9,211	18.03	523
1993	49,304	9,826	19.93	500
1994	47,928	9,904	20.66	424
1995	48,530	10,788	22.23	490
1996	50,390	12,484	24.77	405
1997	52,311	13,892	26.56	422
1998	53,551	15,133	28.26	400
1999	53,354	16,461	30.85	317
2000	54,239	17,235	31.78	303
2001	57,882	18,049	31.18	293
2002	60,521	18,815	31.09	266
2003	61,517	19,313	31.39	263
2004	61,684	19,935	32.32	273
2005	61,042	19,528	32.00	253
2006	64,237	21,295	33.15	222
2007	70,620	23,170	32.81	187
2008	75,065	24,844	33.09	200
2009	74,728	24,532	32.82	190
2010	73,724	24,860	33.72	189
2011	74,650	25,157	33.70	39
2012	72,225	25,344	35.10	49
2013	68,930	24,393	35.40	116
2014	67,462	24,514	36.30	112
2015	65,909	23,990	36.40	94
2016	63,897	23,348	36.50	95
2017	62,053	23,340	37.60	72
2018	61,016	23,061	37.80	72
2019	59,796	22,772	38.10	79
2020	Not available at time of publication			81
TOTAL				44,763

*Sources: Statistical Abstracts (various years), C.S.O.

Table 7 Domestic Adoptions by Type 2016-2020

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Step Parent	65	37	35	51	58
Long Term Foster Care	19	21	25	21	16
Infant	5	7	7	6	5
Foreign to Domestic	4	2	3	0	0
Extended Family	0	3	2	1	2
Private Placement	2	2	0	0	0
Total	95	72	72	79	81

Table 8 Domestic Adoptions by Age of Child 2016-2020

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
17 Years Old	25	27	30	35	40
12-16 Years Old	37	21	23	24	23
7-11 Years Old	15	14	7	13	13
2-6 Years Old	15	5	9	4	3
0-1 Years Old	3	5	3	3	2
Total	95	72	72	79	81

Table 9 High Court Orders Granted Pursuant to Domestic Adoption Applications 2016-2020

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Section 18	7	5	1	0	3
Section 30	13	14	7	8	15
Section 54	17	19	13	5	11
Total	37	38	21	13	29

Table 10 Entries in the Register of Foreign Adoptions, 1991-2010, entered pursuant to Section 5 of the Adoption Act 1991 and in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions, 2010–2020 pursuant to Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010. (Applicants habitually resident in Ireland holding a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the intercountry adoption).

Country	No. of Entries*	Country	No. of Entries*	Country	No. of Entries*
Russia	1,629	India	25	Peru	2
Vietnam	912	Taiwan	22	Poland	2
Romania	808	Colombia	19	Rwanda	2
China	432	England	18	Scotland	2
Ethiopia	308	Brazil	17	Sri Lanka	2
Kazakhstan	151	Paraguay	7	Uzbekistan	2
Belarus	145	Cambodia	4	Bolivia	1
Thailand	133	Philippines	4	Bosnia Herzegovina	1
United States of America	114	South Africa	2	Haiti	1
Mexico	113	El Salvador	2	Hong Kong	1
Ukraine	100	Jersey	2	Malawi	1
Bulgaria	32	Kenya	2	Zimbabwe	1
		Lithuania	2	Total	5,021

*The implementation of a new database has allowed for more accurate reporting of figures. Some statistics published in previous years have been adjusted accordingly.

Table 11 Entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions, pursuant to Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010, for 2020 only. (Applicants habitually resident in Ireland holding a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the intercountry adoption).

Country	No. Entered on the Register in 2020
China	1
India	1
Mexico	5
Thailand	4
United States	1
Vietnam	9
Total	21

Table 12 Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised in 2020, where the adoptions were effected by adopters who were habitually resident abroad. (Sections 57(2)(a) & 57(2)(b)(i) of the Adoption Act 2010 refer).

Country where the adoption was effected	No. entered on the Register in 2020	Country where the adoption was effected	No. entered on the Register in 2020	Country where the adoption was effected	No. entered on the Register in 2020
Brazil	1	Kenya	2	Scotland	6
Canada	6	Malaysia	2	South Africa	4
China	15	Malta	1	Spain	1
Croatia	1	Mexico	1	Thailand	1
England	61	Netherlands	2	Ukraine	2
Ethiopia	2	Northern Ireland	16	USA	29
France	1	Russia	1	Wales	4
Hong Kong	4			Total	163

Table 13 Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 2014 and 2020, * where the adopters were habitually resident in Ireland and held a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the adoption. (Section 5, Adoption Act 1991 and Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010 refers).

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Bulgaria	4	8	4	8	1	1	0
Cambodia	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
China	0	15	7	10	4	3	1
England	2	5	0	0	0	0	0
Ethiopia	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Haiti	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
India	3	0	0	1	0	0	1
Lithuania	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Mexico	5	11	0	1	0	0	5
Peru	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Poland	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Russia	4	2	2	0	1	0	0
Thailand	6	1	4	2	8	0	4
USA	4	6	12	9	7	10	1
Vietnam	4	32	23	22	20	18	9
Total	32	83	55	53	41	33	21

*The implementation of a new database has allowed for more accurate reporting of figures. Some statistics published in previous years have been adjusted accordingly.

Table 14 Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 1991 and 2020 (All Sections).

Year	Number Recognised*	Year	Number Recognised*	Year	Number Recognised*
1991	58	2002	439	2013	141
1992	305	2003	460	2014	106
1993	59	2004	482	2015	160
1994	64	2005	442	2016	214
1995	93	2006	409	2017	324
1996	117	2007	439	2018	313
1997	149	2008	488	2019	386
1998	260	2009	395	2020	184
1999	284	2010	290	Total	8,253
2000	324	2011	342		
2001	284	2012	242		

*A review of the AAI's historical statistics and the implementation of a new database has allowed for more accurate reporting of figures. Some statistics published in previous years have been adjusted accordingly.



Other Information

Website: The website of the Adoption Authority can be accessed at www.aai.gov.ie

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Appendix A

Dates of Meetings 2020		Board of the Authority Attendees
14 January	Full	All members
21 January	Full	All members
11 February		Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, Judge P McMahon, P Harrison, A O'Flaherty, Dr M Anglim
21 February		Dr G Shannon, P Harrison, Judge P McMahon
10 March		Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, Dr H Buckley, P Harrison, A O'Flaherty, Dr M Anglim
24 March		Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, Dr H Buckley
07 April	Full	All members
12 May	Full	All members
09 June	Full	All members
12 June		Dr G Shannon, P Harrison, Dr M Anglim
30 June		Dr G Shannon, P Harrison, A O'Flaherty
07 July	Full	All members
28 July		Dr G Shannon, Dr H Buckley, Judge P McMahon
14 August		Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, P Harrison, A O'Flaherty, Dr M Anglim
08 September		Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, A O'Flaherty, Dr M Anglim, P Harrison, Dr H Buckley
22 September AM	Full	Corporate Governance all members
22 September PM		Dr G Shannon, P Harrison, Judge P McMahon
06 October AM	Full	All members
06 October PM		Dr G Shannon, Dr M Anglim, P Harrison, Judge P McMahon
28 October	Full	All members
10 November	Full	All members
24 November	Full	All members
08 December	Full	All members
22 December		O Traynor, Dr M Anglim, Dr H Buckley, Judge P McMahon, Sean O'Brien, Prof Sheila Greene

Dates of Meetings 2020	Risk and Audit Committee
09 March	Apologies Judge P McMahon
16 July	Full Attendance
29 September	Full Attendance
17 December	Apologies Tara McDermott

Dates of Meetings 2020	Research Sub Committee
30 June	Apologies: Dr G Shannon, O Traynor, Prof G Harold
29 September	Apologies: Dr G Shannon, Prof G Harold, D Tracey
15 December	Apologies: M Kirwan

