



ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND

Údarás Uchtála na hÉireann
Adoption Authority of Ireland

Tuarascáil Bhliantúil 2023
Annual Report 2023





**Report of
Údarás Uchtála na hÉireann
Adoption Authority of Ireland
for 2023**

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

Table of Contents

Board Chairperson Statement	2	Board Evaluation	27
Chief Executive Officer Foreword	5	Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty	28
Overview of the Adoption Authority of Ireland	12	Disability Act	28
Functions of the Adoption Authority of Ireland	13	Children First Act	28
Statement of Mission, Vision and Values	15	Official Languages Act	28
Adoption Authority Mission	16	2022–2024 Strategic Plan	29
Adoption Authority Vision	16	2023 Business Plan	31
Principles and Values	16	Events and Travel 2023	32
Organisation & Management Structure 2023	17	Adoption Operations	34
Board of the Adoption Authority of Ireland	19	Domestic Adoption	35
Membership of the Board	20	Activity Analysis	35
Gender Balance	20	Intercountry Adoption	37
Committees of the Board	20	Activity Analysis	37
Risk and Audit Committee	20	Information Services and Records	39
Research Subcommittee	21	Activity Analysis	40
Governance	21	Records	40
Responsibilities	21	Archives	51
Board Stipend	23	Data Protection	52
Corporate Governance	24	Social Work	54
Financial Control	25	Introduction	55
Internal Financial Control	25	Core Functions	55
Budget Management	25	Tracing Service	55
Risk and Audit Committee	25	Learning from Tracing	56
Risk Management	26	Tracing Outcomes	56
Internal Audit Function	26	Case Study (Birth Parent Trace)	56
Procurement	27	Case Study (Sibling Trace)	57
Protected Disclosures	27	Contact Preference Register Mediation	57
Ethics in Public Office	27		

Intercountry Tracing	57	Press/Media	68
Tracing and Support for Intercountry Adoptees	57	Parliamentary Questions (PQs)	70
Brief Intervention Social Work	58	Energy Management and Climate Action	70
Brief Intervention Case Study	58	Facilities Management	70
Social Work Reviews	59	Health, Safety and Welfare at Work	70
Responding to Queries	59	Accreditation	71
Building Our Knowledge	59	Register of Accredited Bodies	71
Training and Education	59	Accreditation Procedures	71
Social Work Placements	59	Cessation of Accredited Bodies	71
Research	60	Tracing Service Statistics	72
Overview	61	Domestic and Intercountry Adoption Statistics	76
Activities 2023	61	Other Information	82
Core Research Studies	61	Appendix A	84
‘Reflections on the Irish Domestic Adoption Process 1952–2022’	61	Appendix B	86
‘The Lived Experience of Intercountry Adoption in Ireland’	61		
Research Resources	62		
Conferences and Networking	62		
External Communications	63		
Human Resources	64		
Overview	65		
Recruitment	65		
Pension/Retirements	65		
Training and Professional Development	66		
Employee Assistance Programme	66		
Corporate Services and Accreditation	67		
Website and Communications	68		

Board Chairperson Statement



I am pleased to present the 2023 Annual Report for the Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI).

This was a year of contrasts.

In its first full year of implementation, the operation of the Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 (BITA) was now business as usual at AAI.

At the same time, the organisation bade a sad farewell to long-standing Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Patricia Carey. The Board and I would like to extend our sincere thanks to interim CEO, Colm O’Leary, for his able steering of the AAI while the recruitment process for a permanent CEO was underway.

We appreciated Minister Roderic O’Gorman’s participation in the launch of the AAI Annual Report 2022 to coincide with the BITA’s one-year anniversary in October, when we announced that having processed the backlog of birth information applications, the AAI Records team was now able to respond to new applications within the timeframes specified in BITA. We also noted that by July, 3,270 people had joined the new Contact Preference Register (CPR) in its first year of operation.

In May, the AAI welcomed a six-person delegation from the central authority of Vietnam as an opportunity to cement the warm relationship that our two countries share and continue our cooperative activities in the best interest of children. I thank the representatives from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency’s adoption division and the AAI executive for their polished and professional presentations to the Director of the Department of Adoption – Ministry of Justice of Vietnam and his colleagues on an interesting range of topics: AAI research; the intercountry adoption application process; adoption policy and guidelines; and information and tracing requests, supports, legislation and services. The Vietnamese delegation deemed their visit both successful and informative.

Bearing in mind that 2024 would be the final year of the AAI’s current strategic period, the Board began in 2023 to anticipate the process of developing a new organisational strategy to take the AAI through 2025–2027. We also started to prepare for the Periodic Critical Review (PCR) of the AAI that the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

(DCEDIY) will commence in the first half of 2024. Under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, departments critically review each State body under their aegis at least once in every five-year period.

With regard to day-to-day business, the [statistics](#) section of this report displays figures for operational matters in 2023 and previous years for all the key areas of work of the Authority. This data indicates how numbers of domestic adoption orders, intercountry adoptions, requests for birth information and release of same, applications to the CPR and matches between adopted persons and birth relatives in 2023 compared with other years, and how many Parliamentary Questions and data protection requests the Authority processed.

While the number of domestic infant adoptions has declined, the Board has concerns over the delays in placing these infants for adoption. The Board also notes the increase in adoptions from long-term foster care. While the Board welcomes the increase in these applications, we note a corresponding increase in the number of birth parents appearing before the Board who, while not objecting to the adoption of their children, have a difficulty in signing consents as they feel they are signing away their children. Such applications have to be remitted to the High Court, resulting in some cases, to lengthy delays in finalisation. The Board would welcome a debate on a possible change to the legislation to allow for open adoption in appropriate circumstances.

There were also several applications before the Board for children born through surrogacy and the Board welcomes the proposed legislative structure to formalise such family formations.

The Board has noted that the complexity of both the matters coming before it and the matters being referred to the High Court continues to increase.

I would like to express my appreciation for my Board colleagues for their time and expertise, their commitment, dedication and sheer hard work involved in making significant, life-changing decisions, ‘without fear or favour’, focusing on the best interests of the child.

I would also like to thank the Executive and Senior Management Team (SMT) who week after week supported the Board in its endeavours to achieve the highest standards in adoption services.

Furthermore, I express my thanks and appreciation to the Minister and to the staff of the Adoption Policy Unit in the Department for their continued support and assistance.

I look forward to continuing to progress our mission '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' and, in this regard, to continue to deliver the goals and vision as set out in our Strategic Plan, 'to be recognised as the centre of excellence and principal authoritative source of information on all aspects of adoption and as a provider and regulator of high quality adoption services'.



Ms Orlaith Traynor
Board Chairperson



Chief
Executive
Officer
Foreword



The AAI, as an independent quasi-judicial body under the aegis of the DCEDIY, has a range of important functions which, taken together, serve to ensure the highest possible standards of adoption-related services, including access to birth and early life information. Our focus, at all times, is on the best interests of the child in the adoption process.

I am very happy to have joined the AAI in January 2024 and to be able to present the work outlined in this Annual Report. The achievements, activities and outputs in this report reflect the dedication and commitment of the Board of the AAI and all of our staff who have contributed to the AAI's work in 2023. These achievements are also testament to the leadership of the AAI's Interim CEOs in 2023: Mr Philip Crosby and Mr Colm O'Leary.

This report outlines our progress in the delivery of the second year of the AAI's three-year Strategic Plan (2022–2024). This was a significant year for the AAI as it was the first full year of delivery of our new functions under the BITA.

The one-year anniversary of the implementation of the BITA and its new information release service, a tracing service and the establishment of the CPR on a statutory footing, was marked in October on the occasion of the launch of the 2022 Annual Report. The AAI has a dedicated information and tracing service (also referred to as our search for origins), including a large team of very experienced, trained social workers. All enquiries are treated with sensitivity and compassion. Since the enactment of the BITA, the AAI has received more tracing applications than at any time in its history. Details on the AAI's Tracing Service and an overview of the outcomes relating to the operation of this service in 2023 are provided on pp. 55-58 and pp. 72-75 of this report.

We continued throughout 2023 to invest significant time and effort into training our staff on processing applications for birth and early life information, allied with a focus on compliance with the statutory timelines, while balancing the understandable desire on the part of the service users for access to information as soon as possible.

Under the BITA, as the AAI is now subject to the National Archives Acts 1986–2018, work was advanced in 2023 on the creation of a new storage space for

the safeguarding and preservation of almost 100,000 records currently held by the AAI. Construction works for this fit-out were commenced in 2023 and are on track to conclude in 2024. Alongside this work, the digitisation of the AAI's adoption records continued.

We also continued our focus to build our research capabilities and capacity in 2023. A new three-year research strategy (2023–2025) was developed and agreed with delivery and implementation overseen by the Board's Research Subcommittee. A Research Ethics Committee is also in place to provide the necessary ethical review.

Over the course of 2023, we continued to deliver our other important work in domestic and intercountry adoptions, other social work services, regulatory oversight of the three bodies accredited by the AAI, alongside continuing to develop our supports for our people and ensuring that the AAI remains an employer of choice and a good place to work. In line with our responsibilities as a public body and role modelling to deliver on the Government's Climate Action Plan, the AAI developed its own Climate Action Roadmap in 2023, which will be updated each year as its implementation is advanced.

We continued to work closely with our line department, the DCEDIY. Our role as a regulator and service provider is part of a broader ecosystem. The delivery of our services and activities was achieved in collaboration with our key stakeholders, including DCEDIY, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, other agencies, organisations and individuals. We therefore appreciate and acknowledge those who engaged with us and informed our work.

The unflinching focus of both the Board and staff of the AAI on ensuring that the best interests of the child remain front and centre in the adoption process frames how the AAI works in all of its interactions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Board and my new colleagues for their hard work and commitment over the course of 2023, which is documented in this report.

I would also like to acknowledge the many service-users and people who have been personally affected by adoption who we engage with daily and who the AAI Board and its staff engaged with over the course of 2023. Theirs are important stories and voices, and we will continue to find new ways of listening and reaching out to improve our services.

I look forward to working with the highly committed and dedicated team in the AAI to progress our work under the remaining year of the current strategy in 2024 while also focusing on the development of the AAI's next three-year strategy and shaping our vision for the future.

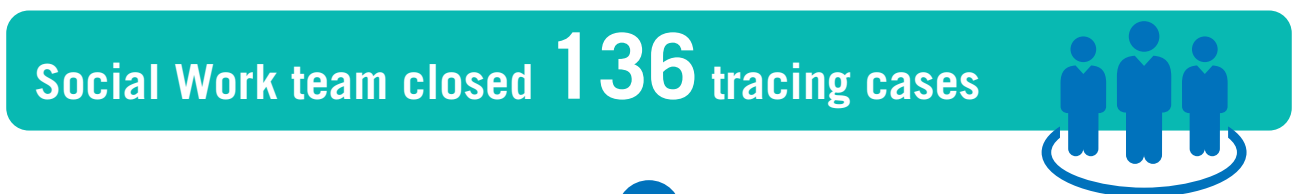
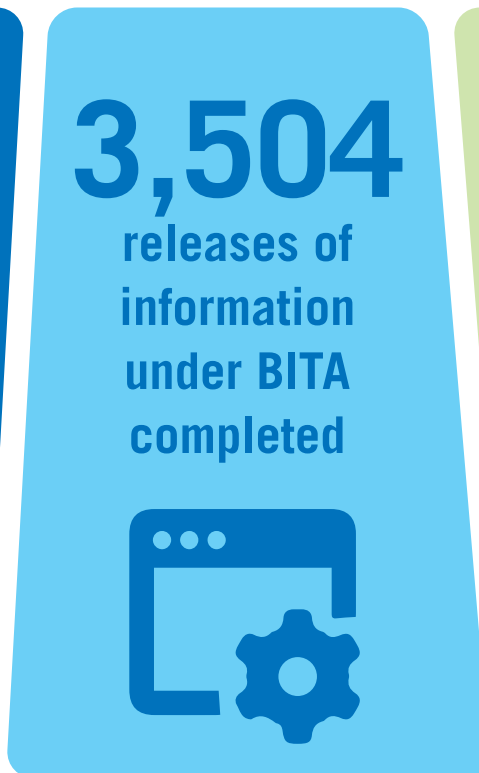
Dr Lorraine Horgan
CEO



Key
Activities and
Achievements
2023



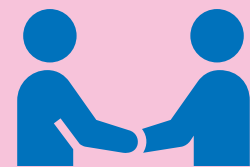
Infographics



Dedicated tracing service for intercountry adoptees in Ireland established



Social worker appointed to handle Brief Intervention referrals



New post of permanent Research Assistant recruited and appointed



New research strategy 2023–2025 approved



Board approved AAI's first Climate Action Roadmap

Overview of
the Adoption
Authority of
Ireland



The AAI, established on 1 November 2010 under the Adoption Act 2010, is an independent quasi-judicial body under the aegis of the DCEDIY. The Authority is also, in line with the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (the 1993 Hague Convention), 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 Authority under the current 2010 legislation, which repealed the Adoption Acts from 1952 to 1998.

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. In addition, the Authority has registration and regulatory functions, as well as reporting, advice and research functions.

The 2010 Act was amended on several occasions since its commencement by the following legislation:

- Child Care (Amendment) Act 2011
- Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2013
- Court of Appeal Act 2014
- Gender Recognition Act 2015
- Children and Family Relationships Act 2015
- Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017
- Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022

The Adoption Amendment Act 2017 gave legislative effect to the Thirty-first Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Act 2012 ensuring that the best interests of the child were given paramount consideration in relation to any matter and that the views of the child would be ascertained by the Adoption Authority or by the court, and given due weight, having regard to the age and maturity of the child. The 2017 Amendment Act also

permitted the High Court to dispense with parental consent and authorised the Authority to make an adoption order in respect of that child and provided for the adoption of a child by civil partners and cohabiting couples and allowed for stepparent adoption without the requirement for the other parent to adopt his or her own child.

The BITA was signed into law on 30 June 2022. This landmark legislation provided a full and clear right of access to birth certificates and birth and early life information for all persons who were adopted, boarded out, nursed out or the subject of an illegal birth registration. It also allowed for access to information by next of kin in certain circumstances.

The new law also established the CPR and a robust tracing service, as well as a range of new bespoke measures to address issues arising for people affected by illegal birth registration. It mandated the safeguarding of adoption records by the Authority.

Functions of the Adoption Authority of Ireland



The Authority's obligations span the following areas:

Domestic Adoption

Domestic adoption refers to the situation where a child who is resident in Ireland is adopted by a person or couple who is/are also resident in Ireland. The nature and effect of an Irish adoption order is that the child becomes the child of the adopter(s) as if born to them, with all the rights and duties of parent(s) and children in relation to each other. Irish adoption legislation only allows for the adoption of a child. A child is defined as a person who has not yet reached 18 years of age. There are four different types of domestic adoption – stepfamily, extended family/relative adoption, domestic infant adoption and long-term foster care to adoption.

Intercountry Adoption

Intercountry adoption refers to the situation where persons resident in Ireland decide to adopt a child who is resident in a country other than Ireland. The nature and effect of such an adoption is that the child becomes the child of the adopter as if born to her or him or to them, in the case of a qualified couple with all the rights and duties of parents and children in relation to each other. Intercountry adoption was given a statutory basis in 1991 with the passing of the Adoption Act in that year.

Information Services and Records

The Information Services and Records Unit assists with post-adoption information and services such as access to records. Under the BITA, access to birth, care and early life information; medical information; and information relating to illegal birth registrations and provided items is now available. This unit is also responsible for data protection, freedom of information (FOI), digital information and communication technology (ICT) and historical archives that fall under the National Archives Act 1986–2018.

Social Work

Social workers in the Adoption Authority understand that adoption is a life-long process that can generate a mix of emotions and needs for parties involved. It is the responsibility of the social work service in the Adoption Authority to provide a statutory tracing service for our clients. Further to this work, social workers also provide mediation, brief intervention and support and complete reviews of all current proposed adoptions.

Accreditation

In the context of adoption, accreditation means the formal evaluation by the Authority of certain bodies or persons, specifically bodies or persons who are involved in making arrangements for the adoption of a child or the provision of services such as tracing, counselling or mediation for adopted persons or relatives of adopted persons.

Research

As part of its statutory function, the Authority is required to undertake or assist in research projects and activities relating to adoption services. The Authority is committed to informing adoption policy and service delivery through provision of a comprehensive information, research and communications framework.

Statement
of Mission,
Vision and
Values



Adoption Authority Mission

'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.'

Adoption Authority Vision

'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:

Focusing on the best interests of the child as paramount in the adoption process with consideration of their lifelong needs. Ensuring that the child's voice is heard and responded to meaningfully in the adoption process.

Quality Services:

Provide the highest quality services in adoption based on law and best practice, alongside developing and retaining experts in the field (including commitment to continuous improvement of services).

Accountability:

Through ethical practice and transparency; modus operandi which is open to scrutiny, distinguished by impartiality and equity and guided by honest, proper, accountable and ethical adoption practice. Committed to delivering services in an effective and efficient manner to achieve value for money.

Respect:

Committed to treating all stakeholders in the adoption process or otherwise with dignity, respect and courtesy. Listening, learning and empowering organisation for all those working or affected by adoption services and listen to and respect staff ensuring the Authority remains a good place to work.

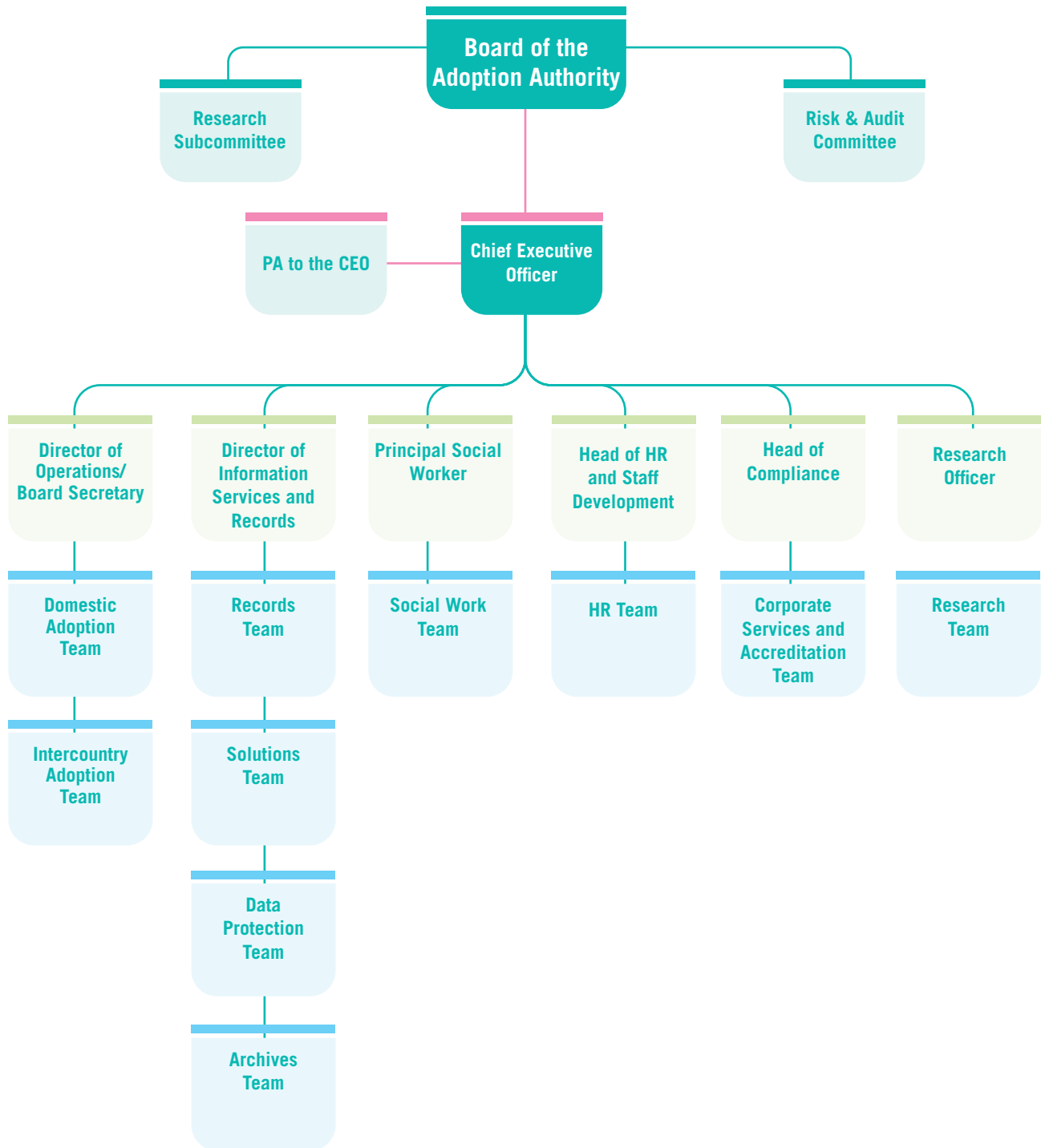
This Annual Report is a summary of the main pieces of work undertaken by the AAI in 2023. You can read and download information about our accounts and publications on www.aai.gov.ie.

Organisation
& Management
Structure
2023



Organisation & Management Structure 2023

An overview of all sanctioned posts appears in Appendix B to this report. The AAI's organisation and management structure is set out in the following diagram.



Board of
the Adoption
Authority of
Ireland



Membership of the Board

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.

Since 1 November 2020, the composition of the Board has remained the same.

Ms Orlaith Traynor, Chairperson

Mr Sean O'Brien, Deputy Chairperson

Dr Helen Buckley

Mr Paul Harrison

Judge Patrick McMahon (Retired)

Dr Margo Anglim

Prof Sheila Greene

Gender Balance

As of 31 December 2023, the Board had four (57%) female and three (43%) male members, with no positions vacant. The Board therefore meets the government target of a minimum of 40% representation of each gender in the membership of State Boards.

Meetings of the Board

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 shall hold as many meetings as are necessary for performing its functions, but shall hold at least 12 meetings a year. The Board held 18 scheduled meetings during 2023.

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 for other emergency hearings or additional meetings to grant emergency adoption orders, and this is reflected in the attendance report in Appendix A.

The Board passed a resolution to have a minimum of one meeting each year for governance matters only. Two governance meetings were held during 2023, on 23 May and 21 November.

At each Board meeting, the CEO report provides information and updates to the Board on the operation of the AAI, 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 two occasions in 2023; these meetings were conducted in the absence of the Executive. On each of the 'full' Board meeting dates the Board met without the Executive for such time as was required to discuss matters.

Committees of the Board

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, and there are two committees which have been appointed by the Board:

Risk and Audit Committee

The Risk and Audit Committee (RAC) comprises of two Authority board members and two external independent members. The role of the RAC is to support the Board in relation to its responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance and associated assurance. The RAC is independent from the financial management of the organisation. In particular, the RAC ensures that the internal control systems including audit activities are monitored actively and independently.

The members of the RAC in 2023 were

Ms Patricia Gilheaney (Chair)
Ms Orlaith Traynor (Chairperson of the Authority)
Mr Paul Harrison (Board Member)
Ms Tara McDermott (External Member) until 14/10/2023

The RAC 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 2023, the RAC met four times. The RAC invited members of the Executive, auditors or others to attend meetings and to provide pertinent information, as necessary. The CEO and the Head of Compliance attend all meetings. Crowleys DFK provides secretarial support to the committee.

Research Subcommittee

The Research Subcommittee comprises four Board members, two independent external members and six staff members.

The main functions of the Research Subcommittee are to support the Authority in the development and delivery of a research strategy, to regularly review and advise on such projects as are proposed by the Authority and to consider and make recommendations on matters of policy relating to research to the Board.

The Research Subcommittee also advises on research commissioned by the Board, promotes the dissemination of any research that is completed and advises on the allocation of research funds.

The members of the Research Subcommittee in 2023 were:

Dr Helen Buckley (Board Member)
Ms Orlaith Traynor (Chairperson of the Authority)
Prof. Sheila Greene (Board Member)
Dr Margo Anglim (Board Member)
Dr Claire McGettrick, Co-Director of the Clann Project (External Member)
Dr Richard Sullivan, Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia (External Member)
Mr Philip Crosby (interim CEO Jan–Mar)

Mr Colm O’Leary (interim CEO Apr–Dec)
Dr Judy Lovett (Research Officer)
Mr Darren Broomfield (Principal Social Worker)
Mr Gordon Corrigan (HEO Records Team)
Mr Mark Kirwan (Manager, Domestic Adoption Unit)
Ms Orla Bolger (Manager, Intercountry Adoption Unit)

The Research Subcommittee met three times in 2023.

Governance

The Board of the AAI 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 AAI are the responsibility of the CEO and the SMT. The CEO and the SMT 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 AAI.

Responsibilities

Board

The work and responsibilities of the Board are set out in the AAI’s Code of Governance.

Section 112 of the Adoption Act 2010 requires the CEO of the Authority 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 considering these financial statements prepared by the CEO, the Board of the Authority 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 overseeing that the CEO is keeping adequate accounting records which disclose, with reasonable accuracy at any time, its financial position and enable 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 Authority's website is the responsibility of the Board.

The Board is responsible for approving the annual Business Plan and budget and regularly evaluates the performance of the Authority by reference to the annual Business Plan and budget 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.

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.

Chairperson

The primary role of the Chairperson is providing leadership to the Board and the Authority 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;
- 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 AAI's Annual Report and financial statements 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 AAI operates. This is supported by the governance framework and corporate governance arrangements within the organisation.

As well as keeping all proper and usual accounts of money received and expended by the AAI, the CEO is also responsible for

- The implementation of policies approved by the Board;
- The day-to-day management of the staff;
- Carry on and manage and control generally the administration and business of the AAI;
- 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 AAI;
- Implementation of policy and progress on the Strategic Plan.

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 currently employed as public servants. From November 2020, in recognition of the quasi-judicial nature of the decisions and work of the Authority, the sum of €57,646 per annum is paid to the Chair. All payments are made quarterly in arrears.



Corporate Governance



Corporate Governance

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 Authority is allocated through the DCEDIY. The CEO is the Accounting Officer for the Authority. In 2023, the financial allocation of the Adoption Authority was €7,372,000.

As set out in Section 112 of the Adoption Act 2010, the CEO 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 (OCAG). The OCAG audited and approved the 2023 Financial Statements, and they are published on the Authority's website.

Crowleys DFK Chartered Accountants provided accountancy services to the Authority during 2023.



Internal Financial Control

The Board has overall responsibility for the internal financial control of the Authority. 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 AAI.



Budget Management

The CEO and the SMT prepare an annual budget based on the operational and developmental needs of the Authority. The annual budget is recommended for approval by the CEO to the Board. Day-to-day responsibility for managing expenditure within budget limits is assigned to the CEO and Head of Compliance with support from the Authority's outsourced finance consultants. Expenditure is monitored closely by the SMT and the CEO with support from the outsourced finance consultants. Reports are furnished to the DCEDIY as part of the drawdown process.



Risk and Audit Committee

The RAC 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/or private sectors (for membership see p. 20). The CEO and the Head of Compliance attend all meetings of the committee. The RAC met four times during 2023 and met with representatives from the OCAG, as well as internal auditors. The RAC maintained minutes or other reports of its meetings and activities. In its Annual Report 2023, the RAC expressed satisfaction with the general financial control environment operating within the Authority.

The RAC plays a fundamental role in ensuring that the Authority 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, 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 audits;

- 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 AAI;
- 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 RAC periodically reviews its own effectiveness and reports the results of that review to the Board.

The Committee's agenda in 2023 included

- Review of draft Annual Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2022;
- Discussion and approval of the Internal Audit Plan and Internal Audit Charter;
- Approval and review of 2023 Procurement Plan;
- Draft Governance Statement and Board Members' Report;
- Draft Statement of Internal Control 2022;
- OCAG Audit of 2022 Financial Statements;
- Accredited bodies;
- 2023 Budget and draft 2024 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.

Audits commissioned by the RAC included a review of the effectiveness of internal financial controls, a review of HR and Payroll, a review of the report on the Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan, a data protection review and a financial sustainability review of Helping Hands Adoption Mediation Agency (HHAMA), the agency accredited by the Authority to facilitate and mediate intercountry adoptions.

The Chair of the RAC formally presented the 2022 Annual Report of the RAC to the Board at the 09 May 2023 Board meeting.



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 SMT, provides the leadership in promoting risk management. The risk management framework and policy of the Authority is approved by the Board. This provides for a planned and systematic approach to identifying and managing a range of risk categories: Financial, Compliance and Governance, Strategic, Operational, Stakeholder and Reputational.

The Chief Risk Officer is a member of the SMT and reports directly to the CEO, the RAC and the Board. The Corporate Risk Register sets out the major risks facing the Authority 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 2023.



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 AAI.

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 Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) for use in government departments.

The contract for Internal Audit services procured in 2019 through the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) using their established framework for accountancy and auditing services ran until the end of 2023, and in November 2023 the Authority utilised the OGP to engage future services and support.



Procurement

The AAI operates under the Public Procurement Guidelines which provide the direction for all procurement policy activity and ensure that the objectives and key principles of competition, equality of treatment and transparency which underpin national and EU rules are complied with and observed.

The Authority avails of centralised managed contracts that have been put in place by the OGP, including the provision of stationery and office supplies, photocopying and foreign travel. The Authority continues to engage with the OGP for advice on current and future procurement requirements. In 2023, five contracts with a total contract value of over €25,000 were successfully procured in conjunction, where available, with the OGP in line with the Authority's 2023 Procurement Plan. The most significant procurement project of 2023 related to renovations to the ground floor area to accommodate the storage of records, where both project management and construction services were secured. Other major services procured include the document management system's ongoing development and maintenance and internal audit services.

For the financial year ended 31 December 2023, AAI can confirm that procedures are in place to ensure compliance with current procurement rules and guidelines.



Protected Disclosures

The Protected Disclosures Act 2014, as amended by the Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022, 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.

Following the amendment to the legislation, the Authority's Protected Disclosure's Policy was revised to reflect the legislative amendments. The Board approved this revised and updated policy on protected disclosures at its meeting in June 2023. The policy was brought to the attention of all staff and is published on the AAI's website.

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 AAI confirms that no reports were received and/or are under investigation in accordance with the provisions of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 (as amended 2022) for the financial year from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023.

Ethics in Public Office

Under the provisions of the Ethics in Public Office Act 1995 and the Standards in Public Office Act 2001, AAI Board members and some AAI staff members are required to disclose material interests. Annual statements of interests are requested from all AAI Board members as, under ethics legislation, they are designated directors, and these annual statements must be submitted to the Standards in Public Office Commission. Any AAI staff member who is deemed to hold a designated position of employment, is also required to complete a disclosure of interest statement if they have interests to disclose, both on appointment, and annually.

Board Evaluation

Under Section 4.6 of the Code of Practice for the 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. The Authority completed an external review in 2020 and implemented the recommendations arising from that report. The Authority completed its annual self-assessment for 2023 at the beginning of 2024. The next external evaluation of the Board and its Committees is due for completion in 2024.

Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

All public bodies in Ireland have a statutory duty to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect the human rights of their staff, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This is an obligation originated in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014. In the Strategic Plan for 2022–2024, the Authority commits to completing an assessment of the equality and human rights issues that are relevant to its purpose and functions and this will be progressed in 2024.

Disability Act

The Disability Act 2005 places a statutory obligation on public service organisations to provide support and access to services and facilities for people with disabilities. In line with the obligation placed on all public bodies, we promote and support the employment of people with disabilities. In 2023, the AAI made efforts to meet the minimum 3% target of employment for people with disabilities but we did not appear to meet this requirement as declared by our staff. We will reinforce our efforts in 2024 to meet this requirement and will continue to promote our commitment to enabling all staff to carry out their work on an equal basis through the provision of all necessary supports and accommodations.

Children First Act

All staff within the AAI are expected to have an awareness of child safety matters. The AAI recognises that protecting children from harm is everyone's responsibility. All staff are required to undertake Tusla, the Child and Family Agency's Children First e-learning programme and the social work team through the Relevant Person will update staff to any new issues or guidance in the area. The AAI is committed to responding to all matters of concern in a manner that is sensitive, empathetic, timely and in line with statutory guidelines. The AAI is fully committed to the implementation of this Child Safeguarding Statement and the procedures to support staff to keep children safe from harm.

Official Languages Act

The AAI has a number of legal obligations which are set out under the Official Languages Act 2003 and the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021. In line with these obligations, the AAI publishes public facing documents such as the Annual Report and vacancy advertisements in Irish. All queries, FOI requests, complaints and other communications received in Irish are responded to in the Irish language. All AAI branded stationery (e.g. letterheads) exhibit the AAI logo with the Irish language. Throughout 2023 the AAI began reviewing and updating all information provided through the Irish language, and this work is ongoing throughout 2024.

2022-2024
Strategic Plan



Section 108 of the Adoption Act 2010 requires the Authority to prepare and submit a three-year Corporate/Strategic Plan.

In February 2022, the AAI launched its 2022–2024 Strategic Plan. In 2023, the 2022–2024 Strategic Plan continued to serve as the overarching guide for annual business planning throughout this period and as the blueprint, outlining the key priorities, goals, objectives and actions, to enable the Authority to provide and ensure the highest possible standard of adoption services in Ireland.

During 2023, the AAI continued to deliver on our

commitment to provide excellent adoption and birth information and tracing services to the public at all times and worked to further enhance communication to the public and those involved in the adoption processes to encourage an improved awareness and understanding around adoption.

The 2022–2024 strategic priorities in Figure 1 below demonstrate the AAI’s commitment to being recognised as the centre of excellence and principal authoritative source of information on all aspects of adoption and as a provider and regulator of high quality adoption services in Ireland.

Figure 1: Strategic Priorities and Goals 2022-2024

Priorities	Goals
1. The child is the foremost priority and their best interests should be pursued in all adoption cases.	1.1. The primary goal of all adoptions is that the best interests of the child/young person are heard throughout the adoption process and they are responded to in a timely and meaningful manner throughout.
2. Achieve the highest standards of adoption services.	2.1 Ensure that all relevant parties can exercise their right to be heard throughout the full adoption process and support legal aid applications where required for parents. 2.2 Achieve the highest standard in the regulation and operation of the adoption services provided directly by the Authority or by those agencies accredited by the Authority.
3. Effectively implement the BITA.	3.1 Ensure that the BITA continues to be operationalised. 3.2 Develop an organisation that is ready to adapt quickly to changes in legislation.
4. Empower our people and deliver effective operations.	4.1 Build and maintain a workforce that has the capability, capacity and adaptability to achieve their career ambitions, and meet the changing needs of the adoption landscape. 4.2 Develop the Authority’s organisation structure, its processes, and technology to enable the delivery of the Strategic Plan.
5. Attain robust governance and supportive stakeholder relationships.	5.1 Develop effective and accountable governance, risk management and compliance arrangements. 5.2 Progress strong working relationships and collaboration with adoption stakeholders. 5.3 Improve awareness and understanding of the adoption process among stakeholders and the wider public.
6. Foster a culture of innovation.	6.1 Build and maintain innovative methods to ensure that the adoption services provided by the Authority, and those agencies accredited by the Authority, are of world-class standard. 6.2 Extend and develop capacity of Research Unit to enable the Authority to show clear research leadership in its field.

2023 Business Plan

The 2022–2024 Strategic Plan serves as the overarching guide for annual business planning throughout this period. The key components of the Business Plan for 2023 were derived from the Strategic Plan, while several other unplanned activities also took place throughout the year.

In July and October, respectively, the AAI marked the one-year anniversary of the implementation of services under the BITA, including the placement of the CPR on a statutory footing and the provision of information and tracing services. In respect of the tracing service, the AAI has received more tracing applications than at any time in its history, and all of these have been allocated to Social Workers for progressing within six months of the date of their receipt by the AAI.

Throughout 2023, we continued to deliver on our commitment to provide excellent adoption services to the public at all times, maintaining our focus on our key values of child-centredness, quality, accountability and respect. We worked closely with our line department (DCEDIY), as well as key stakeholders during 2023 on a number of initiatives. The digitisation of the AAI's adoption records continued, and extensive work on the organisation's document management system was completed. Office renovation and refurbishment was completed to accommodate our growing workforce both comfortably and safely. The AAI procured the services of a Building Services Design Lead to provide support in the fit-out of storage for relevant records. Construction works for this fit-out were commenced in 2023 and are on track to conclude in 2024.

We continued our focus to build our research capabilities through our Research team. A permanent Research Assistant was recruited in 2023 to join the team and to support the delivery of key objectives and projects identified for delivery through the Research Strategy 2023–2025.

During 2023, the AAI ensured our staff were well supported through our Wellness Programme. A number of initiatives and events were rolled out, including yoga classes and talks from the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Irish Heart Foundation. In 2023, the AAI Social Committee was formed, who organised a number of after-work events. The AAI procured an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provider through the OGP framework to support staff maintain and improve wellbeing in the workplace.



Events and Travel 2023



Vietnamese inter-disciplinary delegation's visit to Ireland

In May 2023, the Authority welcomed a six-person interdisciplinary delegation from the Department of Adoption–Ministry of Justice, the Authority's Central Authority counterpart in Vietnam.

Together, representatives of the Irish and Vietnamese Central Authorities reviewed the intercountry adoption (ICA) cooperation between the two countries in recent years; exchanged information on policies, laws, experiences, good practice and ways forward; reviewed the work of HHAMA, the Irish adoption mediation agency licensed to operate in Vietnam; and discussed the integration and development of Vietnamese children adopted in Ireland.

Officials from DCEDIY delivered a presentation on the implementation of the BITA to the Vietnamese delegation.

Conference attendance

Representatives from the Authority travelled to participate in various conferences in 2023 to gain and share knowledge and improve communications with other agencies and bodies.

The 2nd International Surrogacy Forum 2023 took place in Copenhagen, Denmark, 8–9 June. The conference, titled 'Global surrogacy in a changing world – Ethical, practical and legal developments in assisted reproduction and cross-border parenthood', featured sessions reporting on developments in surrogacy around the globe, children's voices and children's rights, views of surrogates and the role of agencies.

In August, the Annual Conference of the Archives & Records Association (ARA) returned to Belfast for the first time since 2007. Under the theme 'Communities', the ARA conference programme followed six tracks – Archives & Records, Conservation, Record-keeping profession, Users and communities, Digital and Information Governance – to engage communities of users, stakeholders, colleagues and collaborators.

The Intercountry Adoption Network (ICAN) held its seminar in Bern, Switzerland, in November. The ICAN takes an informal, collaborative approach to the exchange of information among receiving countries.

Also in Switzerland in November, the city of Sierre hosted the 13th International Child Identity Protection conference, 'The "Manufactured" Child – What are the challenges for children's rights, identity and origins?'. The conference facilitated a proactive interdisciplinary dialogue between stakeholders – children who are now adults as a result of assisted reproductive technology (ART), professionals, parents who have recourse to ART, politicians, academia – about children's rights and the new ART techniques; to highlight good practices as well as the abuses that allow or compromise the respect of the rights of the children concerning both their identity and their family life; to deepen the scientific and legal knowledge in this field; and to provide concrete tools to the professionals who work with these children and their families.

The Research Officer attended the World Association of Infant Mental Health conference in Dublin in July, and the Children's Research Network conference in UCD in December. Both proved extremely relevant and informative to Research, and any points of note were communicated to the Research Subcommittee, the SMT and to staff through all-staff meetings.

See also the [Research section](#) for an overview of the Research team's extensive networking and engagement activities.

Adoption Operations





Domestic and intercountry adoption operations are overseen by a Principal Officer who also fulfils the function of Board Secretary.

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, 103 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted in 2023, an increase of three from the previous year. The expiration dates of 14 Declarations were extended in 2023, an increase of five from the previous year. In most cases, Declarations were granted within three to four weeks of receipt of the application.

Of the Declarations granted, 92 were granted in respect of married persons or couples, seven in respect of co-habiting persons or couples, one in respect of a civil partnership, and three in respect of single applicants.

Adoption Orders

The Authority received 117 adoption applications in 2023, and 90 Adoption Orders were granted during the year. This is a decrease from 102 granted in the previous year. The majority of orders granted were in respect step-parent adoptions which totalled 47. The number of adoption orders made for children who had been in long-term foster care in 2023 was 30. The remainder consisted of eight infants placed from birth for the purpose of adoption, and five cases of children living with extended family members.

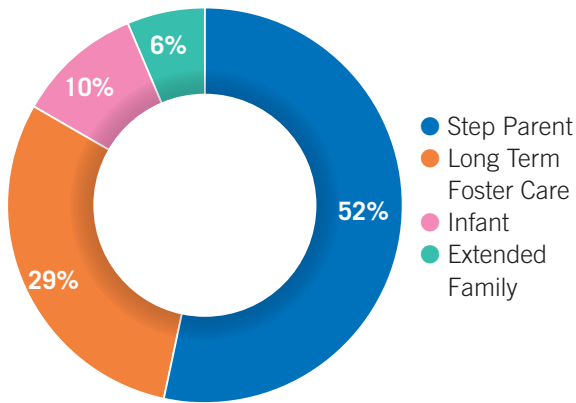


Figure 2: Adoption Orders granted in 2023

Adoption Orders cannot be granted once a child turns 18 years of age and is legally considered an adult. Of the 90 Adoption Orders granted in 2023, in 37 cases the child was 17 years of age; in 27 cases they were aged between 12 and 16 years, in 16 cases they were aged between seven and 11 years, in four cases they were aged between two and six years, and in six cases they were one year old.

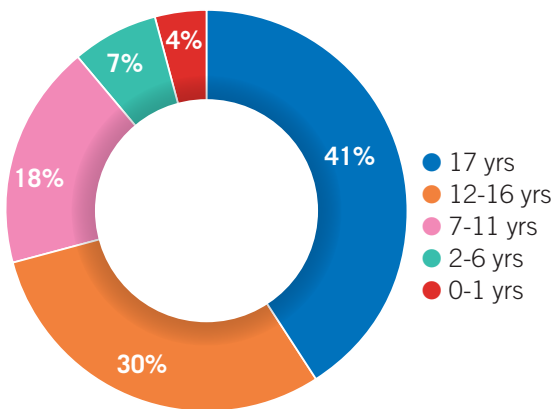


Figure 3: Domestic Adoptions by Age of Child granted in 2023

The majority of applications, 89, were assessed and facilitated by the adoption services of Tusla. The remaining 28 applications were assessed and facilitated by the AAI accredited agency, Pact.

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 2023, 18 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 18 applications were granted.

Of these applications, 11 orders were made by the High Court in circumstances where it was deemed inappropriate or not possible to notify and consult with the birth father. The remaining seven orders were made in circumstances where the identity of the birth father was unknown.

In 2023, one application was 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 this matter, the identity of the birth father was unknown and the order was granted.

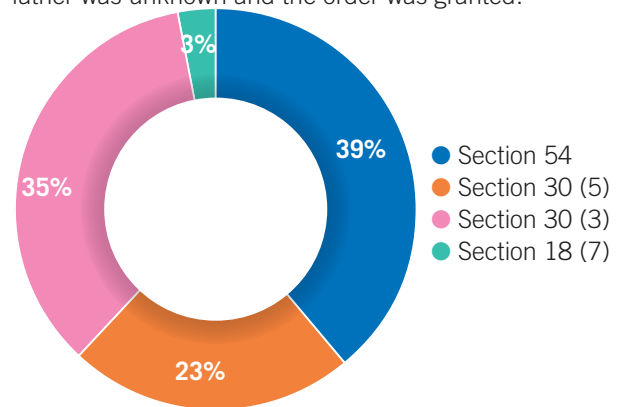


Figure 4: Applications to the High Court

To allow the Authority to make an adoption order, Tusla (or in certain cases, the applicants) must make an application to the High Court under Section 54 in the 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 2023, 12 applications were made to the High Court under Section 54 of the Act and these were granted in 2023. In all of these cases, the birth mother or guardian's consents could not be obtained.

Intercountry Adoption

Activity Analysis

Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability

The Authority granted 37 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability in 2023 to applicants seeking to adopt abroad and extended 18 existing Declarations by one year (Figure 5).

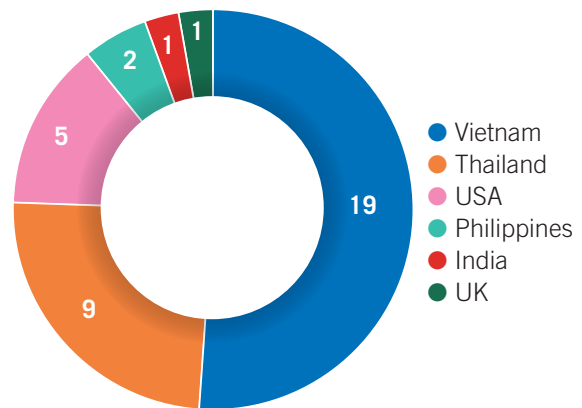


Figure 5: Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability granted in 2023

Register of Intercountry Adoptions

In 2023, 209 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions on foot of applications for recognition of adoptions. Of this number, 184 applications were for recognition of adoptions effected outside of Ireland by adopters who were habitually resident outside of the State (Figure 6).

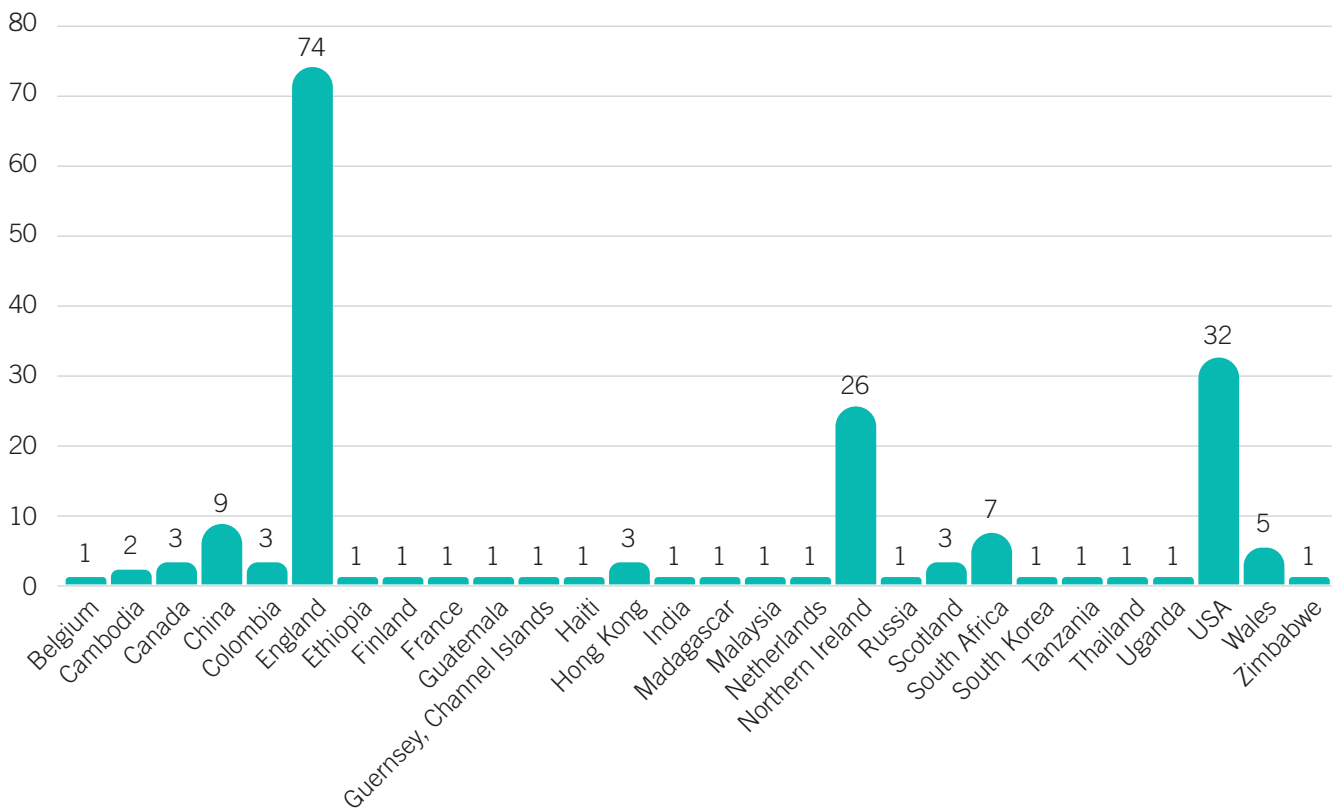


Figure 6: Intercountry adoptions recognised in 2023 where the adoptions were effected by adopters habitually resident outside of the State

Matching of Children

The ICA team collaborate with the Social Work team and a medical advisor, to advise on the matching of children's needs with the abilities and capacities of prospective adoptive parents. In 2023, 20 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.

This year, 25 entries were in respect of intercountry adoptions of children into Ireland by adopters habitually resident in the State (Figure 7).

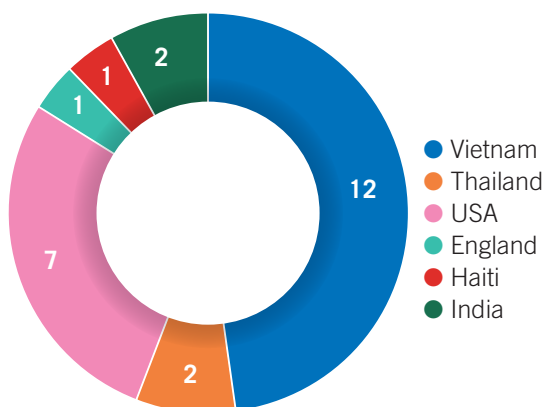


Figure 7: Entries granted into the Register of Intercountry Adoptions (RICA) for adoptions into Ireland in 2023

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 Register of Intercountry Adoptions (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).

Two entries were made in the Register in 2023, compared with three in 2022.

A Central Authority under the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-Operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption

The Adoption Authority is designated a Central Authority under the Adoption Act 2010. In its role as a Central Authority, the Manager of the Intercountry Adoption Unit is the designated contact for all matters pertaining to The Hague Convention.

Engagement – Intercountry

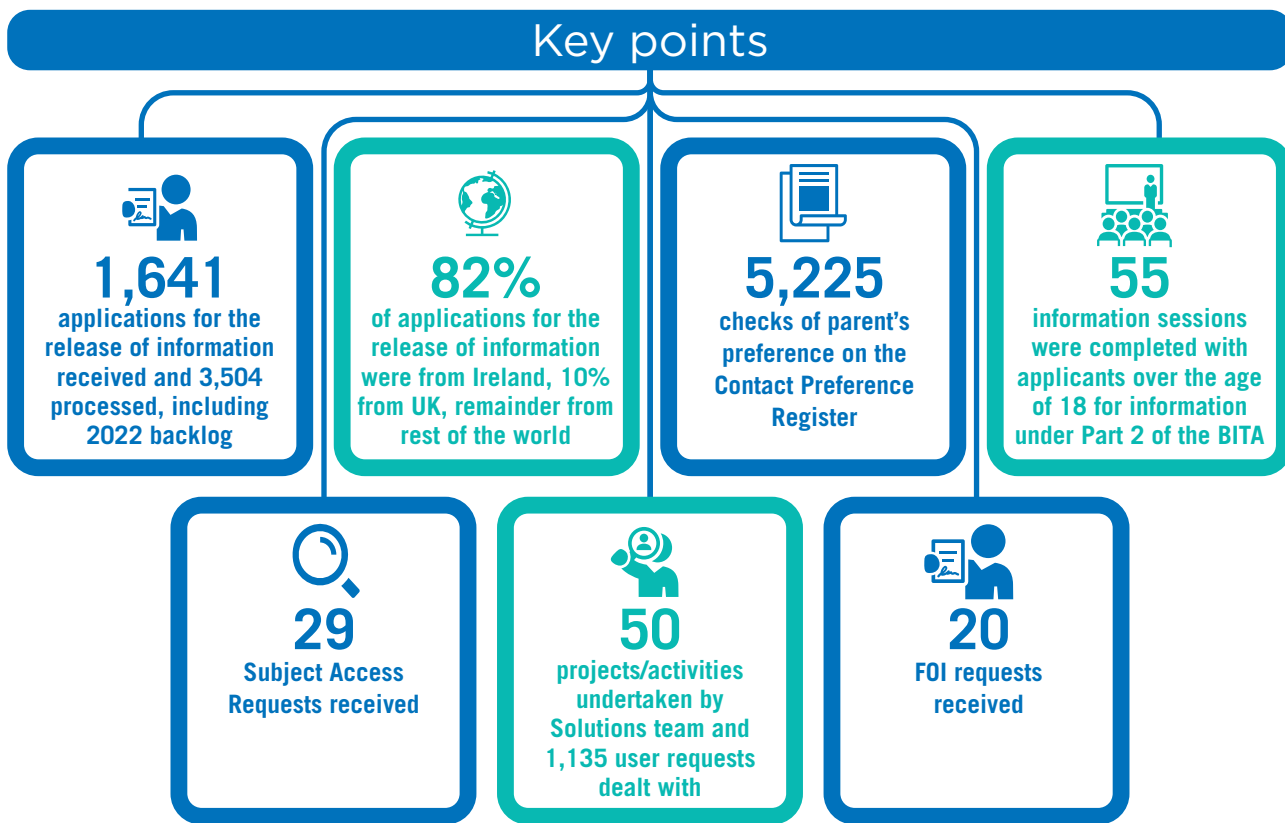
Biannually, the Anglophone Conference takes place online in respect of Intercountry Adoption matters. On the 18 April 2023, the ICA Unit Manager chaired the Anglophone Conference on behalf of Ireland and on 21 September 2023, the ICA Unit Manager and the Principal Social Worker represented the Authority at the Anglophone Conference hosted online by New Zealand.

In June 2023, the Authority made a formal decision to suspend its intercountry adoption programme with Haiti for two years. The Authority had grown increasingly concerned in relation to the general deterioration in the situation in Haiti where political instability and gang violence continued. The situation caused major risk factors for security as well as affecting the ethics of adoption procedures, the legality of which, in accordance with the requirements of the Hague Convention could no longer be guaranteed. The suspension will be reviewed in June 2025.

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

Information Services and Records





The Information Services and Records Unit established in 2022 to implement the BITA is overseen by a Principal Officer who has responsibility for Records, Data Protection, Digital Solutions, Archives and FOI activities.

Activity Analysis

Records

Processing of 2022 Applications under Parts 2-4 of the BITA

For the first three quarters of 2023, the Records team focused on clearing the backlog of information release applications. A total of 2,537 applications had been received in 2022 during the three months following the

commencement on 3 October of the relevant sections of the BITA, with 464 processed by 31 December 2022 and 2,073 left to be processed.

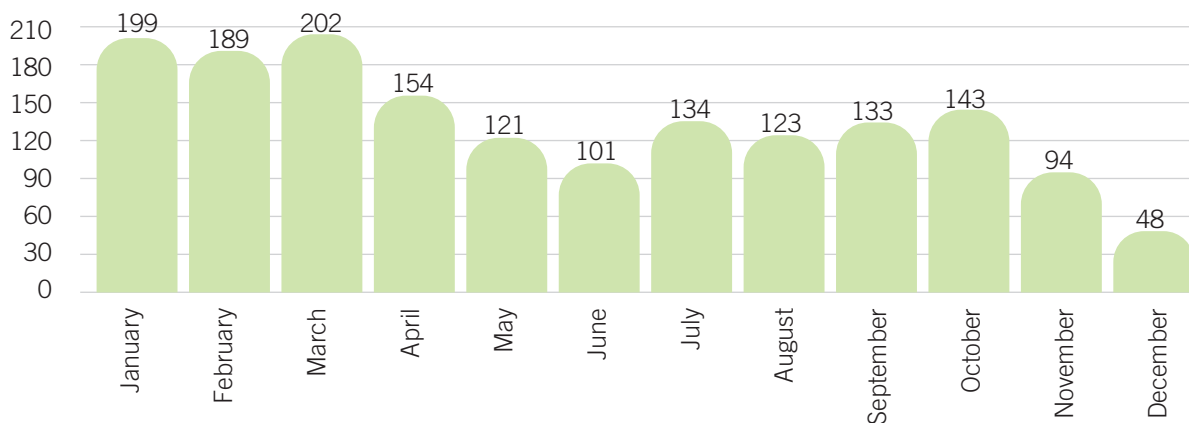
By 18 September 2023, the Records team had cleared the backlog and for the remainder of 2023 met the statutory obligations and processed all BITA applications received within 30 days of receipt.

Information Release under Parts 2-4 of the BITA

Number of Applications in 2023

Between January 1 and December 21 2023, the Authority received 1,641 applications for the release of information as broken down in Table 1.

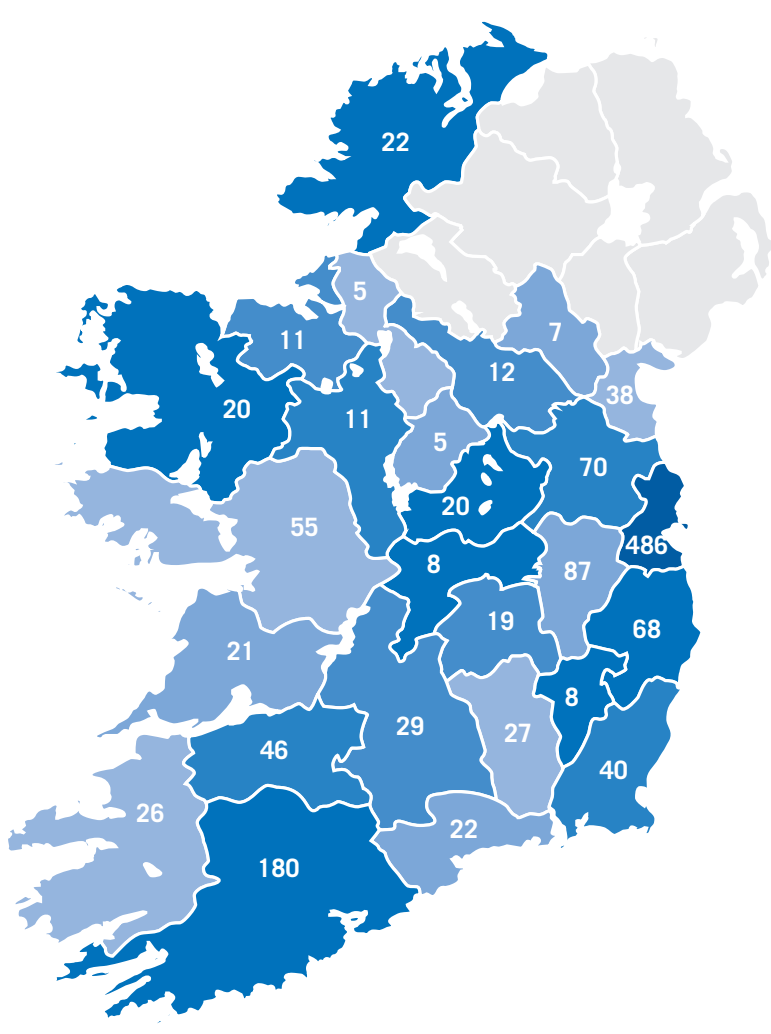
Table 1: Number of applications in 2023 for the release of information



Location of Applications

A total of 1,343 applications were received from within the Republic of Ireland, with the largest number from County Dublin and the smallest number of applications from both County Leitrim and County Longford. These represent 82% of all applications. For a county-by-county breakdown, see Table 2.

Table 2: Breakdown by county of applications for information release in 2023

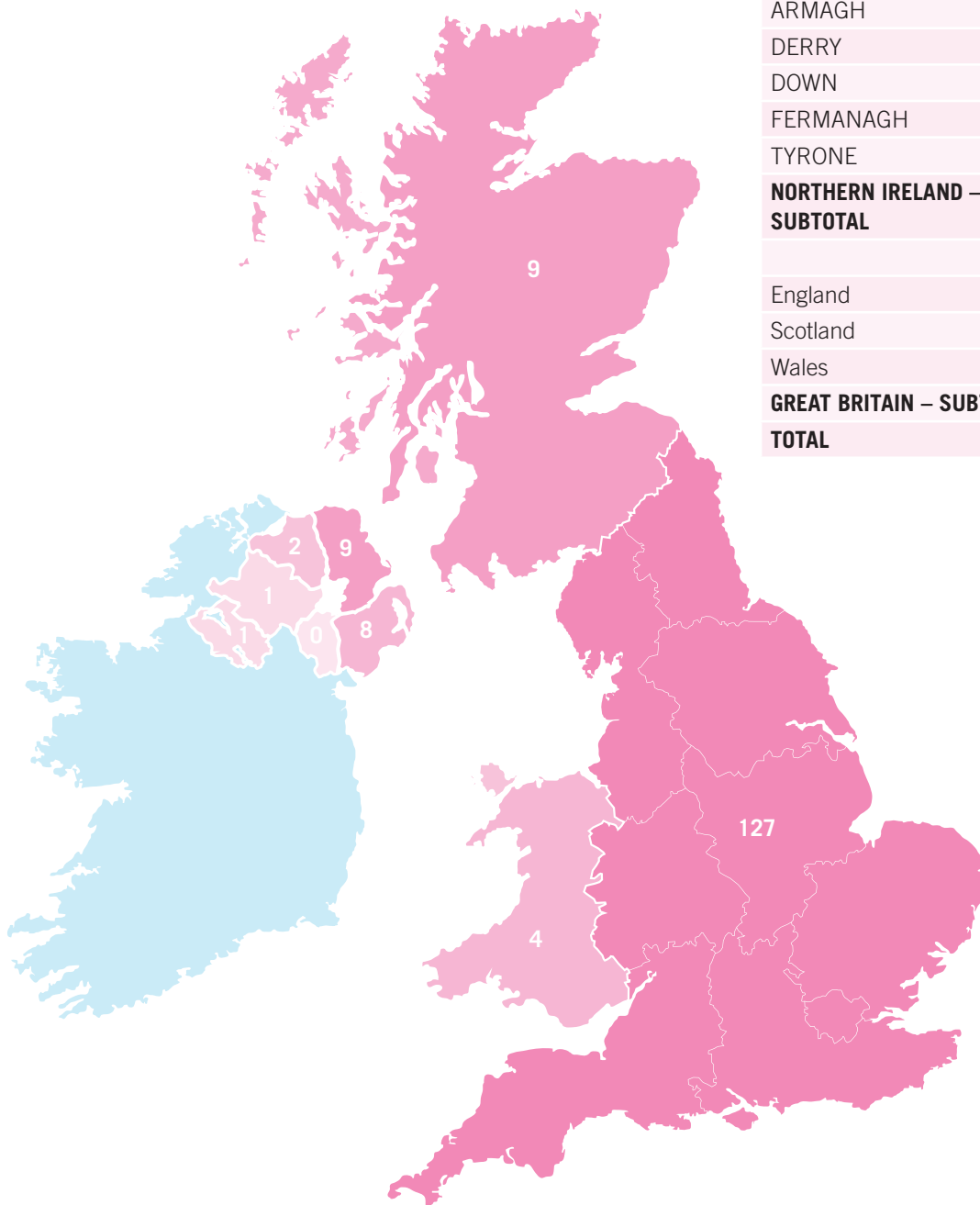


IRELAND - COUNTY	Number of Applications
CARLOW	8
CAVAN	12
CLARE	21
CORK	180
DONEGAL	22
DUBLIN	486
GALWAY	55
KERRY	26
KILDARE	87
KILKENNY	27
LAOIS	19
LEITRIM	5
LIMERICK	46
LONGFORD	5
LOUTH	38
MAYO	20
MEATH	70
MONAGHAN	7
OFFALY	8
ROSCOMMON	11
SLIGO	11
TIPPERARY	29
WATERFORD	22
WESTMEATH	20
WEXFORD	40
WICKLOW	68
TOTAL	1,343

The next most significant jurisdiction for applications was the United Kingdom. A breakdown of figures from the UK between England, Scotland, Wales and the individual counties of Northern Ireland can be seen in Table 3. This represents 10% of all applications.

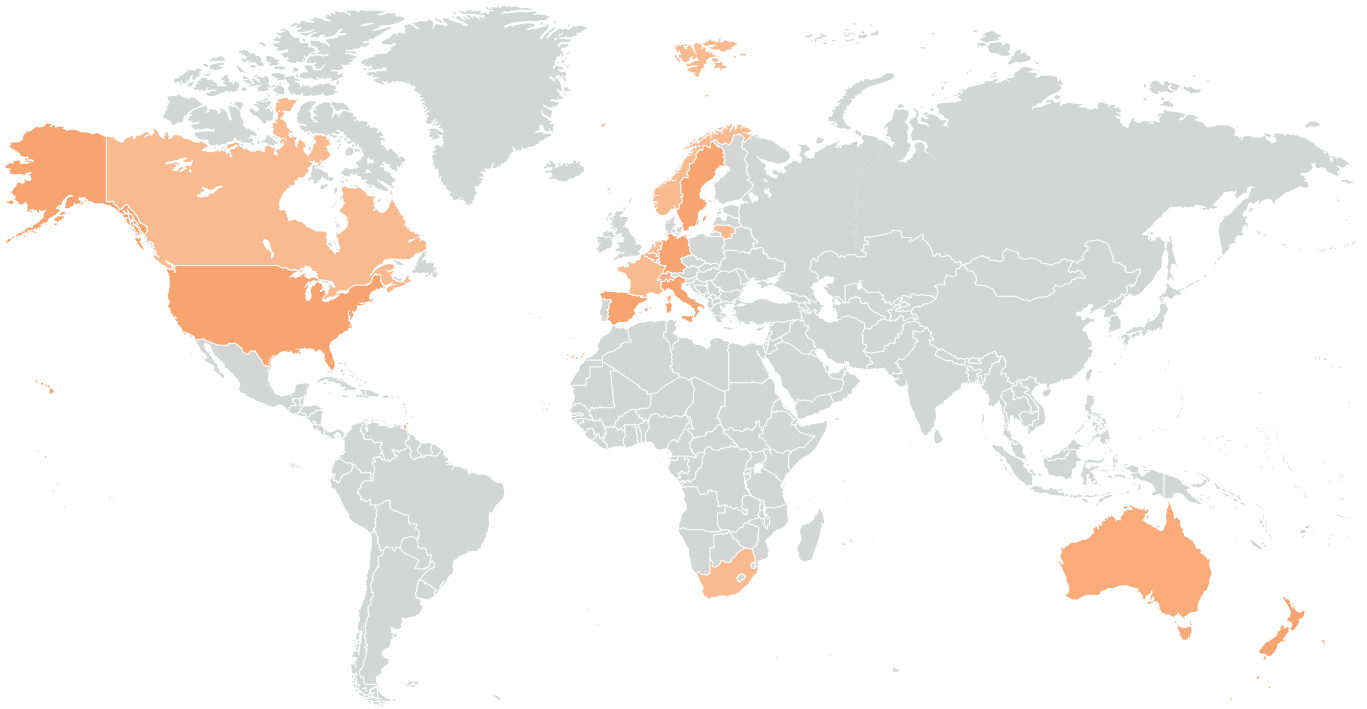
Table 3: Breakdown of applications for information release in 2023 from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

UNITED KINGDOM	Number of Applications
ANTRIM	9
ARMAGH	0
DERRY	2
DOWN	8
FERMANAGH	1
TYRONE	1
NORTHERN IRELAND – SUBTOTAL	21
England	127
Scotland	9
Wales	4
GREAT BRITAIN – SUBTOTAL	140
TOTAL	161



The balance of applications other than from Ireland or the United Kingdom were from 15 different jurisdictions. These represent 8% of all applications. A breakdown of the applications from these jurisdictions can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Breakdown by country from where applications for information release were requested in 2023



Jurisdiction	Number of Applications
Australia	29
Canada	13
France	6
Germany	9
Italy	1
Lithuania	1
New Zealand	4
Norway	1
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago	1
South Africa	1
Spain	3
Sweden	1
Switzerland	3
The Netherlands	3
United States of America	57
No address provided	4
TOTAL	137

Category of Applicants

The following table (Table 5) sets out the number of applications for information release per category of applicant as defined in the BITA.

Table 5: Number of applicants for information release according to category of applicant as defined in the BITA

Category*	Definitions	Number of Applications
Relevant Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an adopted person; a person who is, or who has reasonable grounds for suspecting that he or she is, the subject of an incorrect birth registration;** or a person who has been, or who has reasonable grounds for suspecting that he or she has been, at any time in the period following his or her birth and ending on the date on which he or she attained the age of 18 years; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> resident in an institution specified in the Schedule of the BITA, or the subject of a nursed out arrangement or a boarded out arrangement. 	1,485
Qualifying Person	The son or daughter of a relevant person is termed a 'qualifying person'.	77
Qualifying Relative	<p>The next of kin of a relevant person is termed a 'qualifying relative' under the BITA who may make an application for information if the relevant person died as a child in an institution.</p> <p>For the purposes of an application, 'next of kin' can mean one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a deceased relevant person's mother or father; the relevant person's brother(s) or sister(s), if the deceased relevant person's parents are deceased the relevant person's uncle or aunt, if the relevant person's parents and siblings (if any) are deceased; the relevant person's niece(s) or nephew(s), if the relevant person's parents, siblings (if any), and aunts and uncles (if any) are deceased. 	79
TOTAL		1,641
<p>*As indicated by applicant **Within the Relevant Persons category, 63 applicants indicated that they were, or had reasonable grounds for suspecting that they were, the subject of an incorrect birth registration.</p>		

Format of information release requested

A total of 536 (33%) requested the release of their information via hardcopy posted to their address, and 1,105 (66%) requested their information electronically via email.

Check of the CPR for a parent's Contact Preference under Sections 7 (1), 8 (2), 9 (4), and 10 (4) of the BITA and Section 2.3.2.5 of the BITA – Policy Guidelines

The Authority completed 5,225 checks of parent's preference on the CPR in 2023, 3,504 of which related to the release of records by the Authority itself, while 1,720 related to the release of Information by Tusla, the

Child and Family Agency. All requests for checks of the Contact Preference Register by Tusla – the Child and Family Agency were completed within the mandatory three working day timeframe.

Release of Genetic Medical Information under Section 16 of the BITA

A total of 832 applicants nominated a medical practitioner in their application for the sharing of genetic medical information of a relevant person. Two applicants stated that they did not currently have a medical practitioner, while 807 declined to nominate a medical practitioner.

Information Sessions under Section 17 (2) of the BITA

Where a ‘no contact’ preference is recorded against a birth parent’s entry on the CPR, the Authority is required to conduct an information session conveying the text set out in Annex 1 of the protocol,¹ with any applicant who is requesting their birth certificate, birth information, early life information, care information, medical information or provided items under the BITA.

Fifty-five information sessions were completed with applicants over the age of 18 for information under Part 2 of the BITA. No information sessions were refused by applicants. All 55 information sessions took place via telephone call with a designated person, as defined in Annex 2 of the protocol. In 50 out of 55 applicants only the initial contact was required to arrange an information session. In the five additional cases, a second communication was required to agree a date for the information session with the applicant. Twenty-six of the applications were for information release by the Authority, while the remaining 29 were for the release of information by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

Release of Information with reference to Section 19 (7) of the BITA

A total of 3,504 applications were completed and information released to applicants by 31 December 2023. All applications were acknowledged within the mandatory five-day time period. Until the backlog was cleared in September, all applicants were advised that the release of their records could take up to the 90-day statutory limit for release of information.

Reviews under Section 2.7 of the BITA – Policy Guidelines

The Authority appointed a second Review Officer for the purposes of Section 2.7 of the Policy Guidelines on 29 August 2023. The Authority received 78 requests for reviews between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023.

Contact Preference Register under Part 6 of the BITA

On 1 July 2022, the CPR came into existence on a statutory footing under Part 6 of the BITA.

The main function of the CPR is to enable contact between family members affected by adoption. The register also serves as a way to lodge a contact preference, including a request for privacy. Applicants have the option to share information that could be beneficial to a family member, such as medical or background information.

Applicants to the register can lodge an item (letter, photograph etc.) for a specified person, which will be given to the specified person if they join or have previously joined the register.

Number of Applications for Registration

Between 1 January 2023 and year end, the Authority received 313 applications from adoptees, 27 applications from parents and 105 applications from other relatives to the CPR. It should be noted that a portion of these represented updates to existing entries on the CPR, e.g. change of contact details and updating of contact preferences, etc.

TABLE 6	Records released within one month	Records released within three months	Records released after three months	TOTAL
Relevant Person	432	355	2,591	3,378
Qualifying Person	31	22	67	120
Qualifying Relative	2	1	3	6
TOTAL	465	378	2,661	3,504

Table 6: Release of information following request with reference to statutory timeframes

1. Communication Protocol Between the Adoption Authority of Ireland (‘The Authority’) and the Child and Family Agency–Tusla (‘The Agency’) regarding Chapter 2 of the Policy Guidelines made by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth under Sections 19, 25 and 31 of the BITA.

Category of Registrants

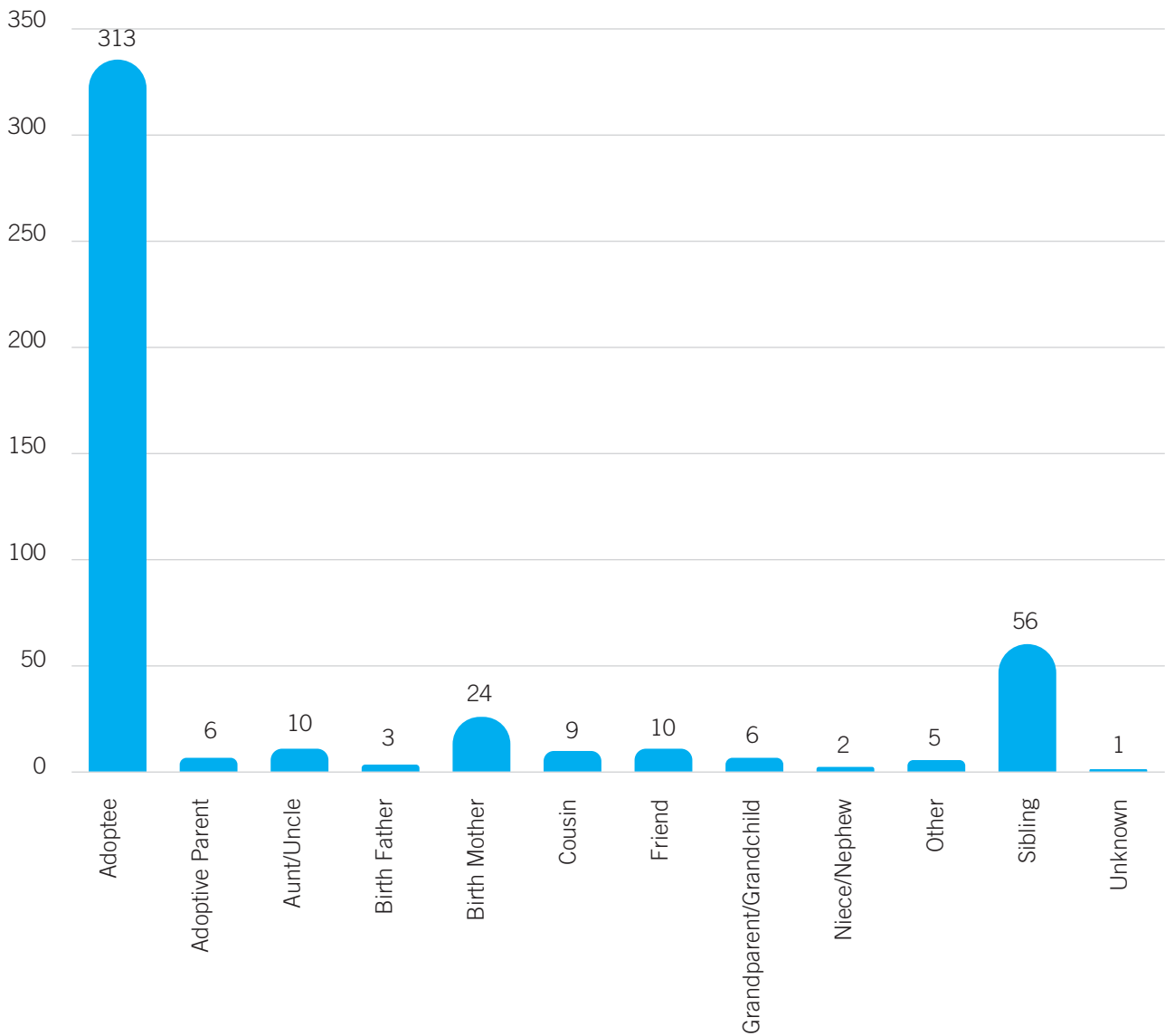
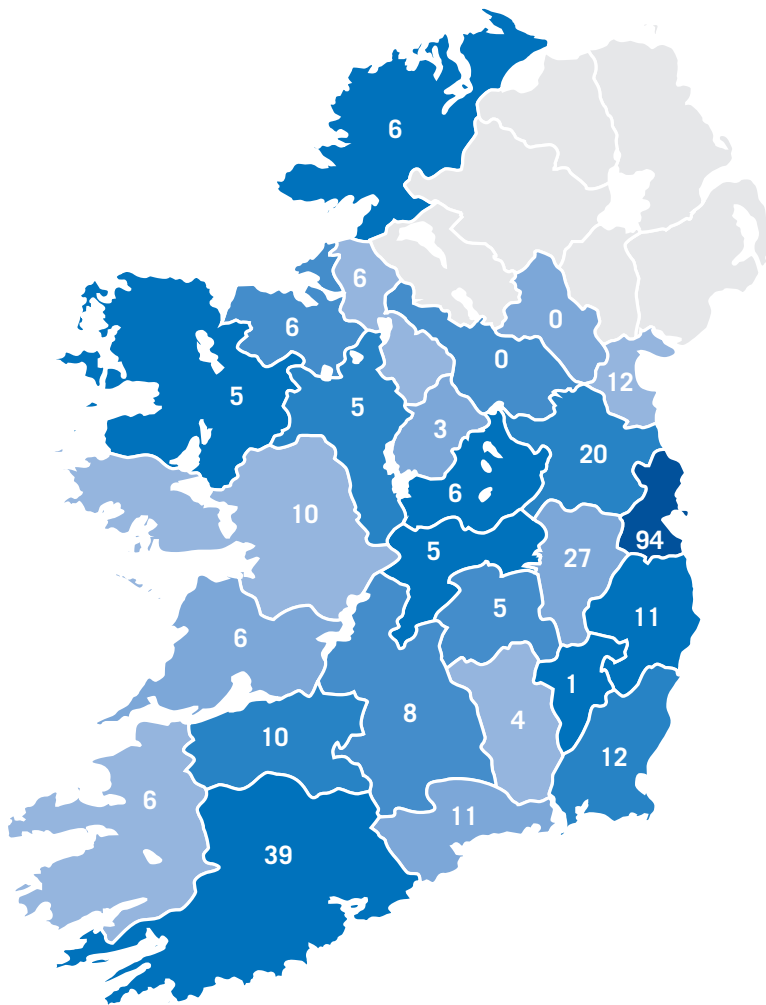


Table 7: Number of applications to the CPR/request for changes to CPR entry in 2023, according to category of registrant

Location of Registrants

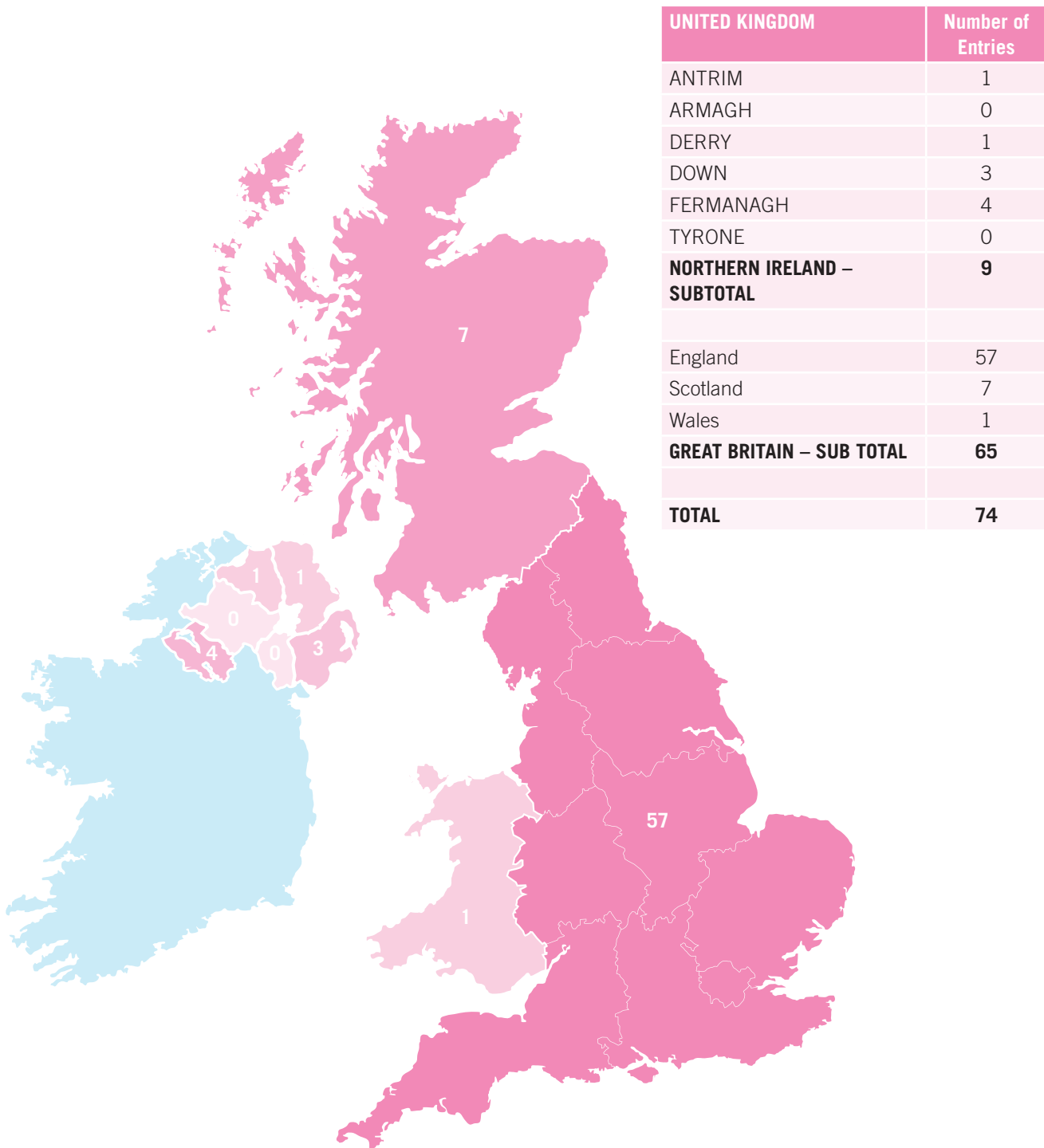
A total of 318 entries on the register are from within the Republic of Ireland, with the largest number from County Dublin and no entries from County Cavan. These represent 71% of all entries. For a county-by-county breakdown, see Table 8.

Table 8: Location in Ireland of applications for entry on the CPR in 2023



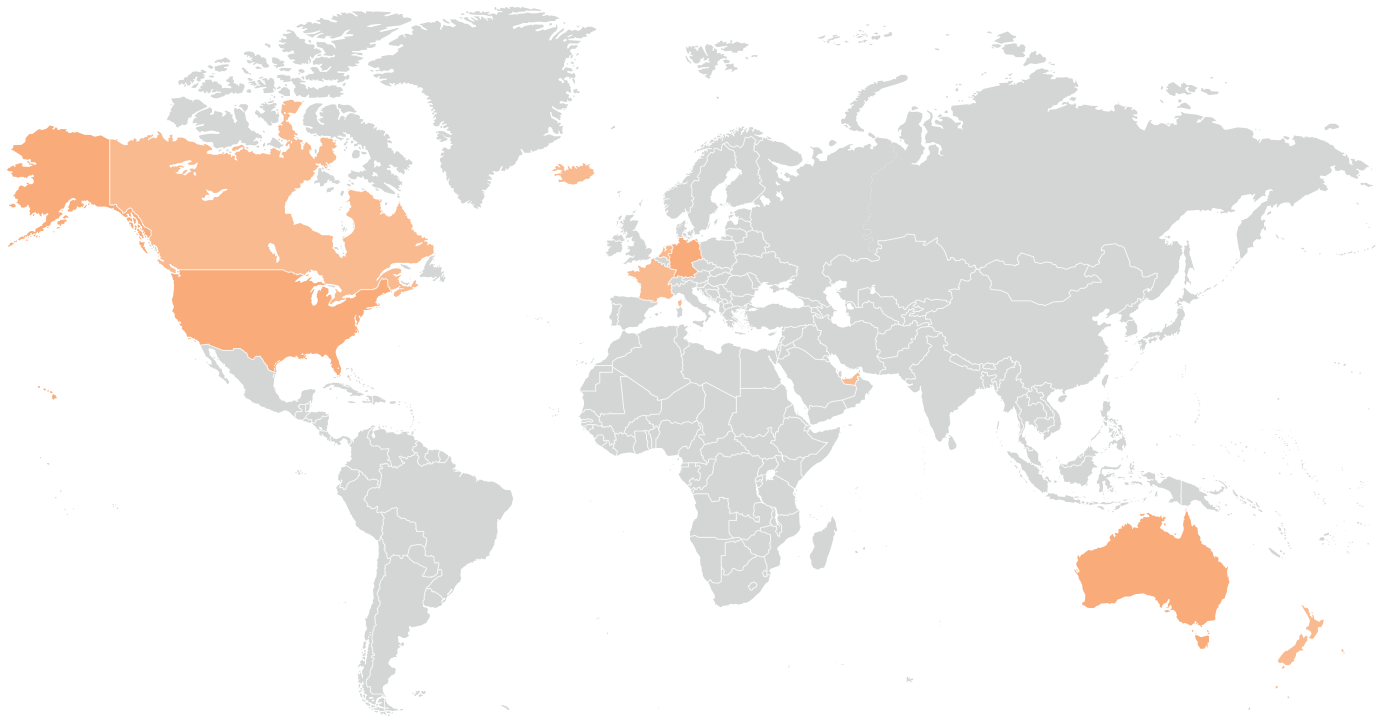
The next most significant jurisdiction for entries on the register is the United Kingdom. A breakdown of figures from the UK between England, Scotland, Wales and the individual counties of Northern Ireland can be seen in Table 9. These represent 17% of all entries.

Table 9: Location in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland of applications for entry on the CPR in 2023



The balance of entries, other than from Ireland or the United Kingdom, are from 10 different jurisdictions. These represent 12% of all entries. A breakdown of the entries from these jurisdictions can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10: Locations outside of Ireland and the UK of applications for entry on the CPR in 2023



Jurisdiction	Number of Entries
Andorra	1
Australia	12
Canada	4
France	2
Germany	2
Iceland	1
Netherlands	3
New Zealand	3
United Arab Emirates	1
United States of America	15
No address provided	4
TOTAL	53

Lodging of information and Items under Section 39 of the BITA

Twelve provided items were lodged with the Authority in 2023.

Solutions

In 2023, the Solutions team managed projects that ranged from ingestion of document images acquired from accredited bodies (either Adoption or Information and Tracing) that no longer have accreditation, structural changes to our Electronic Document Management System (e-DMS), process improvement reviews and additions and enhancements to existing tools. All projects were carried out underpinning our principles of



thus providing Authority staff with the tools they need to continue to provide our service users with a quality service.

Of the 50 projects/activities undertaken in 2023, an illustrative cross-section is described below.

1. Future Proofing Data – Ingestion of document images and unstructured data

At the beginning of 2023, two former accredited bodies' digitised case and register book images were held on a read-only database, managed by a third-party vendor. The digitised images and metadata were available to our staff to be searched under licence and proved very valuable in providing fullest information possible to AAI's service users under the BITA. To improve the way our data is stored and searched, we amalgamated our two e-DMS systems, bringing all images and metadata into

one central store. This gave the Authority an opportunity to update the metadata, align metadata with other Authority data stores and assist our staff in search and retrieval tasks. In total 38,542 images of historic files and registers ranging in date from the years 1908 to 2019 were ingested. All digitised images and metadata are included in our robust backup and recovery procedures. There is cost savings on an annual licences fee into the future. Completion of this project has resulted in Authority staff being able to provide service users with the fullest information profile that we have available to us, in the shortest possible time.

2. Deployment of New Tools – Development of an Authority Intranet Site

An Authority intranet site was developed with the assistance of Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) staff. It sits on the SharePoint site in OGCIO, who manage and maintain it as part of its Build-to-Share service. The Solutions team worked very closely with OGCIO to bring about changes to the site to align it with Authority staff requirements. After the launch of the site, the Solutions team became responsible for the administration of the site within the Authority. The team provide assistance and training with various aspects of content related queries. The intranet home page acts as a login landing page and provides links to all of the other tools available to users.

Completion of this project provided a means for users to share news items and documents. Staff welcomed it and continue to get value from it.

3. Process Improvement – Deployment of ICT Ticketing System

The Solutions team developed a user support ticketing system to manage and prioritise requests relating to our software tools. Root cause analysis of the ticketing data enables any training or underlying issues with our tool set to be addressed, thus improving the user experience and elapsed time to resolution. All calls to the Solutions team for assistance are logged here. Users' calls are assigned a number and acknowledged via email, allowing easy follow up if necessary. In this context, support means provision of assistance, developments and training, troubleshooting and resolving user issues as they arise.

During 2023, the Solutions team managed 1,135 user requests in-house. Of these, 965 were received and resolved on the same day. We use priority levels to determine urgency and schedule our work.² Table 12 below summarises the number of user requests received in 2023 according to priority level.

Priority Level	Priority Level Definition	Total
1	All users impacted	2
2	Impacts only one team	76
3	Impacts only one staff member	377
4	Development or change requests	161
5	Data (structured or unstructured) amendments	519
Total		1,135

Table 12: Number of user requests received in 2023 according to priority level

Where requests could not be resolved in house, our e-DMS third-party provider assisted with 24 requests, and our network hosts assisted with 252 incidents or requests. The majority of requests passed on to OGCI0 covered account creation, user permissions and joiners, movers and leavers' processes.

Requests by category	Request Count
e-DMS	779
MS Office Tools	90
Network Service	58
User Profiles	53
Web Forms	47
Intranet	36
Communications	21
Printing	21
Editing Tool	19
Training	8
White Board Tool	3
Total	1,135

Table 13: Categories of requests from users submitted to the ICT Helpdesk in 2023

A complement of four staff allowed progression and guidance on a number of e-DMS related projects. Finding more innovative ways of working with digitised material, encouraging user opinion and providing our clients and stakeholders with a better and fuller service remained paramount.

Advances in the digitisation programme continue to allow the Authority to move forward with replacing existing document images with 300DPI HD standard images. The results are seen in the superior visual quality brought to impaired historic document images, thus minimising physical handling of these fragile items.

A digital signature tool introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be useful where there is a requirement for digital documents to be signed and passed between parties. The time saving element is significant, particularly with a blended work model, allowing decisions, agreements and contracts to be formally signed off. The digital signature is fully integrated in our document editing package.

The year 2023 saw no changes to our third-party e-DMS support supplier. Our online web-forms and white board tool providers also remained the same.

Archives

During 2023, the Adoption Authority appointed a Higher Executive Officer to serve as BITA Review Officer and Freedom of Information Officer. The name of the team changed to Archives and Freedom of Information to reflect the addition of this function to the team.

National Archives Acts 1986–2018

The Authority continued to fulfil its obligations under the National Archives Acts 1986–2018 with regard to Records Management by continuing to develop records retention and disposal schedules for teams in the Authority. In 2023, the AAI developed retention and disposal schedules for three teams as well as a draft Records Management policy. The Authority also took part in four meetings of the Network of State Archivists and Records Managers in 2023.

- Priority 1 calls are ones that affect the whole organisation.
Priority 2 is used where an entire team is impacted. This generally relates to urgent development requests or new permissions requests rather than systems down or partially down.
Priority 3 generally relates to user issues with permissions, equipment or tool settings.
Priority 4 is used for development requests and these relate to ongoing projects or requests for new project or work items.
Priority 5 are normally quick fixes and resolved within in a day.

Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022

Part 7 of the BITA provides for the safeguarding of records. It enables the transfer of records to the AAI, under a direction of the Authority. The purpose of these legislative provisions is to ensure the safeguarding of important historic and relevant records in relation to adoption, boarded out or nursed out arrangements, alleged illegal birth registrations and Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions.

In 2023, the Board of the Adoption Authority approved five directions under Section 48 of the BITA for the transfer of relevant records by information sources.

Direction Issued to	Relevant Records
Sisters of the Holy Faith – Irish Region	Records of St Brigid's Orphanage; St Brigid's Adoption Society; and St Brigid's Information and Tracing Service
Irish Episcopal Conference (Roman Catholic)	Cura Cares – Crisis Pregnancy Agency records relating to relevant persons
Health Service Executive (HSE)	Selected County Home records related to fostering (nursed out and boarded out) of relevant persons
The Protestant Orphanage Charity	'Westbank' orphanage records of relevant persons
Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC)	Records relating to the Society's functions under the Children Act 1908, Part 1, Section 2 i.e. persons who were nursed out

Table 14: Directions under s.48 of the BITA for the transfer of relevant records approved by the AAI Board in 2023

National Centre for Research and Remembrance

The Authority was represented at, and participated in, three meetings of the Archives Sub-Group of the National Centre for Research and Remembrance (NCRR) Steering Group in 2023 – as provided for by Action 6 of the Action Plan for Survivors and Former Residents of Mother and Baby and County Home Institutions. The Authority also completed an in-depth audit of relevant records for the National Archives with reference to the NCRR.

Freedom of Information Requests

The Authority publishes details of FOI requests received, in accordance with the requirements of the DPENDR's Code of Practice for Freedom of Information for Public Bodies.

In 2023, the Adoption Authority received 20 requests under the Freedom of Information Acts.

- four were declined;
- 13 were granted/part granted; and
- three were withdrawn/handled outside of FOI.

In the case of two of the declined requests, the reason for decline was that the FOI 2014 Act designates the AAI 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'.

In the case of the other two declined requests the information was either not available or it is already in the public domain.

Three requests were handled outside of FOI. In these cases, the applicants were advised to submit a Data Subject Access Request under the GDPR or to apply under the BITA as appropriate.

Data Protection

Subject Access Requests (SARs)

In 2023, the Authority saw a decline in the number of incoming SARs it received. Twenty-nine (29) requests were received, representing a 60% decrease on the previous year (73).

A number of factors contributed to the decrease in requests, such as

- The commencement of the Contact Preference Register under S.I. 321/2022; and
- Information release provisions under the BITA which commenced on 3 October 2022.

Since the commencement of BITA 2022, the data protection officer (DPO) has seen a decline in requests from adopted persons; the majority of the requests the DPO receives relate to the birth mothers seeking

information for the first time about themselves or their relatives who are affected by the adoption process.

Typically, the Authority receives SARs relating to legal process of the adoption. However, the Authority holds the records relating to the social work element of the adoption process for the following agencies:

- Bethany House;
- Cúnamh, formerly the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland (CPRSI);
- Denny House;
- Fairfield Children's Home;
- Family adoptions;
- Here2Help, including pre-2010 Pact (Protestant Adoption Society) files;
- Private adoptions from 1952–1991;
- Private placements;
- St Brigid's Adoption Society;
- St Therese Adoption Society;
- The Magdalen Home; and
- The Nursery Rescue Society.

There were instances where responses to applications could not be provided within the statutory timeframe of 30 days, as a result of resource issues or due to the complexity of records to be reviewed. In these

circumstances, applicants were notified of this and provided with a revised timeframe for a full response.

Of the 29 applications, 26 were valid applications. Two were rejected as no identification was provided following a request for same. One application was withdrawn and dealt with by a more appropriate area within the Authority.

There were no appeals lodged to the Data Protection Commission (DPC).

Table 11 below summarises the applications processed over the period 2013 to 2023.

Policies and Procedures

In 2023, the Data Protection Office of the Authority participated in an internal audit review to provide assurance on the application of the legislation organisation wide. The Authority continues to review and develop policies, in line with the Authority's legislative requirements, best practice in the field of data protection and the Authority's commitment to service users in our business plan. A Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) between the Authority and General Register Office (GRO) relating to data sharing for services provided by the BITA 2022, which allows for adopted persons to receive their birth certificates, was made and entered into effect on 15 December 2023.

	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
2021	97	9	5	1	Document released with redactions on foot of DPC decision
2022	73	10	1	0	0
2023	29	3	0	0	n/a

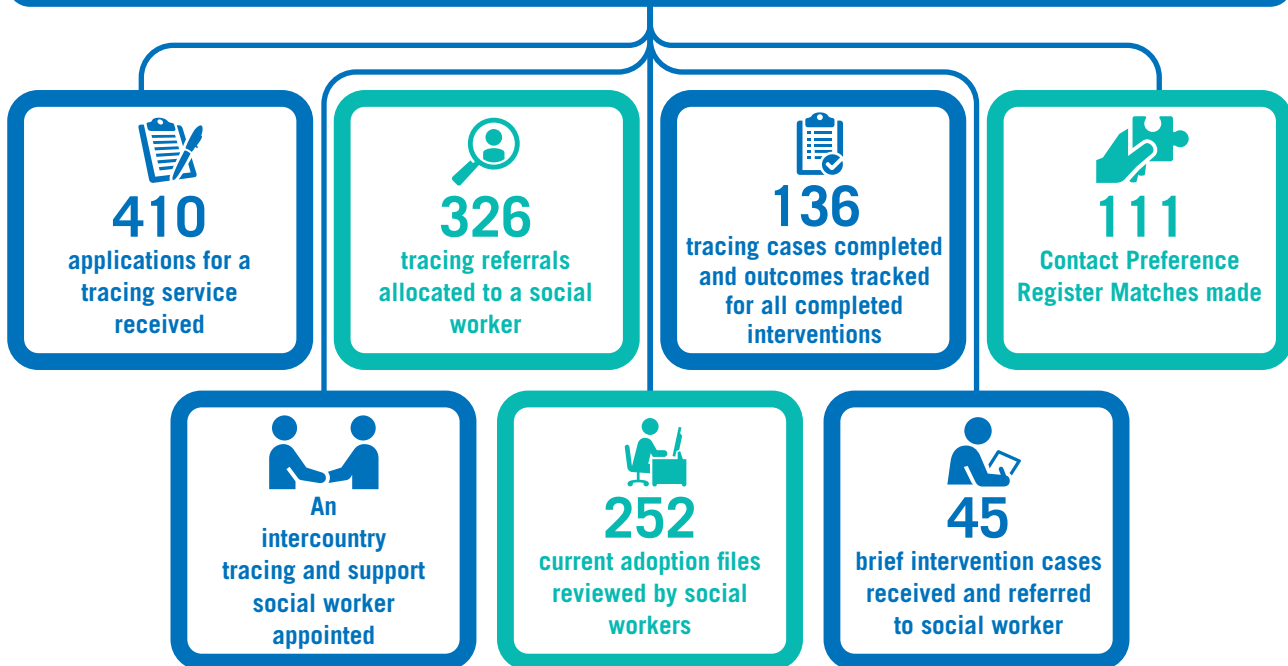
*after GDPR was introduced 25 May 2018

Table 11: Subject Access Requests (SARs) received by the AAI for period 2013–2023

Social Work



Key points



Introduction

The Authority's Social Work Service continued to deliver on its statutory functions in 2023. We have progressed on a journey of empathy and empowerment with our clients in the areas of tracing, mediation and brief intervention. As we have navigated through our work, we have been acutely aware of the paths we tread and the profound impact they have on individuals and families. Throughout our interventions, we believe in empowering clients, recognising the uniqueness of their experiences and valuing their narratives.

Our social work practice adopts an eclectic approach embedded in a number of social work models. We draw upon a narrative approach utilising clients' stories as a compass to better understand their needs. We use a solution-focused approach that both recognises and draws upon clients' own strengths and resources. Further, our practice is rooted in systems theory recognising the importance and interconnectedness of individuals, families and communities in building networks of support and care. These social work models are combined with the digital and research skills of our social work staff in tracing work.

In fulfilling our social work role, we acknowledge the complex legacy of social work in adoption in Ireland. It is in this shadow of the past that we find renewed energy to illuminate the path forward ensuring every client's experience and story is respected.

Core Functions

The Social Work Service in the Adoption Authority has continued to

1. Provide a **tracing service** under Part 5 of the BITA (where we hold the agency file).
2. Work with persons matched on the **Contact Preference Register** under Part 6 of the BITA.
3. Provide **support and brief intervention** to people affected in some way by the delivery of services under the BITA (where we hold the agency file).
4. Review parts of current domestic and intercountry adoptions completed under the Adoption Act 2010.
5. Be responsive to queries from the public and professionals on adoption, tracing and the BITA.

Tracing Service

The year 2023 marked the first full year when the BITA was operational. The Social Work Service conducted tracing in an empathetic, energetic and effective manner utilising social work models, research and digital social work to deliver a service to clients and their families.

The Social Work Service received 410 referrals for tracing and allocated 326 cases. The majority of referrals received in 2023 (318) related to adopted people seeking to trace a birth parent, with two birth parents seeking to trace their children. Sixty-six applications were a person seeking to trace their sibling. Twenty-four people applied to trace other relatives (grandparents etc.).

Learning from Tracing

Tracing Outcomes

In 2023, the Social Work Service collated statistics on the outcomes of tracing cases that were closed during the year. The purpose of this exercise was to enhance our evidence base for all of our stakeholders and clients,

to inform social work practice and service planning and to enhance social work accountability. A total of 136 tracing cases were closed in 2023, and the outcomes collected related both to cases activated prior to and after the introduction of the BITA.



Case Study (Birth Parent Trace)

Patrick, who was placed for adoption in the late 1960s, applied to trace his birth mother (Annie) under the BITA. Patrick had received all of his birth and early life information previously from the Authority. He did have some details of his birth mother from the historic records but decided to proceed with a trace in order to have the support of a social worker. Patrick lived in Dublin and arranged to meet his social worker. Through his conversations with his social worker, Patrick outlined that his desire to trace stemmed from a desire to more fully understand his identity and roots and connect with his biological family. Patrick also wanted to know what his birth mother's life had been like after he was placed for adoption.

Patrick's social worker completed a comprehensive review of any information on adoption files, utilised available digital resources, databases and records and liaised with colleagues in other statutory agencies. In using these information sources, the social worker was required to continually cross reference and test the historic information against the current available information to locate Patrick's birth mother.

Annie was located and found to be living in Canada where she had resided for many years due to her husband's work. During the course of this research, the social worker learned that Patrick's birth mother and birth father had married, meaning that any siblings he may have were full siblings. Further, it came to light that his birth father had died some years earlier. This information was imparted to Patrick and his feelings around it were explored empathically.

A number of correspondences were sent to Patrick's birth mother at her last known address. The last of

these was answered by her daughter (Jean) who sadly advised the social worker that her mother was terminally ill and currently in hospice care. Jean advised the social worker that she would let her three siblings know that Patrick had been in touch. She outlined she always felt they had another sibling but it was not something she would discuss with Annie.

Annie's family, already dealing with her illness, have differing views on the appropriateness of Jean having any contact with Patrick. Jean's decision to have contact with Patrick and advise Annie of the contact raises tensions within the family.

The social worker was required to provide emotional support and guidance to both Patrick and Jean along with the other siblings, two of whom chose to speak with her. She supported the family in navigating each other's viewpoints. Balancing Patrick's needs with his siblings and Annie's needs required careful mediation. Annie expressed her view through Jean that she could not meet Patrick at this point in her life but was eager that he knew she thought of him often and how his life progressed. Annie died some months later.

Despite Annie's passing, Patrick found solace in the messages they could share and his connection with Jean, which they maintained. The social worker continued to provide support to Patrick and Jean assisting with the integration of each other into their respective lives.

As so often in tracing cases, the social worker's role here extended beyond mere tracing and facilitation – it encompassed emotional support, mediation of family dynamics and supporting meaningful connection.



Case Study (Sibling Trace)

Hailey, who was adopted in the mid-1980s, had previously sought to trace her birth mother (Susie). Her birth mother was traced and spoke at length to her social worker about Hailey's birth and subsequent adoption. Susie outlined difficult circumstances around Hailey's conception and the fact that she had never discussed her birth with anyone, not even her now deceased husband, with whom she had a wonderful relationship, nor her children. Susie advised the social worker that she did not feel she could make contact with Hailey at present but might in the future. The social worker was aware that Hailey may seek to trace her siblings (Susie's two daughters), and this would reveal that the adoption had occurred.

The social worker was allocated Hailey's application to trace her siblings. They proceeded to discuss advising Susie that she had made this application to provide her with an opportunity to speak with her children about the adoption. While Hailey empathised with Susie's position she was also anxious that her efforts to connect with her biological family would not be impeded. The social worker worked with Susie in order to support her to find ways to tell her daughters of the adoption. These

conversations also provided opportunities for Hailey's needs to be expressed to Susie. Despite everyone's best efforts, Susie still could not tell her children and expressed her awareness that they would learn via the social worker.

The social worker made contact with both sisters. They had never been aware of Hailey's birth but were open to supporting both Susie and Hailey in meeting if that was what both parties wanted. Susie expressed gratitude that her daughters had responded so positively and took on the logistics of setting up a meeting between all four. Hailey was equally reassured that her half-sisters would support Susie in a meeting. All four people involved decided that they did not wish for the social worker to mediate the meeting but knew she was available in the days after the meeting to discuss any issues that may arise.

This case had a number of important factors, including balancing an adopted person's right to trace with providing birth mother's space to discuss with families, the challenges for some birth mothers in discussing adoption with their families and the strength birth mothers can access from their adult children in supporting them to meet.

Contact Preference Register Mediation

The year 2023 was one of learning for the Social Work Service in relation to the CPR. Given that many matches occurred between people who joined the register many years apart, social work staff undertook significant work in locating and supporting parties to move into contact. The Social Work Service received 111 referrals relating to CPR matches in 2023 and allocated 91 cases to a social worker in 2023. Forty-eight of these referrals related to matches between a birth parent and an adopted person. Fifty-one related to matches between siblings. The remainder (12) related to matches between other relatives.

Intercountry Tracing

Tracing and Support for Intercountry Adoptees

Since 1991, there have been over 5,000 international adoptions into Ireland. The vast majority of these took place over the 19-year period from January 1991 to October 2010, with the current average age of all intercountry adoptees at approximately 20 years

old. Children have been adopted into Ireland from over 27 different countries, with the largest amount of intercountry adoptees in Ireland coming from Russia, Vietnam, Romania, China and Ethiopia. The right to search for origin is stated in both national as well as international provisions (including the BITA, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Hague Convention and the 2008 European Council Convention). Tracing in the international context is widely acknowledged as being a complex process, with internationally adopted people facing significant barriers to undertaking their search for origin.

In line with the Authority's commitment to support international adoptees' right to trace their birth origins, 2023 saw the appointment of a social worker providing a dedicated tracing service for intercountry adoptees in Ireland. This role has provided an important point of liaison for intercountry adoptees, adoptive parents and a variety of support services seeking advice and support around the international tracing process. It has

also been an important time of service development in this space, with this social worker building contacts with various stakeholders nationally and internationally, including international Central Authorities under the 1993 Hague Convention and other international partners in this work. To date, nine requests for tracing have been received from intercountry adoptees under the BITA and all have been allocated to a social worker. Countries of origin include Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Vietnam and Romania. A further six requests for tracing have also been received from the Romanian Central Authority for adoptees living in Ireland. An additional 25 applicants have applied for and received their birth and early life information in relation to their intercountry adoption, and been offered social work support as part of this service.

Please see [statistics section](#) for further information on our tracing service.

Brief Intervention Social Work

Brief Intervention social work offers timely support and guidance to those facing immediate concerns or challenges. It is a proactive approach that promotes the empowerment of individuals and prevents matters escalating.

The Brief Intervention social worker was appointed in February 2023. Between February 2023 and December 2023, the Social Work team received 45 brief intervention referrals. These included cases referred by the Records team when processing information requests and cases where the clients contacted the Authority directly seeking further support. The majority of referrals related to support for clients following receiving their birth and early life information. Some clients required emotional support due to potentially sensitive information recorded in their files. For other clients, the intervention involved discussing their expectations regarding information recorded in their file and providing support when these expectations were not met. Other interventions relevant to the BITA involved providing support to clients in understanding their rights under this legislation and assisting them in completing the relevant application forms.

There remains a group of clients who contact the AAI Social Work Service with queries outside our statutory functions. The Brief Intervention social worker also provides support to these individuals. An example of this type of referral is clients that are seeking guidance on how to manage an approach from a relative.



Brief Intervention Case Study

Jennifer, who was placed for adoption in 1950s, applied for her birth and early life information under the BITA. When processing her request, the Records team identified that there was potentially distressing information recorded in Jennifer's file. In light of this information, the Records team sent a referral to the Brief Intervention social worker. The decision was made to include the Brief Intervention social worker's details on Jennifer's information release letter.

Jennifer's information was released by the Records team to her via email. This was followed by an information release letter. In this letter, Jennifer was encouraged to contact the Brief Intervention social worker if in need of support. Within a few days of receiving her information, Jennifer made contact with the social worker. As Jennifer lives overseas, a phone appointment was arranged. In this appointment, Jennifer was provided with an opportunity and space to discuss her feelings upon reading the material in her file. The social worker provided emotional support and empathetically validated Jennifer's experience. Jennifer spoke about her childhood, her adoptive parents and the supportive people in her life.

Jennifer had specific questions regarding the contents of her file, which the social worker discussed with her. The social worker also informed her of her right to request a review of the information released to her. Jennifer and the social worker then explored sources of support Jennifer could draw upon while processing the contents of the information she received. Through these discussions, Jennifer identified internal and external resources that are available to help her during this time. The social worker also encouraged Jennifer to contact them, if in need of further support.

Some weeks later the social worker contacted Jennifer to check in. Jennifer informed the social worker that she was coping well, that she was taking some time to process the information in her file and was linking with her identified supports. Jennifer expressed sincere thanks to the Records team for the speed in which her information was released to her and thanked the social worker for their support during this process.

Social Work Reviews

Reviewing assessments in adoption aims to ensure that all prospective parents and proposed adoptions are assessed within a clear, evidence-based model. In 2023, the Social Work team reviewed 204 domestic and 48 intercountry files. These reviews were completed by all social work staff in addition to their statutory functions.

Responding to Queries

The Social Work Service responded to 246 queries – 90 from the public and 156 from social workers and other professionals. These queries related to placing a child for adoption, aspects of the Adoption Act 2010, how the BITA functions, concerns about contact from a relative, the CPR and accessing post-adoption support.

Building Our Knowledge

Training and Education

Continuous professional development is crucial to the ongoing development of the Social Work Service. Continuous learning equips social workers with updated knowledge, refined skills and deepened understanding. Moreover, it fosters adaptability, ensuring social workers can effectively respond to clients' needs and a changing policy and practice landscape. By investing in social work training and education, the Authority demonstrates its commitment to professional practice and ultimately the quality of service provided to individuals, families and communities.

In 2023, the Social Work Service completed two group training programmes:

- Working sensitively and effectively with those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual violence. This was delivered by the Rape Crisis Centre over two half-days in May 2023. A number of colleagues from the Authority's Records team also joined in this training.
- In October 2023, all the team attended training in Trauma Informed Practice facilitated remotely by Gary Broderick based in The Learning Curve and SAOL Project.

In addition, the ICSWA training was attended by the majority of the Social Work team on a regular basis

Social work staff have also attended training and conferences in the areas of

- Adoption assessment
- Attachment styles

- Motivational interviewing
- Learning from Research: The English and Romanian Adoptees study (ERA)
- Child Protection and Welfare.

Social Work Placements

Social work practice placements serve as a bridge between academic knowledge and real-world practice, allowing students to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice. Such placements also foster collaboration between academia and practice facilitating an exchange of ideas and best practice.

In 2023, the Authority's Social Work Service offered placements to social work students. From January to April 2023, three Social Work team members took on the roles of practice teachers where they supervised three students of the Social Work Masters from UCD and Maynooth University. It is envisaged that offering social work placements will now be a standard part of the Social Work Service. Providing placements to students is invaluable to the Authority as students bring new and innovative ways of working and understanding our work. Additionally, it is hoped that exposing students to the area of adoption social work will provide new social work recruits in the future.

Research



Overview

Under the Adoption Act 2010 (96[1]), the functions of the Adoption Authority include

- Undertaking or assisting in research projects and activities relating to adoption services;
- Compiling statistical information and other records as to the proper planning, development and provision of those adoption services.

A Research Subcommittee was appointed as a sub-committee of the Board of the Adoption Authority in 2016, to consider how best to meet this legal requirement. A Research team was established in the Adoption Authority in 2019, commencing with the employment of a Research Officer. The Research Officer joined the SMT in May 2023.

The Authority received sanction from the DCEDIY to create a second permanent position in the Research Team of a Research Assistant at the Administrative Officer grade. A recruitment competition for this new post was undertaken in 2023 with appointment to the role commencing in November.

The Authority's Research Ethics Committee (REC) was established in 2020 to oversee the ethical considerations of large research studies. It consists of two Authority Board members and one external advisor from the DCEDIY. The REC meets as required, when a study design is presented by the Research team for review and approval.

Activities 2023

In early 2023, the new Research Strategy 2023–2025 was approved. This strategy was designed to be flexible, and to allow for the continuation and completion of a number of studies which were commenced under the previous strategy. It also includes a number of new proposed studies, looking into the areas of adoption assessment, adoption from long-term foster care, and international surrogacy. A Legal Research Working Group was formed to specifically consider how the Authority could conduct research into areas of legislation related to adoption. In 2023, this group met on two occasions, and highlighted international surrogacy as a specific area of focus to be considered for our research.

Core Research Studies

'Reflections on the Irish Domestic Adoption Process 1952–2022'



Domestic adoption was first legislated for under the Adoption Act, 1952. This study explores domestic adoption from the perspective of a number of activists, advocates and service providers who were involved in the area of domestic adoption on a long-term basis during the 70-year period leading up to the BITA. The resultant report was reviewed by the Research Subcommittee in August 2023, minor changes were made in accordance with their feedback, and the final report was accepted by the Board of the Authority in November 2023. It will be published and disseminated in 2024.

'The Lived Experience of Intercountry Adoption in Ireland'



This study explores the lived experience of intercountry adoption in Ireland. More than 5,000 people have been adopted into Ireland via intercountry adoption since 1991.

A number of ‘country background reports’ have been compiled by the Research team as part of this study, and in 2023 the Research team published the last of these five reports which focused on adoption from Ethiopia. The other four existing reports – regarding Romania, Vietnam, Russia and China – were revised and updated by the Research team in July 2023 with new figures and context, where applicable. These country background reports contain general contextual information about adoptions from these countries, alongside information on the current age profile of each adopted cohort. We anticipate that they will be of use to a wide variety of stakeholders, including adopted people and their families, voluntary groups, service providers and policymakers. To date they have been used by the Authority to help inform the development of intercountry adoption information and tracing supports.

In 2023, the Research team sought to conduct focus groups with two cohorts of the Irish intercountry adopted population: aged 13–17 and aged 18+, respectively. These were advertised through key stakeholders, as documented in the 2022 Annual Report. When uptake was low, the design was revised to include an option of individual interviews for participants, as an alternative to the focus groups. Though recruitment continued to be slow, the option of an interview proved to be more productive, and the Research team conducted in-depth interviews with a further nine intercountry adopted adults in 2023, bringing the total interviewed to 11. These interviews explored topics of childhood and adolescence, identity development, transracial adoption, relationships, physical and mental health, and feelings about birth family. Thematic analysis of the interview data is nearing completion, and the findings will be written up in a report in 2024.

The Research team developed a survey in late 2023, based on the early findings from the intercountry adoption interviews described above. The purpose of this survey is to explore some of the findings with a larger Irish intercountry adopted sample using a quantitative method. The Research Officer met with the principal investigator on an adoption research team based in the University of Minnesota, and has included some of their measures in this survey, adapting them as needed for use with the Irish intercountry adopted population. The proposed survey also includes a number of questions about whether the respondents had heard about the focus groups/interviews, and, if so, why they chose not to participate. This feedback will be utilised to inform the design and advertising of future research conducted by the Adoption Authority.

Throughout 2023, the Research team also sought to recruit 13–17-year-olds for focus groups and/or interviews on the experience of intercountry adoption (under the revised design described above). Uptake was extremely low, however, and having sought feedback from a small number of parents and teenagers who had expressed an initial interest in taking part, the Research team decided to redesign this element of the Lived Experience of Intercountry Adoption Study for this particular age-group. The proposed new design utilises an online format and an arts-based research methodology. It is shorter, and can be completed at a time convenient to the participant. This design was submitted to our REC for review in December 2023, and is expected to commence in 2024, once ethical approval has been received.

Research Resources

All staff and Board members have online access to the library catalogue and journal database at any time. A number of new titles were added to the Authority’s library in 2023, and the Authority’s EBSCO subscription was upgraded to more accurately meet the needs of the organisation.

Conferences and Networking

The Research team continued to focus on building relationships with other stakeholders in 2023. The team designed a one-hour workshop called *Becoming Adoption Aware: Supporting Ireland’s Adoption Community Through Awareness, Language and Sensitivity*. This workshop was provided by the team to delegates at the Psychological Society of Ireland conference in 2023. All participants in the workshop received links to a number of resources, including the two infographics entitled ‘Simple Ways to Be Adoption Aware’, which had been designed by the Research team in 2022. The Research team also had an initial meeting with a representative of the Professional Development Service for Teachers in 2023 to discuss building adoption awareness into their new equality/diversity training module for teachers.



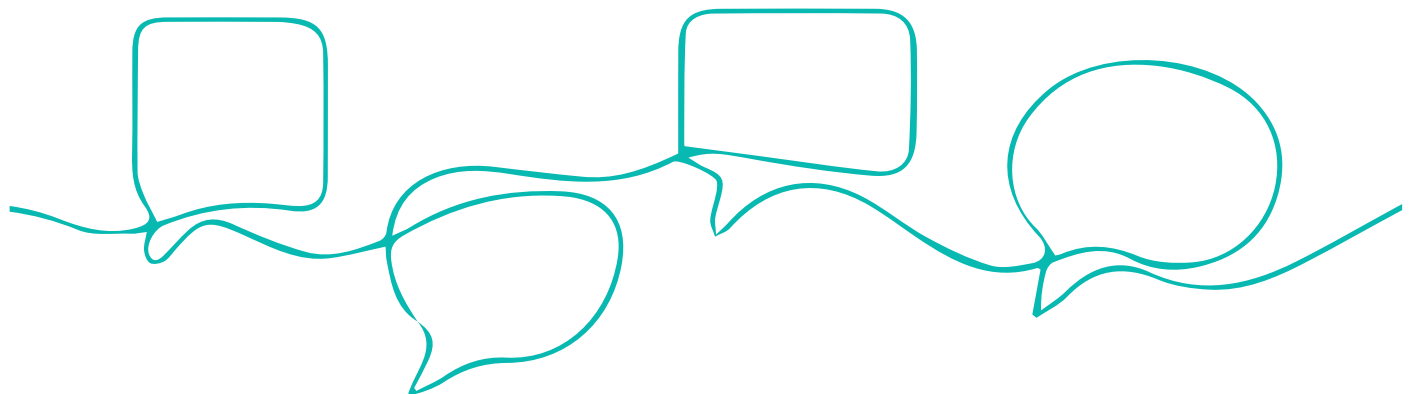
The Research Officer chaired a meeting of the Adoption Research Network of Ireland in 2023. The group discussed Irish representation at the upcoming International Conference on Adoption Research-8 (ICAR-8), and the promotion of Irish adoption research to key Irish stakeholder groups via a newsletter, which the Research team will compile. The ICAR conference is typically held every four years. It will take place in Minnesota in July 2024.

Throughout the second half of 2023, the Research team internally promoted recent, relevant Irish and international adoption research through drafting and circulating 'quick reads' to all Authority staff. Each 'quick read' is a summary of a journal article, conference presentation, or podcast/video. The purpose of these 'quick reads' is to ensure that all staff are aware of the latest developments in adoption research, and are research-informed when interacting with service users.

In May 2023, the Research Officer presented to the visiting delegation from the Vietnamese central authority (see also section on Events and Travel 2023). The presentation included a summary of the updated Vietnam country background report, and of Irish intercountry adoption research findings to date. The Research Officer subsequently gave a similar presentation to the Adoption Policy Unit in the DCEDIY.

External Communications

Throughout 2023, the Research team received occasional requests from external parties seeking statistics or other information relating to adoption research. Where possible and practical, the team always sought to provide assistance and support to these parties.



Human Resources



Overview

Following the Authority's exponential growth rate of 63% in 2022, 2023 marked a move to increased permanency and stability, with key strategic hiring in place, and a future-proofing of the organisation through investment in technology and training.

Through our Recruitment overview, this transition from a period of flux to stability is most notable in the recruitment of our new CEO, Dr Lorraine Horgan, as well as a number of key strategic hires in our Social Work and Research teams, the addition of a new permanent Head of HR and a continued focus on internal mobility.

As noted in the AAI's 2023 Business Plan, one of our key goals in the Human Resources function was to 'Optimise processes and operations to ensure high quality provision of all services to the public'. To this end we have focused on technical adaption with the design and roll-out of an effective time and attendance system for the organisation. In Q3 2023 we began planning for the implementation of a new time and attendance system. Additionally, we have further optimised our processes with the identification of our first Applicant Tracking System (ATS) which will serve to further enhance candidate confidentiality, provide a renewed focus on hiring metrics benchmarking, and streamline our hiring processes.

Having successfully completed our rapid expansion and growth in 2022 with the onboarding of a large number of staff, we transitioned to a period of upskilling and investment in these employees, to ensure that we offer training and development opportunities in a way that is readily available and fair, to allow them to achieve their career ambitions and align their work to support the implementation of the Authority's Strategic Plan.

Recruitment

In 2023, the Authority conducted 14 recruitment competitions, including two confined competitions. Four of these competitions recruited temporary members of staff, appointing eight temporary staff members in total. The Authority conducts all its own recruitment under licence from the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA). In 2023, 23 staff were appointed, four of which were internal appointments.

A key competition in 2023 was the recruitment of a new CEO on a five-year fixed-term contract basis to replace the previous CEO, Patricia Carey, who departed the AAI end 2022. Two interim CEOs were appointed to manage

the organisation in 2022 pending the completion of the open recruitment competition run by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). The new CEO, Dr Lorraine Horgan was recruited in 2023 and commenced in the role in January 2024.

The recruitment of two Professionally Qualified Social Workers was particularly beneficial to the Authority in 2023, as this allowed our Social Work team to provide more specialised expertise to service users who have been impacted by the BITA. The Authority also expanded our Research team with the addition of our first permanent Research Assistant role.

The Authority continues to have high rates of internal mobility, allowing for continued staff growth and development in their careers while also retaining organisational and role related knowledge. This internal mobility is strongly aligned with our business objective to 'Implement a robust staff retention, development and succession programme to ensure continuity of services, knowledge retention and organisation development'.

Pension/Retirements

The majority of staff in the Authority (83%) are members of the Single Public Service Pension Scheme (SPSPS). Annual Benefit Statements were provided to all members of the SPSPS as required under the legislation.

There was one retirement in 2023, bringing the total number of pensioners in the AAI to nine.

Technical Adaptation

The new time and attendance system implementation was started in September 2023 following a procurement process. This system will allow access to stored information real time, allowing the generation of additional reports and increased security in data storage. Implementation of the new system will be advanced in early 2024.

A procurement process to select an ATS was run in Q4. It is expected that this ATS – a first for the AAI – will allow for increased security of candidate confidentiality, and a continued focus on GDPR compliance. With the use of a new recruitment jobs site, the Adoption Authority will be able to advertise vacancies on various number of platforms and reach larger volume of possible candidates. We will also have access to employer branding tools to bring our employer branding efforts in line with other public sector bodies. It will also

allow for the establishment of recruitment benchmarks and easy reporting of hiring metrics (time to hire, applicant to interview ratio, monitoring of candidate withdrawal rates, and an increased focus on ROI by source of hire).

Training and Professional Development

The HR team supported staff participation in a range of courses and seminars, many of which were conducted remotely.

Employee Assistance Programme

The Authority continues to encourage and promote the services of our dedicated EAP which is available to all staff members as required. Each employee has access to a 24-hour telephone support line, case management assessment and up to six one-hour confidential counselling sessions free of charge.

Topics covered included

Disability Awareness Training

Women in Leadership **Professional Diploma in Data Protection & GDPR** **IT Service Management (ITIL) Foundation**
Basic Archive Skills Training Day
Performance Management and Appraisal Training

Managing Difficult Scenarios **Solution Focused Brief Therapy** **Sectorial Financial Statements – State Bodies**
Mental Health in the Workplace

Understanding Invisible Disabilities in the Workplace **Finance for Non Financials**

Certificate in Professional Irish **Training Needs Analysis/Learning Needs Analysis** **Intercultural and Anti-Racism Training**

Introduction to Motivational Interviewing **QI Training Delivery and Evaluation** **Diploma in Professional Human Resources Practice**
Dealing with Challenging and Hostile Calls **Competency Based Interview Training**
Administrative Law in Civil Service

Certificate in Public Procurement **Business Writing Skills**
Certificate in Public Expenditure and Financial Management

Freedom of Information for Decision Makers **Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies**
Certificate in GDPR and Data Protection

Corporate Services and Accreditation



Website and Communications

The Authority's website (www.aai.gov.ie) continued to be an important source of information and news from the Adoption Authority. During 2023, the website's content was reviewed and updated to improve the quality of information sharing with service users and the general public. Throughout the process, consideration was given to the organisation's obligations under the EU Web Accessibility Directive and the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021.

Throughout 2023, the Birth Information and Tracing website (www.birthinfo.ie) continued to serve as a platform solely for the provision of information relating to the new legislation, and as a portal for CPR application forms, tracing services and birth and early life information.

Press/Media

Interest raised in 2022 by the public information campaign about the BITA remained strong in 2023 as the Irish and UK media sought updates on response rates to applications.

In August, the Authority engaged Limelight Communications to provide the necessary services

to deliver the increased communications and public relations output generated by the anniversary of the landmark legislation enacted the previous year.

Several key events in 2023 attracted significant public and media attention. On 3 July, to mark the one-year anniversary of the establishment of the CPR, the Authority issued a press release that drew keen interest from broadcasters and journalists nationwide and beyond.

National and international media interest also surrounded the launch by Minister Roderic O'Gorman of the Authority's Annual Report 2022 at an event on 19 September, where the Authority announced that the backlog of information release applications under the BITA was cleared. On 3 October, a press release flagged another significant milestone – the one-year anniversary of information release and tracing services opening under the BITA 2022.

The Authority continued to closely monitor adoption-related news reports in the local, national and international media, via our media monitoring service, to keep up to date with developments on adoption-related matters in 2023, and the organisation responded to all press queries and requests throughout the year.



L-r: Sean O'Brien, Deputy Chairperson; Dr Margo Anglim, Board member; Dr Roderic O'Gorman TD, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Orlaith Traynor, Chairperson; Colm O'Leary, CEO.

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Adoption Authority records thousands seeking birth information

Updated / Tuesday, 3 Oct 2023 08:39

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A total of 85% of those added to the register in the past year are adopted persons (file image)

By **Ailbhe Conneely**
Social Affairs & Religion Correspondent

The Journal

BIRTH INFORMATION & TRACING

Image of August 2022 of a booklet about the new Birth Information and Tracing Act, produced by the AAI. IMAGE: Alamy Stock Photo

ADOPTION AUTHORITY OF IRELAND

More than 3,800 applications for records in first year of Birth Information and Tracing Act

The Adoption Authority of Ireland said there has been significant progress but that further work still lies ahead.

6.46am, 3 Oct 2023 ↗ 7.2k 📧 5

Massive backlog of adoption data requests almost cleared after 'surge' in applications last year following law change

Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI) has said there has been a "seismic change" in relation to sharing adoption information in Ireland



Cian O'Broin
September 19 2023 2:30 AM

MENU **breakingnews.ie** 🔍

Supreme Court upholds adoption of girl against birth mother's wishes

IRELAND



The girl, who is now a young woman, was born with foetal alcohol syndrome with associated global development delay and a moderate general learning disability. Photo: PA Images

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24/05/2023 | 16:27 PM
HIGH COURT REPORTERS

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Adoption body says personal information request backlog now cleared

Delay of almost year 'unacceptable' as Adoption Authority of Ireland says it was inundated with applications for birth certificates, birth information, early life, care and medical information

Expand



Adoption Authority of Ireland interim chief executive Colm O'Leary with Minister for Children Roderic O'Gorman: 'The authority was 'inundated, to put it mildly,' says Mr O'Leary. 'It took a while for us to be really confident in finding the structure of the records...'

Photograph: Alan Betson

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Supreme Court dismisses appeal by birth mother against adoption of daughter

Updated / Wednesday, 24 May 2023 15:50

📱 📧 📧 📧 📧



The decision upholds a Court of Appeal decision allowing the adoption to proceed

By **Vivienne Traynor**
RTÉ Courts Reporter

Parliamentary Questions (PQs)

In total, the Authority received and responded to 27 Parliamentary Questions in 2023.

Energy Management and Climate Action

In April 2023, the Board approved the organisation’s first Climate Action Roadmap.

The Authority is committed to reducing its carbon emissions targets by 51% by 2030.

The Authority has identified education and awareness as the core theme of the initial Roadmap with the goals of strengthening engagement and the understanding of climate action and energy management throughout the organisation. To drive engagement and education amongst staff, suitable educational resources were identified with the guidance of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland to raise staff awareness on energy related emissions and, over time, wider climate issues to support a reduction in the organisational carbon footprint.

The Authority will also identify appropriate climate action training for staff. Climate Action is a shared ambition and responsibility for the organisation, and we will work to build the capacity of our staff to respond to this challenge.

A major area of potential carbon emission reduction identified by the Authority is in its procurement policy. Public procurement in Ireland accounts for 10%–12% of GDP. The Authority is working to embed Green Public Procurement into its corporate policy, which aims to further reduce emissions whilst still supplying the organisation with the goods and services it requires.

Towards the end of 2023, in order to meet its carbon reduction targets, the Authority began to procure the services of a contractor for its first energy audit. The energy audit is expected to be completed in early 2024 and will identify objectives and projects to support the sustainability agenda for the 2024–2025 Roadmap.

Facilities Management

An extensive reconfiguration of the Authority’s third-floor office space took place in 2023 to comfortably and safely accommodate the Authority’s expanding workforce. A section of the space, previously used as storage, was refurbished in order to relocate two teams.

As part of this project, additional works were completed on the remainder of the third floor; including the removal of the old carpet and relaying new carpet

tiles with Pure Air 100, as well as the plastering and repainting of the walls on the floor. Pure Air 100 ensures the carpet is engineered to trap dust and purge the indoor air. The newly installed carpet tiles meet the requirements of EN-14041 (European Health, Safety and Energy requirements), including E1 classification for formaldehyde emissions, contributing to the credit for a health indoor air quality.

The Authority will continue to update and improve the office configuration moving into 2024.

Health, Safety and Welfare at Work

As an employer, the Authority is committed to ensuring the safety, health and welfare at work of all its employees, contractors, visitors and others, who share or visit our workspace. The Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act 2005 strongly emphasises the need to provide employees with instruction, information and training necessary to ensure their health and safety when carrying out their work activities.

In order to support staff with carrying out duties in a safe and informed manner, the Adoption Authority’s staff underwent the following training in 2023:

	Manual Handling	48
	Fire Warden	5
	First Aid	4
	Display Screen Unit Risk Assessor	1
	Certificate in Health, Safety and Welfare at Work	1
	Safety Representative	1

The Authority continued to support safe blended working arrangements for all staff by engaging an external Health and Safety partner to confirm remote workstations were appropriate and advise on suitable actions where gaps were identified.

Accreditation

Register of Accredited Bodies

The Authority maintains a 'Register of Accredited Bodies', as set out in legislation.³ The initial registration is valid for a period of five years and renewals shall not exceed three years.⁴ In 2023, no new applications were received, and one renewal was processed.

There were three registered accredited bodies by 2023 year end.

Table 15: Register of Accredited Bodies 2023

Accredited Body	Date of accreditation
Pact 18D Nutgrove Office Park Rathfarnham Dublin 14	Reaccredited 22 June 2022
Barnardos Post Adoption Service 23/24 Buckingham Street Dublin 1	Reaccredited 07 September 2022
Helping Hands Adoption Facilitation Agency t/a Helping Hands Adoption Mediation Agency The Loft, Bessboro Centre Blackrock Road Cork	Reaccredited 07 March 2023

Accreditation Procedures

In line with statutory requirements, the AAI continued to actively engage with all accredited bodies throughout 2023. The Executive submitted a monthly report to the Board of the Authority detailing activity and engagement with the accredited bodies.

Accredited bodies are required to submit activity reports on a bi-annual basis. In 2023, all relevant bodies submitted two six-monthly reports. Each report was summarised by the Executive and presented to the Board of the Authority. Audited accounts for the year ending 31 December 2022 were also submitted by all relevant accredited bodies.

Cessation of Accredited Bodies

No accredited bodies were formally deregistered in 2023.

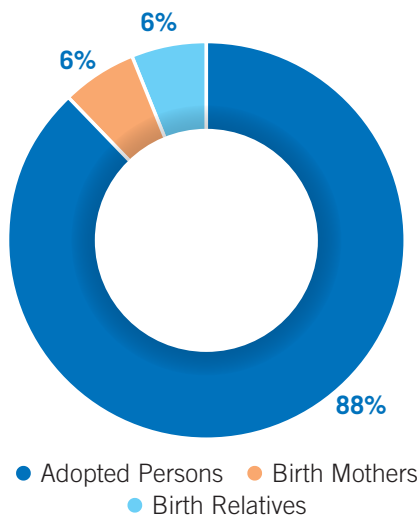
3. The maintenance of a 'Register of Accredited Bodies' by the Authority is provided for under Section 126–135 of the Adoption Act 2010 and S.I. No. 524 of 2010, Adoption Act 2010 (Accredited Bodies) Regulations 2010.

4. As per Section 128 of the Adoption Act 2010.

Tracing Service Statistics

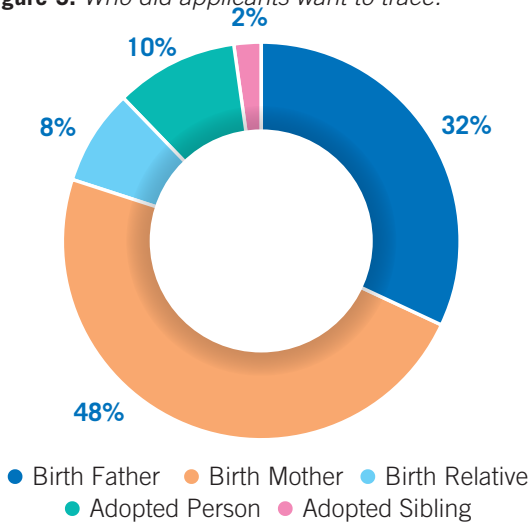


Figure 8: Who applied to trace?



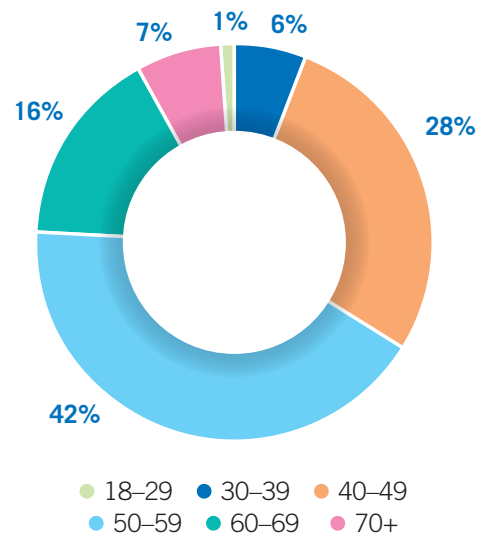
As can be seen from Figure 8 above the highest number of requests for a tracing service were received from adopted persons and accounted for 88% of the overall number of applicants. Birth mothers and birth relatives accounted for the remaining 12%, both groups representing 6% of the overall number.

Figure 9: Who did applicants want to trace?



The majority of the applications received related to traces for a birth mother (48%) and a birth father (32%). Ten percent of the applications requested traces in respect of the adopted person, with 8% and 2% of applications relating to birth relative and adopted sibling traces, respectively.

Figure 10: Adopted Person: Tracing according to age group

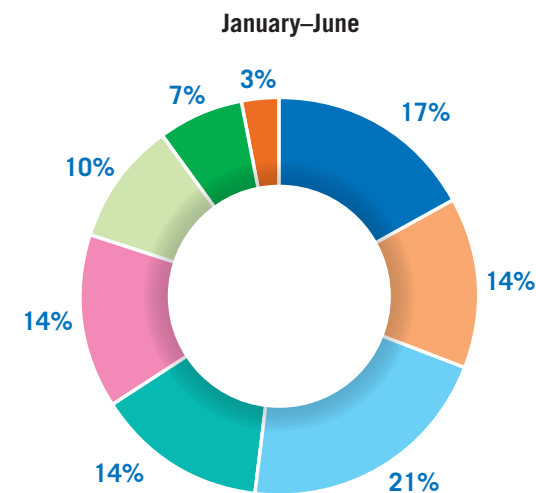


The majority of those who made a request or application to trace fell within the 50-59 age bracket (42%), with the 40-49 age group being the second largest cohort and the 60-69 age group the third largest to apply for a trace. The 18-29 age group accounted for the smallest number of applicants at 1% of the overall number, with 30-39-year-olds accounting for 6%. These results point towards the birth mothers and birth fathers who are being traced also being in older age categories.

Outcomes where a birth mother was traced:

It is important to note that there is an overlap in those included in the outcomes Mediated Contact Reunion and Post-Reunion Service.

Figure 11: Outcomes where a birth mother was traced (January to June 2023)

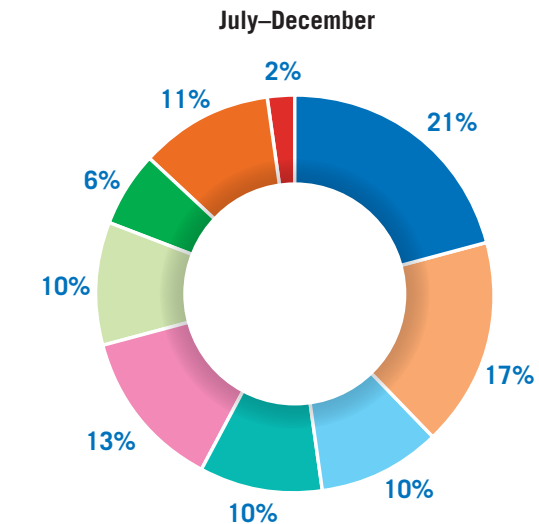


- Closed at Initial Meeting – 17%
- Contact Refused – 14%
- No Response – 21%
- Mediated Contact Reunion – 14%
- Post Reunion Service – 14%
- Deceased Contact with Other Relatives – 10%
- Deceased Closed – 7%
- Social Work Support - Direct Contact Closed Before Reunion – 3%
- Unable to Locate – 0%

There were no cases closed in the period January to June in which a birth mother was not located.

The highest outcomes included No Response (21%) and Closed at Initial Meeting (17%).

Figure 12: Outcomes where a birth mother was traced (July to December 2023)



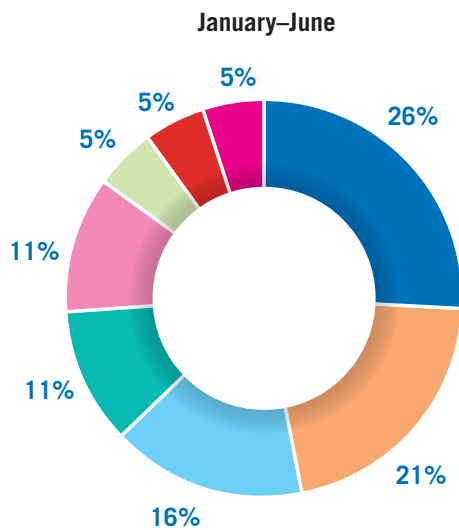
- Closed Trace/Not Activated/Withdrawn – 21%
- Contact Refused – 17%
- No Response – 10%
- Mediated Contact Reunion – 10%
- Post Reunion Service – 13%
- Deceased Contact with Other Relatives – 10%
- Deceased Closed – 6%
- Social Work Intermediary Service - Closed – 11%
- Unable to Locate – 2%

The change in outcome headings between January and June and those used in July to December reflected feedback from the Social Work team on their practice experience and an attempt to match the outcomes with this.

The two highest outcomes included Closed Trace Not Activated/Withdrawn (21%) and Contact Refused (17%).

Outcomes where a Birth Father was traced

Figure 13: Outcomes where a birth father was traced (January to June 2023)

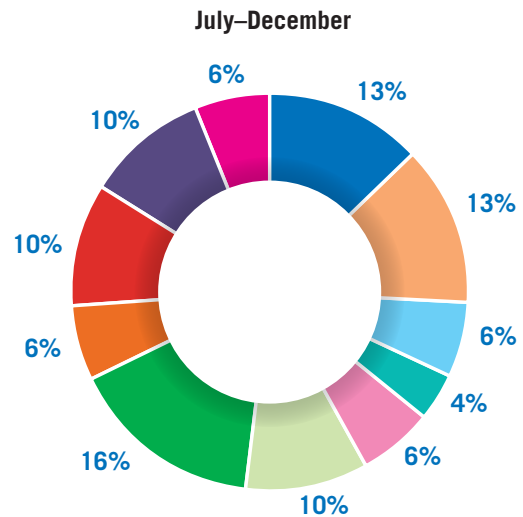


- Closed at Initial Meeting – 26%
- Contact Refused – 21%
- No Response – 16%
- Mediated Contact Reunion – 11%
- Post Reunion Service – 11%
- Deceased Contact with Other Relatives – 5%
- Deceased Closed – 0%
- Social Work Support - Direct Contact - Closed Before Reunion – 0%
- Unable to Locate – 5%
- No Trace – Not Enough Info – 0%
- No Trace – BF Info Withdrawn – 5%

There were no cases closed in the period January–June where there was not enough information on record to trace a birth father, nor were there any cases where the birth father was deceased and the case closed, nor under Social Work Support – Direct Contact – Closed Before Reunion.

The two highest outcomes included Closed at Initial Meeting (26%) and Contact Refused (21%).

Figure 14: Outcomes where a birth father was traced (July to December 2023)



- Closed Trace/Not Activated/Withdrawn – 13%
- Contact Refused – 13%
- No Response – 6%
- Mediated Contact Reunion – 4%
- Post Reunion Service – 6%
- Deceased Contact with Other Relatives – 10%
- Deceased Closed – 16%
- Support – Intermediary Service – 6%
- Unable to Locate – 10%
- No Trace – Not Enough Info – 10%
- No Trace – BF Info Withdrawn – 0%
- Other – 6%

There were no cases closed in the period July to December where a trace did not take place due to not enough information on record.

The three highest outcomes included Deceased – Closed (16%), Closed Trace/Not Activated/Withdrawn (13%) and Contact Refused (13%).



Domestic and
Intercountry
Adoption
Statistics



Table 16: Domestic Adoption Statistics 1953-2023

Year	No. of Adoptions	Year	No. of Adoptions
1953	381	1990	648
1954	888	1991	590
1955	786	1992	523
1956	565	1993	500
1957	752	1994	424
1958	592	1995	490
1959	501	1996	405
1960	505	1997	422
1961	547	1998	400
1962	699	1999	317
1963	840	2000	303
1964	1,003	2001	293
1965	1,049	2002	266
1966	1,178	2003	263
1967	1,493	2004	273
1968	1,343	2005	253
1969	1,225	2006	222
1970	1,414	2007	187
1971	1,305	2008	200
1972	1,291	2009	190
1973	1,402	2010	189
1974	1,415	2011	39
1975	1,443	2012	49
1976	1,104	2013	116
1977	1,127	2014	112
1978	1,223	2015	94
1979	988	2016	95
1980	1,115	2017	72
1981	1,191	2018	72
1982	1,191	2019	79
1983	1,184	2020	81
1984	1,195	2021	101
1985	882	2022	102
1986	800	2023	90
1987	715	TOTAL	45,056
1988	649		
1989	615		

Table 17: *Domestic Adoptions by type 2019–2023*

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Step Parent	51	58	65	60	47
Long-Term Foster Care	21	16	24	31	30
Infant	6	5	2	9	8
Foreign to Domestic	0	0	5	0	0
Extended Family	1	2	5	2	5
Total	79	81	101	102	90

Table 18: *Domestic Adoptions by Age of Child 2019–2023*

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
17 Years Old	35	40	36	36	37
12–16 Years Old	24	23	45	33	27
7–11 Years Old	13	13	16	23	16
2–6 Years Old	4	3	7	8	4
0–1 Years Old	3	2	1	2	6
Total	79	81	101	102	90

Table 19: *High Court Orders Granted in Respect of Domestic Adoption Applications 2019–2023*

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Section 18	0	3	2	1	1
Section 30	8	15	19	24	18
Section 54	5	11	14	18	12
Total	13	29	35	43	31

Table 20: 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, 2010–2023 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	1,631	Taiwan	22	Rwanda	2
Vietnam	945	Colombia	19	Scotland	2
Romania	808	England	19	Sri Lanka	2
China	432	Brazil	17	Uzbekistan	2
Ethiopia	308	Paraguay	7	Bolivia	1
Kazakhstan	151	Cambodia	4	Bosnia Herzegovina	1
Belarus	145	Philippines	4	Haiti	2
Thailand	140	South Africa	2	Hong Kong	1
United States of America	127	El Salvador	2	Malawi	1
Mexico	113	Jersey	2	Zimbabwe	1
Ukraine	100	Kenya	2	Moldova	1
Bulgaria	32	Lithuania	2	Total	5,082
India	27	Peru	2		
		Poland	3		

*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 21: Entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions, pursuant to Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010, for 2023 only (applicants habitually resident in Ireland holding a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the intercountry adoption)

Country	No. Entered in the Register in 2023
Vietnam	12
Thailand	2
Haiti	1
USA	7
England	1
India	2
Total	25

Table 22: Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised in 2023, 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 Register in 2023	Country where the adoption was effected	No. entered on Register in 2023	Country where the adoption was effected	No. entered on Register in 2023
Belgium	1	Guernsey, Channel Islands	1	Scotland	3
Cambodia	2	Haiti	1	South Africa	7
Canada	3	Hong Kong	3	South Korea	1
China	9	India	1	Tanzania	1
Colombia	3	Madagascar	1	Thailand	1
England	74	Malaysia	1	Uganda	1
Ethiopia	1	Netherlands	1	USA	32
Finland	1	Northern Ireland	26	Wales	5
France	1	Russia	1	Zimbabwe	1
Guatemala	1			Total	184

Table 23: Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 2014 and 2023, * 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 refer).

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bulgaria	4	8	4	8	1	1	0	0	0	0
Cambodia	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
China	0	15	7	10	4	3	1	0	0	0
England	2	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Ethiopia	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Haiti	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
India	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Lithuania	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mexico	5	11	0	1	0	0	5	0	0	0
Peru	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poland	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Russia	4	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Thailand	6	1	4	2	8	0	4	2	3	2
USA	4	6	12	9	7	10	1	4	2	7
Vietnam	4	32	23	22	20	18	9	8	13	12
Moldova	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	32	83	55	53	41	33	21	16	18	25

*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 24: Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 1991 and 2023 (All Sections).

Year	Number Recognised*	Year	Number Recognised*	Year	Number Recognised*
1991	58	2002	439	2014	106
1992	305	2003	460	2015	160
1993	59	2004	484	2016	214
1994	64	2005	443	2017	324
1995	93	2006	409	2018	313
1996	117	2007	439	2019	386
1997	149	2008	488	2020	184
1998	260	2009	395	2021	136
1999	284	2010	290	2022	170
2000	324	2011	342	2023	209
2001	284	2012	242	Total	8,771
		2013	141		

Other Information



Website

www.aai.gov.ie
www.birthinfo.ie

Solicitors

- Mason Hayes Curran, South Bank House, Barrow St, Dublin 4
- Matheson, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin 2

Auditors

- The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, Treasury Block, Lower Yard, Dublin Castle, Dublin 2
- Internal Audit) ASM, 20 Rosemary Street, Belfast BT1 1QD

Appendix A



Table 25: Summary of all Board meetings in 2023 and attendance

Meeting Date 2023	Meeting Type	Board of the Authority Attendees
17 January	Full	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Dr H. Buckley, Judge P. McMahon, Prof. S. Greene
31 January	Orders	S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Dr H. Buckley, Judge P. McMahon, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene
14 February	Full	S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Dr H. Buckley, Judge P. McMahon, Dr M. Anglim
07 March	Full	S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Dr H. Buckley, Judge P. McMahon, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene
28 March	Orders	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, Dr H. Buckley, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene
18 April	Full	All members
09 May	Full	All members
23 May	Orders and Governance	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene
13 June	Full	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, Dr H. Buckley, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene
04 July	Full	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Dr H. Buckley, Dr M. Anglim
18 July	Orders	O. Traynor, P. Harrison, Dr H. Buckley, Judge P. McMahon, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene
05 September	Full	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Dr H. Buckley, Judge P. McMahon, Prof. S. Greene
26 September	Orders	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, Dr H. Buckley, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene
03 October	Full	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene
07 November	Full	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Dr H. Buckley, Judge P. McMahon, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene
21 November	Orders	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, Dr H. Buckley, Judge P. McMahon, Prof. S. Greene
28 November	Governance	All members
12 December	Full	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Dr H. Buckley, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene

Appendix B



Number of sanctioned posts by unit/team and grade as at 31 December 2023

Table 26: Overview of all AAI posts sanctioned by the DCEDIY as at 31 December 2023

AAI Unit	Team	Grades													
		Director	Principal Officer	Assistant Principal	Principal Social Worker	Social Work Team Lead	Senior Social Worker	Professionally Qualified Social Worker	Engineer Grade II	Engineer Grade III	Administrative Officer	Higher Executive Officer	Executive Officer	Clerical Officer	Total
Office of the CEO		1											1		2
Adoption Operations			1												
	Domestic										1		3	2	11
	Intercountry											1	1	2	
Social Work					1	1	5	5							12
Information Services and Records			1												1
	Digital Solutions			1									2	1	4
	Archives								1	1		1	1		4
	Records			1								1	5	8	15
	Data Protection											1		1	2
Research				1							1				2
HR and Staff Development				1								1	1	1	4
Compliance, Corporate Services and Accreditation				1								1	4	1	7
Total		1	2	5	1	1	5	5	1	1	2	6	18	16	64



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