



ÚDARÁS UCHTÁLA na hÉIREANN
THE ADOPTION AUTHORITY of IRELAND

Údarás Uchtála na hÉireann
Adoption Authority of Ireland

Tuarascáil Bhliantúil 2021
Annual Report 2021



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



**Report of
Údarás Uchtála na hÉireann
Adoption Authority of Ireland
for 2021**

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

The Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI) Annual Report 2021

Key points



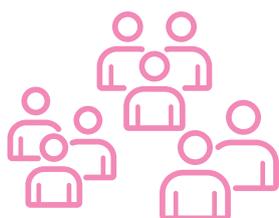
The Board held 17 scheduled meetings and seven additional meetings during 2021, the majority of which were held using remote technologies

124

potential matches on The National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR) identified between adoptees and family members



Despite continued and significant challenges of COVID-19, the AAI operated and delivered a full service throughout the pandemic



469

new registrants applied to the NACPR



101

Domestic Adoption orders granted, all remotely via Zoom

In March, the Authority's information and communication technology service provision migrated to the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO)



The AAI presented research findings at the 7th International Conference on Adoption Research

AAI replaced existing digital record images with high definition images



The Authority granted 41 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability in 2021 to applicants seeking to adopt abroad

136 entries

were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions

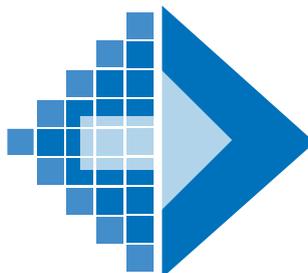


Table of Contents

Foreword	2	Domestic Adoption	30
Overview	4	Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability	31
Statement of Mission, Vision and Values	6	Adoption Orders	31
Mission Statement	7	Applications to the High Court	31
Vision Statement	7	Other Activity	32
Principles and Values	7	Information and Tracing	33
Child-Centeredness	7	Requests for the Release of Birth Certificates	34
Quality Services	7	National Adoption Contact Preference	
Accountability through Ethical		Register (NACPR)	34
Practice and Transparency	7	NACPR Matches	35
Respect	7	Birth Information and Tracing Bill 2022	36
Organisation & Management Structure 2021	8	Intercountry Adoption	37
Chief Executive Officer and Senior		Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability	38
Management Team 2021	9	Register of Intercountry Adoptions	38
Board of the Adoption Authority	10	Matching of Children	38
Membership of the Board	11	Country Specific Issues	38
Committees of the Board	12	Register of Gender Recognition of	
Risk and Audit Committee	12	Intercountry Adoptions	38
Research Sub-Committee	12	Social Work	39
Governance	12	Staffing	40
Board Responsibilities	12	Overview of Social Work Role	40
Board	12	Social Work Phone Service	40
Chairperson	13	Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)	40
Chief Executive Officer	13	Social Work and Domestic Adoption	40
Board Stipend	13	Social Work and Intercountry Adoption	40
COVID-19	14	Social Work and Information/Search and Reunion	41
Hybrid Working	15	Social Work Fora	41
Impact on Meetings	15	Social Work and Accreditation and Inspection	41
Events and Travel 2021	15	External Social Work Review	41
Corporate Governance	16	Children First Act, 2015 and the Authority's	
General	17	role as a Relevant Organisation	41
Financial Control	17	Research	43
Internal Financial Control	17	Research Studies	44
Budget Management	17	Adoption Researchers Network of Ireland	44
Risk and Audit Committee	17	Strategy	44
Internal Audit Function	18	Research Subcommittee	44
Risk Management	18	The Library and Journal Access	44
Procurement	18	External Communications	44
Protected Disclosures	19	Corporate Services and Accreditation	45
External Board Evaluation	19	Website and Information Technology	46
Board Induction	19	Parliamentary Questions (PQs)	46
2019-2021 Corporate Plan and 2021		Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests	46
Business Plan	20	Press/Media	46
Overview	21	Energy Management	46
Goals	21	Accreditation	46
Business Plan	21	Register of Accredited Bodies	46
Progress Report 2021	22	Accreditation Procedures	47
		Cessation of Accredited Bodies in 2021	47

Digitisation	48	Pension/Retirements	54
Increased Resources	49	HR and COVID-19	54
eDMS and Data Alignment Projects	49	Blended Working Pilot	54
Enhanced Scanning	49	Resource Planning	54
Remote Technologies	49	Training and Development	54
Data Protection	50	Employee Assistance Service	55
Subject Access Requests (SARs)	51	Statistics	56
Policies and Procedures	52	Other Information	63
Human Resources	53	Appendix A	65
Recruitment	54		

Table of Figures and Tables

Figure 1	Number of new registrants who joined the NACPR 2005–2020*	34
Figure 2	Breakdown of NACPR Matches by year 2017-2020	35
Table 1	Breakdown of NACPR Registrants by year 2016-2021	35
Table 2	Adoptee/Relative Breakdown*	35
Table 3	Matches by Relationship by year 2017-2021	36
Table 4	Register of Accredited Bodies 2021	47
Table 5	Birth and Domestic Adoption Trends in Ireland 1953-2021.	57
Table 6	Domestic Adoptions by type 2017-2021.	59
Table 7	Domestic Adoptions by Age of Child 2017-2021.	59
Table 8	High Court Orders Granted Pursuant to Domestic Adoption Applications 2017-2021.	59
Table 9	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, 2010-2021 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).	60
Table 10	Entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions, pursuant to Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010, for 2021 only (Applicants habitually resident in Ireland holding a valid Declaration of Eligibility & Suitability at the time of effecting the intercountry adoption).	60
Table 11	Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised in 2021, 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).	61
Table 12	Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 2014 and 2021,* 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).	61
Table 13	Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 1991 and 2021 (All Sections).	62



Foreword

The year 2021 began in the gloom of post-Christmas lockdown, albeit with a faint air of optimism prompted by the rollout of the national COVID-19 vaccination program.

In March, the Authority's information and communication technology service provision migrated to the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO). The culmination of this huge migration project facilitated a new blended working culture where all staff can now work from home as well as on site, and enabled a range of enhanced and updated services.

The Board, supported by the Executive, continued to operate, and delivered a full service, conducting adoption hearings and adoption orders remotely via Zoom. Board members made a brief return to the office for in-person meetings in September when restrictions lifted, but by the time of the final Board meeting on 21 December they were obliged to once again conduct their work via video link. All of the 101 adoption orders granted in 2021 were granted via Zoom.

On 11 May 2021, the Authority warmly welcomed the publication of the long-awaited draft Birth Information & Tracing legislation by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). During the year, the Authority continued to work closely with colleagues in DCEDIY and the Child and Family Agency-Tusla to prepare for the enactment of the legislation, under which the Authority is pleased to retain the Contact Preference Register for adopted persons and birth relatives and to engage in providing adoptees with their birth certificates, early life information and – critically – medical information. On 15 June, Chairperson Orlaith Traynor and CEO Patricia Carey appeared before the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children, Disability, Equality and Integration, via video link, to give input on behalf of the Authority toward this historical Bill. They emphasised the Authority's view that the legislation is a thoughtful rebalancing of rights to identity and provision of supports to all those, including birth mothers, who will be affected by the legislation.

Research Officer Dr Judy Lovett progressed her dedicated research role throughout 2021, in August publishing the second in a series of five planned country-specific briefings, this latest report investigating at the adoption of children from Vietnam into Ireland between 1988 and 2020. The Authority also marked the first anniversary of the new AAI Board in November

with a new infographic, 'Facts about Adoption in Ireland,' which is on display in Reception and on the AAI website.

In September, the Authority took charge of the files and records of the agency Here2Help, along with the responsibility for providing social work and information and tracing services to anyone whose information was held by Here2Help. St Brigid's Information and Tracing Service (SBITS) closed permanently on 30 November 2021, with their files set to transfer to the Adoption Authority early in 2022 for the provision of information and tracing services.

COVID-19 restrictions prevented travel to any jurisdiction or country to effect an intercountry adoption, and the Authority and Helping Hands continued to engage with the Central Authorities and embassies of several sending countries to support prospective adoptive parents in the process of adopting from overseas.

The [statistics](#) section displays figures for operational matters in 2021 and previous years for all the key areas of work in the Authority. The data indicates how numbers of domestic adoption orders, intercountry adoptions, requests for birth certificate releases, applications to the NACPR and matches between adopted persons and birth relatives in 2021 compare with other years, and how many Parliamentary Questions and Data Protection requests the Authority processed.

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



Ms Orlaith Traynor
Chairperson



Ms Patricia Carey
CEO



Overview

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

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

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



**Statement
of Mission,
Vision and
Values**

Mission Statement

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

Vision Statement

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

Principles and Values

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

Child-Centeredness

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

Quality Services

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

Accountability through Ethical Practice and Transparency

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

Respect

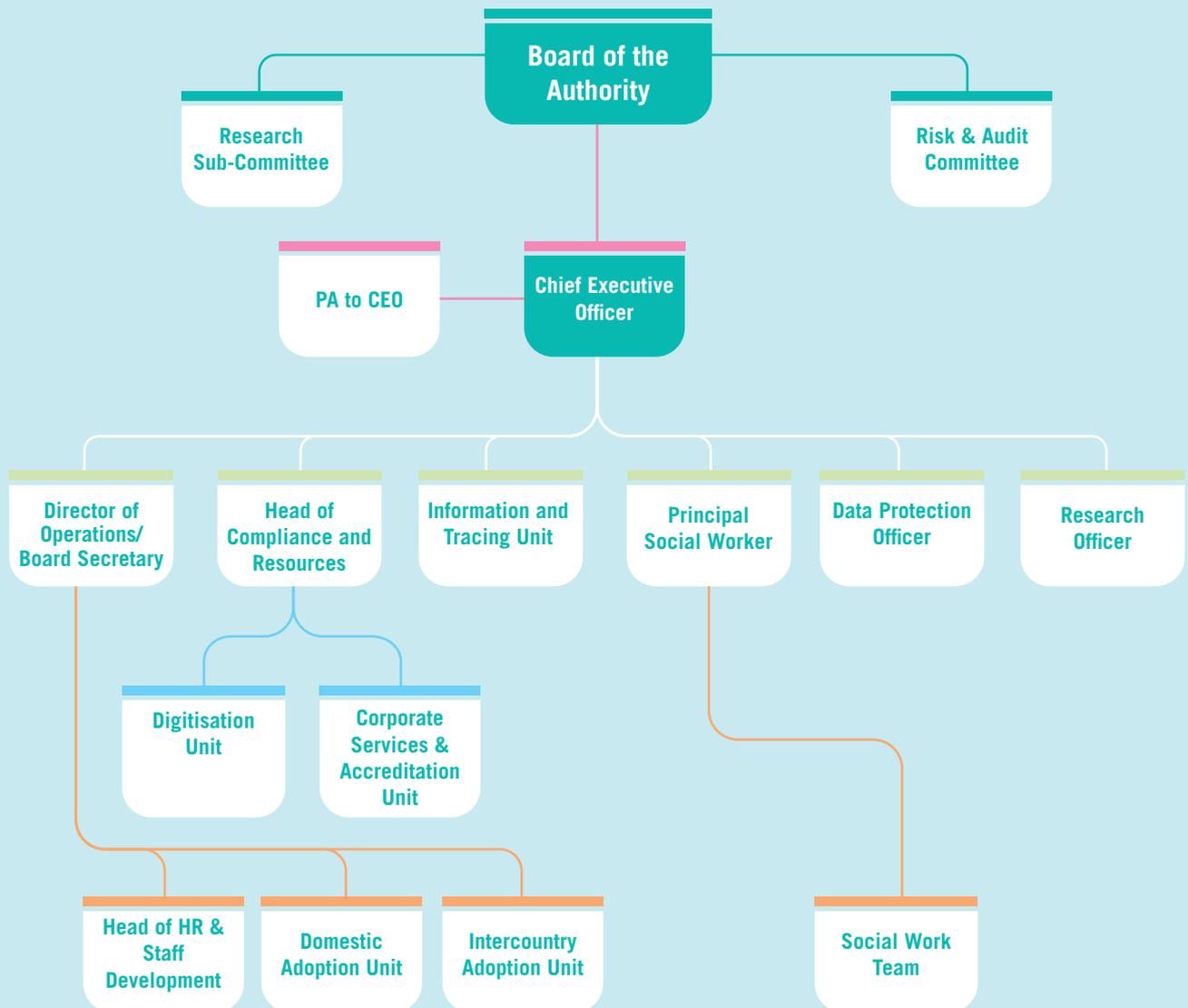
- We are committed to treating all with whom we deal with dignity, respect and courtesy.
- We are a listening, learning and empowering organisation for all those who work in adoption services, or are affected by adoption.
- We listen to the ideas and concerns of our own staff and use their knowledge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

This Annual Report is a summary of the main pieces of work undertaken by the Adoption Authority of Ireland in 2021. You can read and download information about our accounts and publications on www.aai.gov.ie.



**Organisation &
Management
Structure 2021**

Chief Executive Officer and Senior Management Team 2021





**Board of
the Adoption
Authority**

Membership of the Board

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 (Retd.)
Dr Margo Anglim
Prof. Sheila Greene

In accordance with the Adoption Act 2010, the Board shall consist of seven members, being the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson and five ordinary members, appointed by the Minister. The term of office of the Board is for a period not exceeding five years. An appointed member who completes a term of office is eligible for reappointment to the Board, but may not serve as a member for more than two consecutive terms.

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

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

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 17 scheduled meetings and seven extra meetings during 2021, including an emergency meeting on Christmas Eve convened to facilitate the making of an adoption order. Meetings of the Board are scheduled in such a way to facilitate one 'full' Board meeting each month at which matters other than the granting of Adoption Orders are dealt with. In general, the second meeting of the month is reserved for the granting of Adoption Orders and any other urgent business which may need to be dealt with on the day. In general, only a quorate Board is required to attend on the Adoption Order days and this is reflected in the attendance report in Appendix A. Standing items on the agenda for 'full' meetings of the Board include:

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

The Board passed a resolution to have a minimum of one meeting each year for Governance matters only. One Governance meeting was held during 2021, on 21 September. The workload associated with the COVID-19 pandemic meant that Adoption Orders and Hearings had to be prioritised during 2021. The CEO Report on the agenda provides information and updates to the Board on the operation of the Adoption Authority of Ireland, the implementation of Board policy, the implementation of the annual Business Plan, expenditure and budgetary matters and other relevant issues and/or developments. Part 4 of the Adoption Act outlines the powers vested in the Board including

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

These matters form part of the agenda for meetings of the Board and are dealt with under the Domestic and Intercountry sections of the agenda. As required under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, the Board met without the Executive (that is, the CEO, the Board Secretary and any other member of staff or management) on one occasion in 2021, on 21 September, known as the 'Governance Day'. On Governance Day, the meeting was conducted in the absence of the Executive. On each of the 'full' Board meeting dates the Board met without the Executive from 9.45am for such period as was required to discuss matters. This practice will continue in 2022.

Committees of the Board

Risk and Audit Committee

Ms Claire Byrne (Chair of Risk and Audit Committee)

Ms Tara McDermott

Mr Paul Harrison, Member of the Authority

Ms Orlaith Traynor, Chairperson of the Authority

The Committee meets at least four times a year, with authority to convene additional meetings as circumstances require. The attendance of two nonexecutive committee members shall constitute a quorum. In 2021, the Committee met four times. The Committee invited members of the Executive, auditors or others to attend meetings and to provide pertinent information, as necessary. The CEO and the Head of Compliance attend all meetings. Secretarial support is provided by Crowleys DFK.

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

Research Sub-Committee

The Research Sub-Committee met on four occasions in 2021. The frequency of meetings of the Board and its committees and the attendance of each Board member at Board meetings is reported in Appendix A in compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

The membership of the Research Committee in 2021 was as follows:

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

Ms Orlaith Traynor, Chairperson of the Authority

Prof. Sheila Greene, Member of the Authority

Dr Margo Anglim, Member of the Authority

Ms Claire McGettrick, UCD (Extern)

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

Ms Patricia Carey, CEO of the Authority

Dr Judy Lovett, AAI Research Officer

Ms Nicole Scannell, AAI Social Worker

Ms Mary Coffey/ Mr Gordon Corrigan (from 21 Nov) , AAI Head of Information and Tracing

Mr Mark Kirwan, AAI Head of Domestic Adoption

Ms Orla Bolger, AAI Head of Intercountry Adoption

Governance

The Board of the Adoption Authority of Ireland was established under the Adoption Act 2010. The functions of the Board are set out in Section 96 of this Act. The Board is accountable to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and is responsible for ensuring good governance. It performs this task by setting strategic objectives and targets and taking strategic decisions on all key business issues.

The regular day-to-day management, control and direction of the Adoption Authority of Ireland are the responsibility of the CEO and the senior management team. The CEO and the senior management team must follow the broad strategic direction set by the Board, and must ensure that all Board members have a clear understanding of the key activities and decisions related to the entity, and of any significant risks likely to arise. The CEO acts as a direct liaison between the Board and staff and management of the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

Board Responsibilities

Board

The work and responsibilities of the Board are set out in the Adoption Authority of Ireland's Code of Governance.

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

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

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

The Board is responsible for keeping adequate accounting records which disclose, with reasonable accuracy at any time, its financial position and 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 Adoption Authority of Ireland's website is the responsibility of the Board.

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

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

Chairperson

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

- Appropriate agenda setting, management and support of Board meetings;
- Chairing Board meetings characterised by clear decisions and the balancing of contributions from Board Members and the CEO/Executive;
- Ensuring that the minutes of the meeting accurately record the decisions taken;
- Conducting all meetings of the Board in accordance with the Authority's Code of Business Conduct and appropriately evaluating the Board's performance;
- Ensuring Board members understand their respective roles and responsibilities and that the Board works effectively and efficiently;
- Furnishing a Comprehensive Report to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in conjunction with the annual report and financial statements of the State body in compliance with Financial and Reporting arrangements under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

Managing key relationships/communications with

- The CEO; including performance evaluation of the CEO;
- The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the DCEDIY;
- Other key external parties and by promoting the work and mission of the Authority;

- The Board, reflecting a tone of respect, trust and candour that allows for challenging questions and inputs;
- The appropriate Oireachtas Sub-Committee(s).

Chief Executive Officer

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

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

The CEO is responsible for

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

Board Stipend

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



COVID-19

Hybrid Working

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have significant impact on the work of the Authority during 2021, however less so than in 2020. During the initial peak in Q1 staff worked partly remote and partly on-site to reduce numbers of staff on-site. This posed various challenges as the Authority did not yet have full remote access to its systems so the work that could be done by staff working remotely was somewhat limited. However, the staff overcame this challenge by rearranging duties within teams during this time to ensure no productivity was lost.

After this initial peak in COVID-19 cases staff returned to the office full time. COVID-19 protocols, as advised in the COVID-19 risk assessment in 2020, remained in place. Staff were positioned as far away from each other in the office as possible and all return-to-work protocols were strictly adhered to. Those deemed vulnerable to attend Authority offices were set up to work remotely where possible

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Authority migrated to remotely holding Board meetings, hearing the views of children and other parties involved in the adoption process, as well as the granting of final Adoption Orders. This continued throughout 2021. The continued use of remote technology to enable service access was critical to the successful functioning of the Authority and ensuring all Adoption Orders were completed on time. During 2021, meetings were held both remotely and, when permitted, face to face with all relevant COVID-19 protocols in place.

In terms of COVID-19's impact, the most significant change in 2021 was the Authority's migration to the OGCI0 platform in March. This move then gave the Authority's staff the ability to work remotely with full secure access to all systems. Following the migration to OGCI0, a working group was convened to design a remote working policy in consultation with staff. A pilot of this policy was trialled between September and December 2021, with those staff who wished to avail of hybrid working.

Impact on Meetings

The majority of Board meetings were held using remote technologies in 2021. In some cases, a minimum number of Board members attended meetings in person while other Board members joined via teleconference or video conference. At all in-person meetings, the appropriate COVID-19 protocols were in place to protect Board members and Authority staff.

All Risk and Audit meetings and Research Sub-Committee meetings were held remotely in 2021.

Events and Travel 2021

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, international travel was suspended for 2021.



**Corporate
Governance**

General

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

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

Financial Control

The budget of the Adoption Authority of Ireland is allocated through the DCEDIY. In 2021, the financial allocation of the Adoption Authority was €5,626,000.

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

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

The Financial Statements are subject to audit by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (OC&AG). Financial Statements for a particular year are generally not audited at the time of the relevant annual report's publication. The audit of the 2021 accounts commenced in April 2022. Once approved by the OC&AG, the 2021 Statements will be published on the Authority's website.

Crowleys DFK Chartered Accountants provided accountancy services to the Authority during 2021.

Internal Financial Control

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

Budget Management

The CEO and the senior management team prepare an annual budget based on the operational and developmental needs of the Adoption Authority of Ireland. The annual budget is recommended for

approval by CEO to the Board. Day-to-day responsibility for managing expenditure within budget limits is assigned to the CEO and Head of Compliance with support from the Authority's finance consultants Crowleys DFK. Budgets are monitored closely with monthly reports furnished to the DCEDIY and the CEO.

Risk and Audit Committee

The Committee is chaired by an external person and includes the Chair of the Board, a member of the Board and one other external member with significant business expertise and experience within the public and private sectors. The CEO and the Head of Compliance attend all meetings of the committee. The RAC sat four times during 2021 and met with representatives from the OC&AG as well as internal auditors. In their Annual Report 2021, the Committee expressed satisfaction with the general financial control environment operating with the Authority. The Committee plays a fundamental role in ensuring that the Adoption Authority of Ireland functions according to good governance, accounting and auditing standards and adopts appropriate management and risk arrangements. It does this by overseeing and advising the Board and the CEO as Accounting Officer on the following matters:

- The strategic processes for risk, internal control and governance;
- The accounting policies, the financial statements, and the annual report of the Adoption Authority of Ireland, including the process for review of the financial statements prior to submission for audit, levels of error identified, and management's letter of representation to the external auditors;
- The planned activity and results of both internal and external audit;
- Adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit activity, including external audit's management letter of representation;
- Assurances relating to the management of risk and corporate governance requirements for the Adoption Authority of Ireland;
- Proposals for tendering for either internal or external audit services or for purchase of non-audit services from contractors who provide audit services;
- Anti-fraud policies, protected disclosure processes, and arrangements for special investigations; and
- The Risk and Audit Committee periodically reviews its own effectiveness and reports the results of that review to the Board.

The Committee's agenda in 2021 included

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

Internal Audit Function

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

The Internal Audit function is outsourced. It operates in accordance with an audit charter approved by the Board and an annual audit plan approved by the CEO and the RAC. In carrying out audits, the contractor complies with the Institute of Internal Audit Standards, as adapted by the Department of Public Reform and Expenditure for use in government departments.

All audit reports are submitted directly to the CEO and to the RAC who also receive periodic reports showing progress against the plan. The internal auditors completed a review of internal controls in 2021, as well as a review of data security at the Authority. The audits

resulted in 'satisfactory' ratings. Recommendations made were accepted. The AAI procured for Internal Audit services in 2019 through the Office of Government Procurement using their established framework for accountancy and auditing services. This contract will run until 2022.

Risk Management

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

The Chief Risk Officer is a member of the senior management team and reports directly to the RAC and the Board. The Risk Register sets out the major risks facing the Adoption Authority of Ireland together with existing controls and actions to mitigate them, and identifies owners and target dates for completion. Risks are categorised High, Medium and Low. A report on the High Risk items was provided to the Board each month in 2021.

Procurement

The Adoption Authority of Ireland 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 Adoption Authority of Ireland avails of centralised managed contracts that have been put in place by the Office of Government Procurement including the provision of stationery and office supplies, photocopying, and foreign travel. The Adoption Authority of Ireland continues to engage with the Office of Government Procurement for advice on current and future procurement requirements. In 2021, a number of contracts were successfully procured in conjunction with the Office of Government Procurement in line with the Authority's 2021 Procurement Plan.

Protected Disclosures

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

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

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

Section 22 of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 requires the publication of an Annual Report each year relating to the number of protected disclosures made in the preceding year and any actions taken in response to such disclosures. Pursuant to this requirement, the Adoption Authority of Ireland confirms that no reports were received and/or are under investigation in accordance with the provisions of the Protected Disclosures Act, 2014 for the financial year from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021.

External Board Evaluation

Under Section 4.6 of the 2016 Code of Governance of State Bodies 2016, there is a requirement for the Board of all State bodies to undertake an annual self-assessment evaluation of its own performance and that of its committees. The code requires that an external evaluation proportionate to the size and requirements of the State body should be carried out at least every three years. In 2021, the Authority prioritised adoption matters during the period due to COVID-19 and the requirement to conduct meetings remotely.

Board Induction

A new Board was appointed on 1 November 2020 for a period of five years. A Board induction programme was subsequently commenced for all Board members. Topics covered included Culture, Ethics and Governance; Controls and Oversight; Finance and the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies; Roles, responsibilities and relationships as well as a number of legal briefings. This programme will continue during 2022.



**2019-2021
Corporate Plan
and 2021
Business Plan**

Overview

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

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

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

Goals

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

Business Plan

The Annual Business Plans are designed to focus on the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan by identifying tasks to be completed throughout the year. The Business Plan is reviewed periodically and updated as required. Business Plan reviews and updates were submitted to the DCEDIY on a quarterly basis in 2021 in compliance with the Authority's Performance Delivery Agreement with the Department.

Progress Report 2021

Goal
1

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

Task No	Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2021
1.1	The Authority's procedures and policies ensure that all adoption orders incorporate the views of the child giving due weight having regard to the age and maturity of the child.	All applications that proceed to adoption order have a report of child consultation.	In 2021, the Adoption Authority of Ireland continued to engage effectively with service users and their advocates, service providers, policy makers and the Government to bring about continuous quality improvements in our adoption services. Hearings and orders continued to be conducted remotely via online video conferencing. All applications continued to contain satisfactory reports on the voice of the child.
1.2	The Authority will facilitate requests from a child to be heard by the Board during the adoption process.	All requests acknowledged promptly and notified to Board at next scheduled meeting. All requests for a hearing before the Board are facilitated.	Every Adoption Order before the Board was reviewed to ensure the views of the child have been heard. At all Board meetings with children held during 2021 the voice of the child was heard. All such hearings were conducted remotely via online video conferencing. In 2021, 7 children were heard directly by Board either in the process of granting their Adoption Order or prior to making decision whether to progress their case, and 6 children submitted their views in writing to the Board.
1.3	To ensure the Authority provides sufficient and appropriate information to enable the child to make a free and informed decision regarding the adoption.	All relevant information is provided to children and families directly as part of their adoption application.	In 2021, the AAI website continued to be reviewed on a quarterly basis to ensure accuracy of information. Necessary edits were made.
1.4	Liaise with other relevant public bodies in ensuring consistency in practice when hearing the voice of the child.	Consistent high standards are maintained in hearing the voice of the child.	During 2021, there was ongoing interaction with the DCEDIY, Tusla and other relevant stakeholders to ensure the voice of the child was considered in all applications. The voice of the child was heard using remote technologies during 2021.
1.5	Ongoing engagement with the Department and Minister in ensuring the voice of the child is given sufficient consideration in all adoption proceedings.	Full compliance with Section 19 of the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017.	

**Goal
2**

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

Task No	Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2021
2.1	Ensure that all relevant parties (the child; applicants; mother of the child; father of the child; relevant non-guardians; guardians; person having charge or control over the child) are fully informed of their right to be heard.	All parties are aware of their right to be heard before the Board. All relevant information is provided to relevant parties in a timely manner.	During 2021, applications continued to be processed efficiently despite restrictions imposed by COVID 19. The Board took measures to reduce delays in cases receiving a decision and hearings continued to be offered in all cases.
2.2	Facilitate requests to be heard from any of the above relevant parties.	All requests for a hearing before the board are facilitated and scheduled. Birth parents will have service provided to them where required in the adoption process.	Hearings were scheduled on a monthly basis to facilitate all requests. All hearings continued to be conducted via online video conferencing.
2.3	The Authority's procedures and policies ensure that all adoption orders incorporate the views of all relevant parties.	Written confirmations are kept on file of all attempts to engage with relevant parties	Internally during 2021, the Authority's Operations Manual was updated as required.
2.4	Ensure the Authority provides sufficient and clear information to enable all relevant parties to make a free and informed decision to engage in the adoption process.	All relevant information is provided to all relevant parties directly as part of their hearing application. Feedback received from relevant parties as to whether they felt they were adequately informed to enable them to make decisions.	On an ongoing basis, each adoption application is reviewed by the Board to ensure all decisions are free and informed. This continued during 2021.

**Goal
3**

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

Task No	Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2021
3.1	To support and oversee the development of comprehensive, high quality and integrated adoption services with our key statutory and non-statutory partners.	<p>Accurate documentation and reports received against standards.</p> <p>Accurate comprehensive and timely of submissions to Court.</p> <p>Reduced delays in processing of applications and decision making.</p>	In 2021, remote hearings continued and were facilitated in all cases. Reporting and documentation received continued to be accurate and submissions to court were accurate, comprehensive and timely. Review of Domestic Adoption procedures ongoing in 2021.
3.2	To engage effectively with service users and their advocates, service providers, policy makers and government to bring about continuous quality improvements in our adoption services.	<p>Adherence to planned schedule of meetings / consultations.</p> <p>Timely response to unscheduled meeting requests.</p>	During 2021, regular meetings with accredited bodies, support and advocacy groups, as well as other service providers and state bodies were convened. All meeting requests were facilitated. During 2021, international travel and hosting of delegates was suspended due to COVID-19, however communication continued remotely. Work on the new 2022-2024 Strategic Plan commenced. This involved extensive consultation with a range of internal and external stakeholders.
3.3	Maintain active oversight of all accredited agencies, including reaccreditation and registration against approved regulations.	Statutory reports filed on time.	During 2021, all statutory reports were filled on time.
3.4	Ongoing engagement between AAI and Tusla on operational issues, to reflect the Minister’s comments.	Timely engagement with Tusla regarding operational issues.	During 2021, the AAI engaged regularly with Tusla regarding operational issues, such as the processing of late applications for adoption.

**Goal
4**

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

Task No	Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2021
4.1	Make informed and timely decisions regarding: A) the granting of declarations of eligibility and suitability to adopt B) the making of adoption orders C) the recognition of intercountry adoption orders D) Article 17 referrals.	A) Turnaround time of 6 weeks. B) Before age 18. C) Two weeks for routine and 8 weeks for non-routine. D) One week.	During 2021, all applications were reviewed by the Executive as soon as all documentation was complete and referred to the Board for a decision.
4.2	Ongoing engagement with the Department and Minister on all adoption related matters	Full and constructive engagement with the Dept. and Minister on all relevant matters.	In 2021, regular meetings were held with the Adoption Policy Unit to discuss the Authority’s reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other policy, governance and operational matters.
4.3	Maintain all statutory and non-statutory Registers in line with agreed requirements.	Registers are up-to-date and accurate.	By the close of 2021, there were over 14,340 registrants on the NACPR with over 1,498 matches. In keeping with the trend toward online correspondence, the majority of applications received during 2021 were sent via email. In 2021, 469 new registrants joined the NACPR, reflecting a sizable increase when compared to the total of applications received during 2020. The backlog on applications to the NACPR was also cleared. 2021 saw 124 matches being made on the NACPR. Further substantial work was completed on updating the NACPR database in preparation for a move to a new Contact Preference Register in line with proposed Birth, Information and Tracing legislation. The migration to a document management system continued at pace for all sections and the AAI also migrated all ICT services to the OGCIO. Together, both these projects enabled secure remote working options for all staff, which had not previously been available.
4.4	Make informed and timely decisions regarding the release of identifying information to adult adoptees and birth parents.	Non-routine to next appropriate board meeting. Routine 1 - 2 weeks.	In 2021, informed and timely decisions were made in all cases regarding the release of identifying information to adult adoptees and birth parents.
4.5	Maintain constructive relationships with all partners and develop national and international relationships that promote the highest possible standards in adoption and adoption related services.	Quarterly teleconference. Adherence to visits schedule.	COVID-19 continued to restrict international travel and domestic events in 2021. Communications are continuing with international parties via remote technologies.

**Goal
5**

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

Task No	Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2021
5.1	Engage proactively and communicate effectively with all stakeholders	Regular engagements with stakeholders. Timely response to stakeholder issues.	COVID-19 had a severe impact on face-to-face meetings. All remote invites were replied to promptly. All Staff are making use of remote meetings where required.
5.2	Website to be the prime source of information for all stakeholders and the public at large.	Website redesign.	The website was reviewed and updated regularly. A full website redesign has been postponed.
5.3	Undertake and promote research opportunities and research capacity.	Adherence to planned programme. Research strategy underway.	Four meetings of research subcommittee were held in 2021. A Reflections on Domestic Adoption study was completed with interim findings presented at ICAR-7 Conference. A research assistant was recruited. Vietnam country report was completed.
5.4	Support Government Departments in the development of adoption related policy and legislation.	Timely response to all requests.	Continuing engagement with Department on this matter
5.5	Promote informed and considered analysis and debate on adoption issues.	3 Seminars and 4 Social work fora per annum.	Due to the COVID-19 restrictions no fora were held during 2021.

**Goal
6**

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

Task No	Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2021
6.1	To plan and implement the changes required in organisation (including transfer of functions) and operational procedures in line with the Information and Tracing Bill 2016	Effective implementation of project plan.	Implementation plan in place for commencement of legislation. Budget set aside for implementation of plans subject to progress of legislation. External review of records management at the Authority completed.
6.2	Be prepared to adapt to: 1) DAHR and Surrogacy legislation 2) any other relevant legislation	Effective roll out of implementation plan.	Parts 2 and 3 of the Children and Family Relationship Act 2015 have been commenced. Implementation plan in place for commencement of legislation.
6.3	Tracing services for clients from whom the AAI hold both the agency and adoption file or agency and fostering file.	No more than a six-month waiting list for tracing services.	Here2Help files transferred to the Authority in Q2. An information and tracing service began on 1 September 2021. Those who were waiting on a tracing service were amalgamated in to the existing AAI trace workload.
6.4	Information sharing with client for whom we hold any information on (both where the AAI have the agency file and the AAI file).	No more than a 16-week wait for information from AAI file.	Due to the increase in the volume of enquires a waiting list has been put in place. Additional resources will be secured to help alleviate this backlog.
6.5	To plan for and manage the increase in workload as a result of the publication of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission Report and Illegal Birth Registrations Report	Effective management and monitoring of backlogs created by increase in workload.	In 2021, all backlogs in Information and tracing requests were cleared and all new requests are being acknowledged within 2 working days. However, some backlogs remain in both AAI and TUSLA regarding matches, tracing and birth cert requests. In 2021, the AAI received 97 SAR requests, a threefold increase on 2020.
6.6	Streamline processes across the organisation	More streamlined processes and reduction in paper and posting.	Continual review of all processes to streamline & digitalise practices.
6.7	Explore a WFH policy and procedures in line with proposed new government strategy	Draft WFH policy developed and tested with a pilot phase.	A draft Hybrid Working policy has been written in consultation with all staff using a design thinking approach. A pilot scheme ran between September and the end of the year to test this draft policy. Feedback from the testing phase will feed into a finalised report early in 2022.

**Goal
7**

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

Task No	Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2021
7.1	Ensure full compliance with the 2016 Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.	Full compliance with all requirements.	Full compliance achieved with all requirements.
7.2	Collaborate with OPW in obtaining fit-for-purpose file storage at the existing office location.	Relocation with minimal disruption to services. Compliance with Plan.	OPW were not in a position to negotiate a suitable fit-for-purpose storage location in 2021 and so AAI began separate negotiations directly with Shelbourne House to lease additional space on site which will be continued in 2022.
7.3	Maintain robust Risk Management Framework.	4 meetings per annum for RAC. External evaluation once every 3 years. No open recommendations from Internal Audit Reports.	Four RAC meetings held in 2021. Favourable Financial Maturity Model review completed. Any recommendations from audits in 2021 to be audited for successful implementation in 2022.
7.4	Maintain highest standards in data confidentiality and data integrity and compliance with Data Protection, GDPR and e-Privacy legislation.	Full adherence to each policy. Ensure all appropriate policies are reviewed and in place. IT policy to be drafted, agreed and implemented. Data Protection Policy and Breach Reporting Policy.	All data protection policies were fully adhered to. An information security audit was commenced and due to completed early in 2022. Further policy reviews to follow recommendations from this audit in 2022.
7.5	Authority to maintain a learning environment where competencies and training requirements are fully met.	Competency and skill gaps are met. Adherence to training policy. Ensure Personal Performance Plans are completed Training needs report drafted based on PPP and strategy Training programme in place Interim and annual reviews carried out	All personal performance plans completed in 2021. 100% of training requests have been responded to. Training Needs report not commenced as recruitment took priority in 2021.

Task No	Goals	Outcomes	Progress December 2021
7.6	Maintain Board and Executive Succession Plan	<p>No gaps between staff leaving and new appointments.</p> <p>No competency gaps.</p> <p>No gaps in membership/ no competency gaps.</p> <p>No delays in functioning of new Board in Nov.</p> <p>No extended vacancies and no loss of corporate knowledge.</p> <p>Staff complement meets needs of changing organisation.</p>	Ongoing recruitment as required and sanctioned. New Information Services and Records unit planned and to be set up under the supervision of a Director of Information Services and Records who was recruited in late 2021. Several significant staff absences during 2021 impacted negatively on resource capabilities.
7.7	Ensure full value for money in discharge of allocated resources.	<p>Compliance with DPER guidelines.</p> <p>Adherence to procurement and financial policies.</p> <p>Operating within budget.</p>	Review of internal controls complete. Review of Financial Management Maturity Model to be completed in Q3 2021 and presented to RAC on 23 September. Information security review commenced in Q4 2021.
7.8	<p>Full implementation of Corporate Plan</p> <p>Formulate Strategic Plan 2022-2024</p>	<p>Corporate Plan implemented in full, in line with agreed objectives.</p> <p>Business Plan fully aligned to Corporate Plan.</p>	The Corporate Plan 2019-2021 was implemented as fully as possible with the exception of goals reliant on BITB legislation. The Strategic Plan 2022-2024 was prepared and awaiting final approval. The 2022 Business Plan approved and published by the AAI.
7.9	Deliver on Public Sector 2015 ICT Strategy - 5 Strategic Objectives	Significant progress against all objectives in the Public Sector 2015 Strategy.	In 2021, the AAI continued to deliver on the Public Sector 2015 ICT strategy. All ICT systems were migrated to the OGCIO. Permanent OGCIO Wifi was installed through offices. A large-scale digitisation project was procured and started in Q3. Ongoing collaboration with OGCIO on a range of different BTS services progressed. OGCIO provided advisory input into the data and information security audit.



**Domestic
Adoption**

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, 121 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted in 2021, a significant increase of 28 from the previous year. The expiration dates of 19 Declarations were extended in 2021, an increase of 5 from the previous year. In most cases, Declarations were granted within three to four weeks of receipt of the application.

Of the Declarations granted, 103 were granted in respect of married persons or couples, 6 in respect of co-habiting persons or couples, 1 in respect of a civil partnership, and 11 in respect of single applicants.

Adoption Orders

The AAI received 111 adoption applications in 2021, and 101 Adoption orders were granted during the year. This was again a significant increase from 81 granted in the previous year. The majority of orders granted were in respect step-parent adoptions which totalled 65. The number of adoption orders made for children who had been in long-term foster care in 2021 was 24. The remainder consists of 2 infants placed from birth for the purpose of adoption, 5 cases of children living with extended family members, and 5 cases where the child had been placed from abroad and the adoption needed to be completed through a domestic process.

Adoption Orders cannot be granted once a child turns 18 years of age and is legally considered an adult. Of the 101 Adoption orders granted in 2021, in 36 cases the child was 17 years of age; in 45 cases they were aged between 12 and 16 years, in 12 cases they were aged between 7 and 11 years, and in 8 cases they were aged between 1 and 6 years.

All applications were assessed and facilitated by the adoption services of Tusla, Child and Family Agency. In 4 applications, the assessments were facilitated in part by the accredited agency PACT.

Applications to the High Court

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

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

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

In 2021, 19 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 19 applications were granted.

Of these applications, 8 orders were made by the High Court in circumstances where it was deemed inappropriate to notify and consult with the birth father. The remaining 11 orders were made in circumstances where the identity of the birth father was unknown.

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

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

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

In 2021, 14 applications were made to the High Court under Sections 54 of the Act. These 14 applications were granted in 2021. In 11 of these cases, the birth mother or guardians' consents could not be obtained. In 3 cases, the nature of the original placement necessitated the court order.

In 2021, 2 applications were made to the High Court under Section 18 of the Act. This is required in circumstances where the birth father cannot be consulted regarding his child being placed for adoption shortly after birth. In both, the identity of the birth father was unknown and the order was granted.

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

Other Activity

Work continued on improving the Domestic Adoption Unit's digital records and databases during the year. The depth of information captured on cases was expanded, and the manner in which statistical information is captured was improved. This was of particular assistance to the roll out of remote working across the organisation, as it allowed for secure access to complete files by staff members working from home. This continued work on the databases also assisted in providing more accurate and detailed statistics for the AAI's research team, the Board and our parent department.

Work continued on the development of new Domestic guidelines, incorporating changes in practice and legislation. It is hoped that these will be ready for introduction in 2022, following consultation with key stakeholders.

Overall, this was a year which saw an increase in activity in almost all areas of Domestic Adoption and served to highlight the continually evolving nature of this process.



**Information
and Tracing**

Requests for the Release of Birth Certificates

During 2021, the Authority received 134 applications from adoptees seeking their original birth certificates. Of this total, 98 applications were passed to Tusla. The remainder were relevant to the agency files held by the AAI and will be processed in-house. All applications are currently in process or have reached completion. In terms of releases, a total of 22 were approved while 7 were rejected due to the absence of birth mother consent. Of the 22 certificates released, 16 of the requests were placed in 2021, the remaining 6 were made prior to 2021. Of the 7 rejected requests, 3 were received before 2021.

National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR)

Since its launch in 2005, the NACPR has been operated and maintained by the Adoption Authority of Ireland. The register works on a voluntary basis and serves as an effective method of enabling agreed contact between adoptees and birth relatives. By the close of 2021, there were over 14,340 registrants on the NACPR with over 1,498 matches. In keeping with the trend toward online

correspondence, the majority of applications received during 2021 were sent via email.

In 2021, 469 new registrants joined the NACPR, reflecting a sizable increase when compared to the total of applications received during 2020 (see Figure 1). This increase can be attributed to the publication of the Mother and Baby Home Report in January 2021, which generated heightened media attention and, in turn, renewed interest amongst the general public. The first quarter of 2020 saw a total of 92 applications received whereas the same period in 2021 saw 303 applications received, an increase of 211 (229%). This trend once again reflects how public interest directly effects work volumes within the Information and Tracing Unit. Given the progress of the proposed Birth and Information Tracing Bill, currently before the Dáil, it is anticipated that this trend will continue to rise over the coming years. The proposed legislative changes, especially relating to historical adoptions and the release of hitherto sealed documents, such as original birth certificates will most likely generate renewed public interest in the issue of adoption, especially from those directly affected by the process.

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

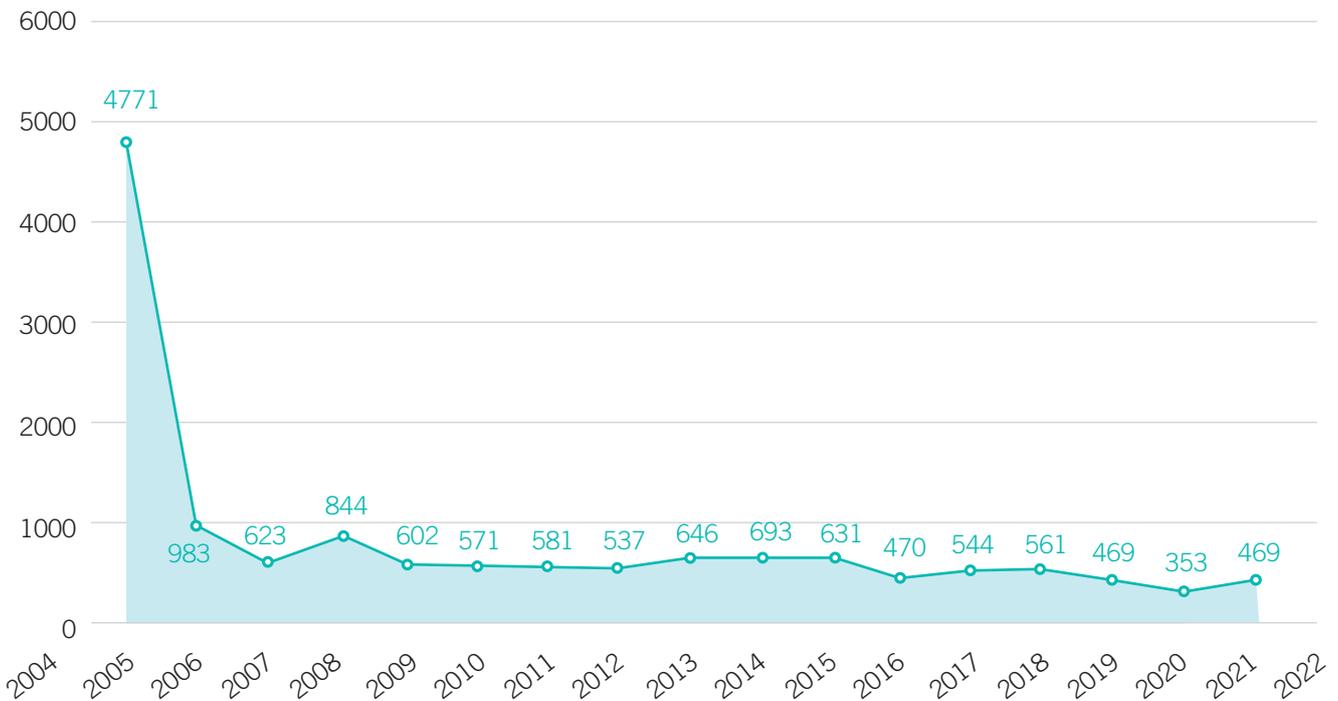


Table 1 Breakdown of NACPR Registrants by year 2016-2021

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Adoptee	333	366	403	300	211	312
Birth Father	17	16	10	19	11	10
Birth Mother	60	69	66	54	50	53
Cousin	7	10	18	8	8	14
Grandparent/Grandchild	4	3	3	6	5	14
Sibling	43	61	48	63	50	51
Uncle/Aunt/Niece/Nephew	6	17	13	19	16	12
Other/Unknown	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	2	3
Total	470	544	561	469	353	469

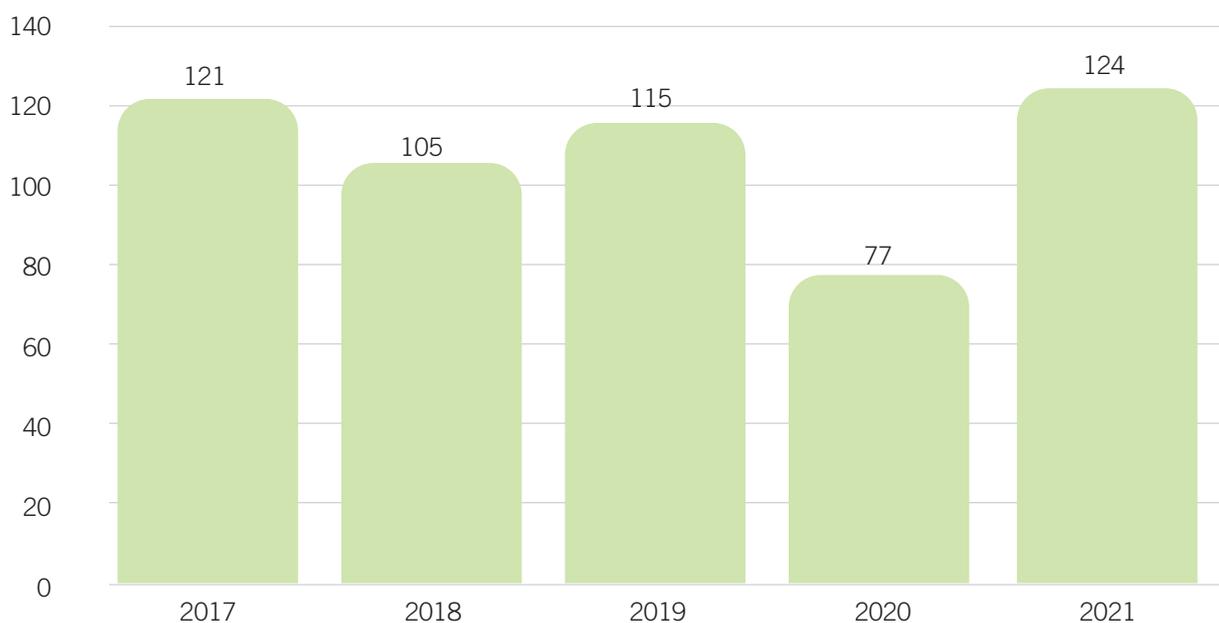
In the main, the Authority receives more applications from adoptees than birth relatives and this trend is once again reflected in the yearly totals for 2021, whereby 312 (67%) adoptees joined compared to 157 (33%) birth relatives (see Table 2).

Table 2 Adoptee/Relative Breakdown*

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Adoptee	71%	67%	72%	64%	60%	67%
Relatives	29%	33%	28%	36%	40%	33%

NACPR Matches

In terms of matches recorded on the NACPR during 2021, a total of 124 potential matches were identified between new registrants and previously registered family members. Again, these figures represent a substantial increase on those recorded in 2020 (see Figure 2). As mentioned above, this increase may be attributed to the publication of the Mother and Baby Home Report.

Figure 2 Breakdown of NACPR Matches by year 2017-2020

In 2021, the majority of potential matches were between adopted out siblings (48 in 2021). This is a slight change on the figures recorded for 2020, where adoptee and birth mother matches were the dominant trend. However, we can see that this match category remains relatively high in 2021, where 30 matches were recorded between adoptees and birth mothers. Again, as in 2020, the third highest category relates to adoptees and birth siblings (17 in 2021). For a concise breakdown of recent figures, please see Table 3:

Table 3 *Matches by Relationship by year 2017-2021*

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Birth Mother	46	38	32	26	30
Birth Father	5	1	6	7	10
Cousin	2	4	0	1	2
Cousin (adopted)	0	3	1	0	0
Grandparent	1	2	4	0	0
Sibling	20	8	14	17	17
Sibling (adopted)	37	40	49	18	48
Uncle, Aunt	10	7	9	6	15
Other	0	2	0	2	2
Total	121	105	115	77	124

Birth Information and Tracing Bill 2022

As referenced above, the Birth Information and Tracing Bill is currently being debated before the Dáil. The Bill contains a number of legislative changes that, if passed into law, will have a direct impact on the role of the Information & Tracing Unit. These changes include the automatic release of adoption records, including original birth certificates, the creation of a new Contact Preference Register (CPR) and the closure of the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR), and the sharing of relevant medical information. The Information and Tracing Unit, in tandem with the Authority's Senior Management Team, continues to liaise with its counterparts in the Child and Family Agency in an effort to best prepare for the anticipated changes.



**Intercountry
Adoption**

Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability

The Authority granted 41 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability in 2021 to applicants seeking to adopt abroad and extended 20 existing Declarations by 1 year.

Register of Intercountry Adoptions

In 2021, 136 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in respect of all relevant sections of the Adoption Act 2010. Of these, 16 entries were in respect of adoptions into Ireland carried out under the terms and conditions of the 1993 Hague Convention.

Matching of Children

Social workers work with administrative staff and a medical advisor, to advise on the matching of children's needs with the abilities of prospective adoptive parents. In 2021, 15 children were referred into Ireland from other countries. All referrals of children for adoption are reviewed by the Authority's multi-disciplinary team, which comprises the Principal Social Worker, the Medical Advisor and the Manager of the Intercountry Adoption Unit.

Country Specific Issues

Bulgaria: In 2021, no Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Bulgaria; no Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and no entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions.

China: In 2021, no Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in China; no Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and no entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions.

Haiti: In 2021, 2 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Haiti; 1 Agreement to Place was granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and no Adoptions completed in Haiti were entered in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions.

In 2021, civil unrest continued in Haiti. The AAI continues to closely monitor the situation there.

India: In 2021, 1 Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability was granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in India. No Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention), No entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in respect of India.

Philippines: In 2021, 1 Declaration of Eligibility and Suitability was granted to prospective adoptive parents

proposing to adopt in the Philippines; no Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention). No entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in respect of Philippines.

Poland: In 2021, No Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Poland; No Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 1 entry was made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions in respect of adoptions effected in Poland. Adoptions from Poland are generally by Polish nationals living in Ireland.

Thailand: In 2021, 9 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Thailand; 2 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 2 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions.

United States of America: In 2021, 4 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in the USA; 3 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 4 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions.

Vietnam: In 2021, 23 Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability were granted to prospective adoptive parents proposing to adopt in Vietnam; 9 Agreements to Place were granted (Article 17 of The Hague Convention) and 8 entries were made in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions.

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).

No entries were made in the Register in 2021.



Social Work

Staffing

In Q1 2021, a recruitment campaign took place to the Principal Social Worker position in the Adoption Authority of Ireland. In Q4, two further recruitment competitions took place for Senior Social Work Practitioners and Professionally Qualified Social Workers. By Q4 2021, the social work team was as follows:

- One Principal Social Worker
- Five Senior Social Work Practitioners
- One Professionally Qualified Social Worker

Each member of the Social Work team is individually registered with CORU.

Overview of Social Work Role

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

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

Social Work Phone Service

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

Primarily callers and emailers sought information on their adoption history and/or searching for their relatives.

In 2021, the on-call Social Worker received and dealt with approximately 387 phone calls and emails.

Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)

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

Reviews cover all aspects of adoption practice, including

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

Social Work and Domestic Adoption

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

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

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

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

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

In 2021, the Team reviewed 121 domestic adoption files for a Declaration.

Social Work and Intercountry Adoption

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

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

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

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

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

In 2021, the Team reviewed 41 intercountry adoption files for a Declaration.

Social Work and Information/Search and Reunion

In 2021, the Team had 270 new referrals relating to information/search and reunion.

Referrals in this area were the following:

- Adopted adults or birth relatives seeking information;
- Birth certificate requests;
- Adopted adults or birth relatives seeking search and reunion service and
- Connections made between relatives on the National Adoption Contact Preference Register

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

Social Work Fora

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

- Provide current information on issues in Information and Tracing work, and on medical issues related to adults and children in adoption;
- Achieve professional and best practice consensus from in-depth discussion on ethical dilemmas in assessment and support services;
- Share professional practice experience and form connections with social workers and other

professionals in the area of adoption work; and offer continuous professional development opportunities for practitioners in adoption.

COVID-19 significantly impacted the Authority's ability to organise and run social work fora. Plans to run such events remotely will be prepared during 2022.

Social Work and Accreditation and Inspection

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

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

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

External Social Work Review

A full external review of social work services in the Adoption Authority of Ireland was initiated in Q4 2021 and it is envisioned that it will be completed by Q2 2022. The purpose of this review is:

1. to examine current social work service provision to better understand areas working well and areas that need improvement
2. to assess the social work team's capacity to take on new statutory responsibilities under the Information and Tracing Bill and identify ways to do this
3. to map out a social work service framework which will provide for the provision of excellent and evidence-based social work including training and developmental needs.

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

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

The Authority is a Relevant Organisation under the Act.

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

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

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



Research

The year 2021 was a very busy year for the Research Unit, working through year 2 of the revised 3-year Research Strategy 2020-2022. In addition to the Research Officer, a research assistant was recruited and joined the Research Unit in September 2021 on a 12-month contract basis. The research assistant will provide general research support on all studies, with a particular focus on Phase 3 of the ICA: *Experiences, Supports, Challenges* study, which will involve focus groups with internationally adopted teenagers and young adults.

Research Studies

After successfully receiving ethical approval from the Authority's Research Ethics Committee in late 2020, recruitment and data collection for the "*Reflections on Domestic Adoption Study 1952 – 2021*" commenced in February 2021 and continued throughout the year. The design and interim findings from the "*Reflections on Domestic Adoption 1952-2021*" study were presented to an international audience at the International Conference on Adoption Research (ICAR-7), held in July 2021.

The "*Intercountry Adoption in Ireland: Experiences, Supports, Challenges*" study continued in 2021 with the research, writing and publication of a background report on Intercountry Adoption from Vietnam in August 2021. A press release led to comprehensive national and local media coverage.

In August 2021, work also commenced on a new study, "*International Practice in the Provision of Intercountry Adoption Information and Tracing Services*". The purpose of this study was to investigate how other countries resource and manage the area of ICA Information and Tracing. Surveys were designed and sent to 14 countries. The results were collated, analysed and written up to form the basis of a detailed **draft report**. This was submitted to the CEO in December 2021 alongside an update on the current age profile of individuals who have been adopted through the AAI's ICA programme. The draft report was sent to all participants for their feedback. It is anticipated that the resulting final report will be used to inform the development of AAI ICA I&T services going forward.

In November 2021, the research unit developed an **infographic**, the release of which was timed to coincide with World Adoption Day. It contained brief information and up-to-date statistics about domestic and intercountry adoption in Ireland. Its purpose was to provide a wide audience of stakeholders with a grounding on the current status of adoption in Ireland.

Adoption Researchers Network of Ireland

Following the International Conference on Adoption Research in July, the Research Officer made contact with a number of Irish delegates who had either attended or presented at ICAR-7, and convened a meeting of Irish Adoption researchers, which was held in September 2021. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the current status of adoption research in Ireland, and to set up a group, with a view to strengthening the field going forward. The *Adoption Researchers' Network of Ireland* (ARNI) was formed, and the Research Officer was elected Chair of ARNI at that meeting, a position she will hold for 12 months. In November 2021, the Research Officer convened and chaired a webinar about current Irish Adoption Research for the AAI Board and Executive, at which members of the network presented their findings. A larger half-day event is planned for Q4 of 2022.

Strategy

The research officer provided an update on the strategy at the September and December meeting of the Research Subcommittee. The strategy is generally progressing well. A number of brief statistical analyses, requested by the Board, cannot be undertaken until the Digitisation of the relevant files is complete. It is anticipated that this will happen in 2022.

Research Subcommittee

The research officer acts as Secretary to the Research Subcommittee. The Subcommittee met on four occasions in 2021. Various members of the subcommittee provided advice to the Research Unit as required outside of these meetings during 2021.

The Library and Journal Access

A number of new titles were added to the library in 2021, and the research unit provided login details and training for all new staff re how to access and utilise the library and the AAI's journal database. While the library remained physically closed to staff during the COVID-19 restrictions, lending was unaffected and continued via direct request from the Research Unit. All staff and Board members have online access to the library catalogue and journal database at any time.

External Communications

Throughout 2021, the research unit received occasional requests from external parties seeking statistics or other information relating to adoption research. Where possible and practical, the unit always sought to provide assistance and support to these parties.



**Corporate
Services and
Accreditation**

Website and Information Technology

In 2021, the website continued to be an important source of information and news from the Adoption Authority. Service updates in light of COVID-19 arrangements were posted on the website responsively throughout the year, ensuring that customers and other stakeholders continued to receive accurate and timely information as to the Authority's activities and services.

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

Parliamentary Questions (PQs)

In total, 34 Parliamentary Questions were received and responded to in 2021.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

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

In 2021, the Adoption Authority received 34 requests under the Freedom of Information Acts.

- 28 were declined;
- 6 were granted/part granted.

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

Press/Media

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

The Authority continued to monitor adoption-related news reports in the local, national and international media to keep updated with developments on adoption-related matters in 2021.

Energy Management

Ireland's third National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP 3), published in 2014, reaffirmed Ireland's commitment to delivering a 20% reduction in energy demand across the whole of the economy by 2021, along with a 33% reduction in public sector energy use.

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

In 2021, The Adoption Authority of Ireland reported on its 2020 energy use and had improved on the previous years' performance with an energy saving of 40% since a baseline level in 2009. At this level of savings, the Adoption Authority is on track to meet the 2030 target of 50.3% savings.

Accreditation

Register of Accredited Bodies

The maintenance of a 'Register of Accredited Bodies' by the Authority is provided for under Section 126 - 135 of the Adoption Act 2010 and S.I. No. 524 of 2010, Adoption Act 2010 (Accredited Bodies) Regulations 2010. By the close of 2021 there were six registered accredited bodies (unchanged from 2020). Three agencies: Cúnamh, Arabella t/a Here2Help and St Brigid's Information and Tracing Agency are closed and will be formally deregistered from the register of accredited bodies in due course.

Table 4 Register of Accredited Bodies 2021

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

Accreditation Procedures

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

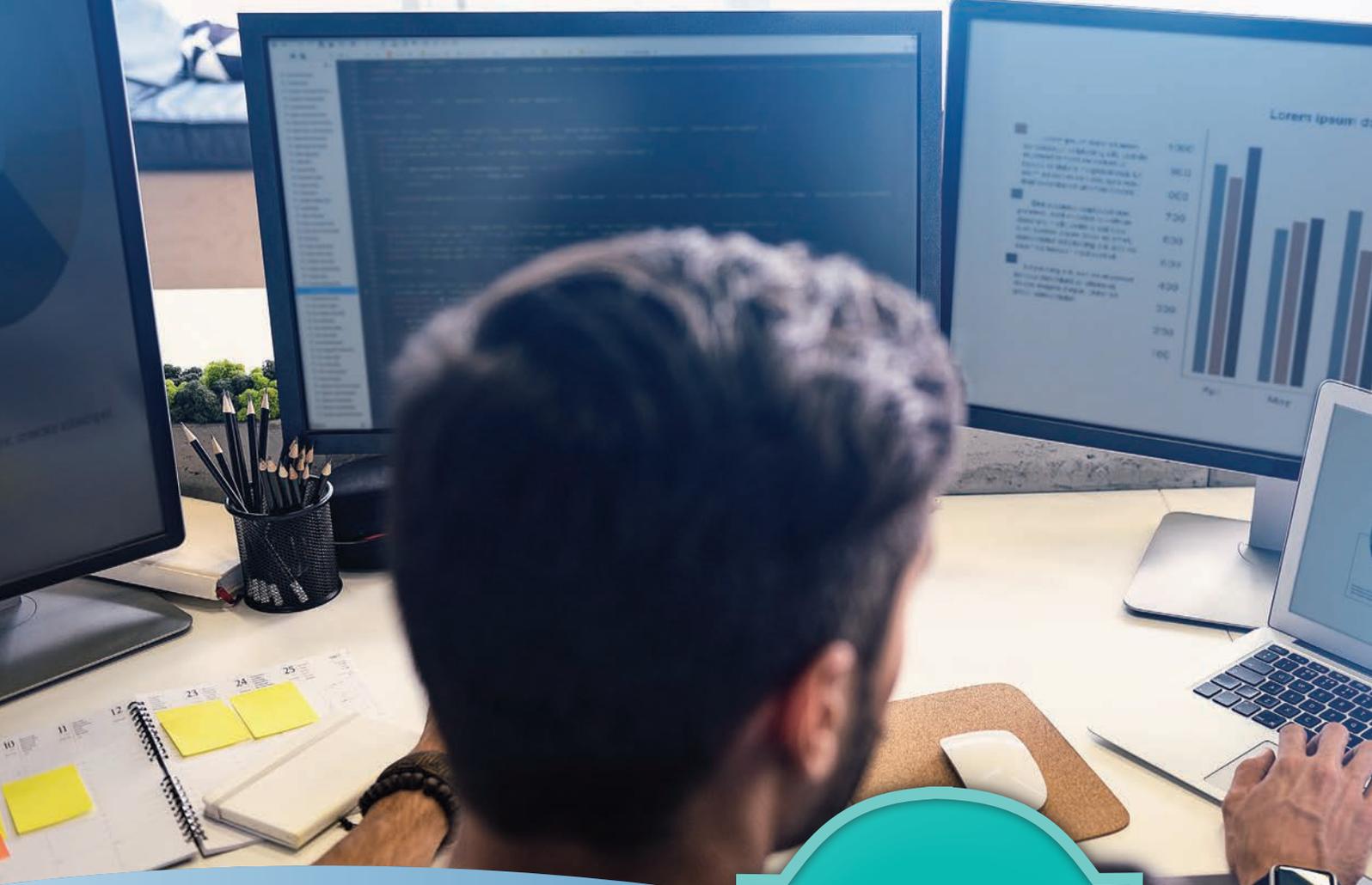
For each calendar year, two six-monthly activity reports are required to be submitted by each accredited body. These reports are summarised by the Executive and presented to the Board of the Authority. In 2021, all relevant bodies submitted two six-monthly reports each. A monthly report is also submitted by the Executive to the Board of the Authority detailing all accredited body activity.

In line with legislation audited accounts for the year ending 31 December 2021 were also submitted by the relevant accredited bodies.

As per Section 128 of the Act, the initial period of registration is for five years and renewals shall not exceed three years. No new application or renewals were made in 2021.

Cessation of Accredited Bodies in 2021

St Brigid's Information and Tracing Agency closed on 30 November 2021 and are currently in the process of transferring their files to the Adoption Authority and will be formally deregistered from the register of accredited bodies in due course.



Digitisation

Increased Resources

2021 saw a commitment from AAI senior management to build on and enhance the existing eDMS (electronic document management system). This was played out by increasing the digitisation team head count and planning for the recruitment of a Director of Information and Records.

eDMS and Data Alignment Projects

These changes to staffing levels allowed the progression and guidance on a number of eDMS related projects. It was seen as an imperative, to build on and encourage staff knowledge of the eDMS. Finding more progressive ways of working with digitised material, encouraging user opinion and providing our clients and stakeholders with a better and fuller service was paramount. One initiative introduced, is a working discussion forum, under the banner of eDMS champions. The forum meets on a monthly basis and provides cross team representation where new ideas and smarter ways of working with the eDMS and other digital tools are discussed.

These discussions brought about a data alignment project. The first cut of the eDMS data was taken from a wide range of legacy systems resulting in information being ingested in differing formats, making data and document image retrieval difficult and cumbersome. The imperative for the Authority was to align and cleanse our data so that the same methodology can be employed by the staff user base, across departments, delivering consistency, robustness and good quality results to our clients and stakeholders. While this is an ongoing project there has been much progress in 2021. Plans exist for provision of more general and specialist staff, to assist with the progression this project and many others.

Enhanced Scanning

Advances in scanning technologies allowed AAI to embark on a project where existing eDMS images would be replaced by 300DPI HD standard images. This will bring superior visual quality to impaired historic document images and minimise physical handling of these fragile items.

Remote Technologies

Our board meeting software package, Decision Time, continued to prove a useful tool throughout the COVID pandemic. Board members embraced this technology and by using mobile devices enhanced their decision making and governance. The continued use of Decision Time allows for much reduced administrative costs and quicker turnaround times.

The COVID pandemic also saw the introduction of a digital signature for all staff. These proved especially useful where there was a requirement for digital documents to be signed and passed between parties. The time saving element was significant particularly with a blended office/home work model in force, allowing decisions, agreements and contracts to be formally signed off. The digital signature is fully integrated in our NitroPro PDF (Portable Document Format) package.

2021 saw no changes to our third-party suppliers.



**Data
Protection**

Subject Access Requests (SARs)

In 2021, the AAI received an unprecedented number of Subject Access Requests. Ninety-seven (97) requests were received, representing a 300% increase on the previous year (32).

A number of factors prompted this increase in applications, including

- the release in January of the Report into the Mother and Baby Home Commission of Inquiry;
- regular media coverage of matters relating to illegal birth registrations;
- ongoing political and media discussion on the draft Adoption (Information and Tracing)Bill;

all of which raised the public profile of adoption and adoption related matters. In some cases, this prompted adopted persons, or family members of adopted persons, to consider seeking information for the first time about themselves or their relative. In other cases adopted persons followed up on enquiries they had made in the past.

The volume of records held by the Authority grew following the acquisition by the Authority of the records of the former Adoption Agency, Cúnamh, and SARs which might previously have been directed to Cúnamh now came to the Authority.

COVID restrictions throughout 2021 resulted in periods during the year where staff could not work on site and therefore did not have full access to sensitive and confidential records when away from the office. This negatively impacted the speed at which some SARs could be processed.

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

Of the 97 applications, only 88 were valid. Four were rejected as no identification was provided following a request for same. Two applications were duplicates and 3 were withdrawn and the request dealt with by a more appropriate mechanism within the Authority.

There were 5 appeals lodged to the AAI Data Protection Appeals officer.

There was one complaint lodged with the Data Protection Commission at the end of 2021, which has not been concluded at the time of this report. The complaint commenced in 2019 was still ongoing at the end of 2021.

	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	Awaiting decision

* after GDPR was introduced 18 May 2018

Policies and Procedures

In 2021, The Adoption Authority of Ireland continued to review and develop policies. Revised policy documents were presented to the Board for its approval at various intervals during the year.

- General Data Protection Policy
- Glossary of Data Protection Terms
- Website Privacy Policy
- Personal Data Retention Policy for Employees
- AAI Service User Privacy Notices
- Subject Access Requests Operational Policy
- Subject Access Request Form
- Policy in Right of Erasure
- Retention and Disposal Policy
- Data Rectification Policy
- Restriction on Processing Policy
- Data Portability Policy

The 2020 Annual Report on Data Protection and GDR was presented in May 2021.



**Human
Resources**

The year 2021 saw a significant increase in the work of the HR across all areas. The HR Unit expanded from one staff member at AP level to two in March with the recruitment of a Clerical Officer with HR experience.

Recruitment

In 2021, the Authority conducted 10 open recruitment competitions, a significant increase in recruitment from 2020 (4 competitions) and the highest number of competitions conducted in any year since the establishment of the Authority in 2010. Recruitment competitions were required as a result of retirements and resignations as well as vacancies arising where incumbent staff were successfully appointed to higher grades as a result of the competitions. A number of competitions were for newly sanctioned posts in the Authority, namely Director of Information Services and Records (PO), 3 Senior Social Worker posts, 2 additional social work posts and a Clerical Officer in HR.

The Authority conducts all its own recruitment under licence from the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA).

- CO in HR Unit - new post
- Principal Social Worker
- Principal Officer (1-year contract for career break), Director of Operations/ Board Secretary.
- Principal Officer, Director of Information Services and Records - new post
- Senior Social Work Practitioners – 3 new posts.
- Professionally Qualified Social Workers – one competition to fill vacancies resulting from SSWP competition and second competition for 2 new posts
- HEO (1-year contract) in Digitisation Unit
- EO (1-year contract) in Digitisation Unit
- EO in Corporate Services Unit

Pension/Retirements

The majority of staff in the Authority (75%) 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 at Higher Executive level in February 2021.

HR and COVID-19

Throughout 2021, COVID-19 continued to impact the Authority.

HR, in conjunction with the senior management team, disseminated information provided by DPER/HSE in relation to COVID protocols and implemented the protocols as required. HR monitored and managed protocols around absences due to COVID or related issues such as isolation for close contacts.

Throughout COVID-19, the Authority staff worked predominantly on site, facilitating staggered attendance patterns for staff in line with concerns raised about the spread of COVID-19 during the early months of 2021. Following ICT improvements in early 2021, the Authority implemented a work from home facility where feasible. Increased administration of staggered attendances/ rotas/more flexible starting and finishing times was managed by the HR team.

Blended Working Pilot

A Blended Working Group made up of representative staff across the organisation developed a Blended Working Pilot Scheme. The proposed pilot scheme was approved by the Senior Management Team and commenced in September.

The experiences gained from the pilot scheme will inform the Authority's formal Blended Working Policy to be introduced in early 2022. The Authority's policy will be in line with DPER's Blended Working Guidelines due to be published in early 2022.

Resource Planning

The expected enactment of the BITB in 2022 will result in a change in the remit of the Authority as a whole and increase the responsibilities of the Information Services and Records Unit, the Social Work team and Corporate Services units in particular. Up to 20 additional staff will be required to fulfil this new remit. HR have been instrumental in assisting the Senior Management Team in resource planning. In early 2022, the priority will be to increase the capacity of the HR team, recruiting a HEO and EO, to double the size of the team allowing it to provide full support for the expanded staff cohort.

Training and Development

Throughout 2021, HR facilitated staff attending a range of training courses and participating in seminars which were predominantly conducted remotely. Topics covered included

- Professional Development for Clerical Officers and Executive Officers
- Personal development (Assertiveness skills)
- General Data Protection Regulation

- Microsoft Office Suite
- Professional Diploma in Public Service Innovation
- Human Resource Management
- Competency Based Interviewer Preparation
- Pensions Administration
- Finance
- IT training
- Trauma Informed Practice
- One to One Media Skills Session
- Courtroom Skills
- Web Authoring

Staff also attended virtual conferences/seminars in last year such as:

- National Child Protection and Welfare Social Work Conference
- International Adoption Conference
- Digital Government 2021 Conference

Employee Assistance Service

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



Statistics

Table 5 Birth and Domestic Adoption Trends in Ireland 1953-2021.

Year	Total Births*	Non-Marital Births*	% of Total Births	No. of Adoptions
1953	62,558	1,340	2.14	381
1954	62,534	1,310	2.09	888
1955	61,662	1,234	2.00	786
1956	60,740	1,173	1.93	565
1957	61,242	1,032	1.69	752
1958	59,510	976	1.64	592
1959	60,188	959	1.59	501
1960	60,735	968	1.59	505
1961	59,825	975	1.63	547
1962	61,782	1,111	1.80	699
1963	63,246	1,157	1.83	840
1964	64,072	1,292	2.02	1,003
1965	63,525	1,403	2.21	1,049
1966	62,215	1,436	2.31	1,178
1967	61,307	1,540	2.51	1,493
1968	61,004	1,558	2.55	1,343
1969	62,912	1,642	2.61	1,225
1970	64,382	1,709	2.65	1,414
1971	67,551	1,842	2.73	1,305
1972	68,527	2,005	2.93	1,291
1973	68,713	2,167	3.15	1,402
1974	68,907	2,309	3.35	1,415
1975	67,178	2,515	3.74	1,443
1976	67,718	2,545	3.76	1,104
1977	68,892	2,877	4.18	1,127
1978	70,299	3,003	4.27	1,223
1979	72,539	3,337	4.60	988
1980	74,064	3,723	5.03	1,115
1981	72,158	3,914	5.42	1,191
1982	70,843	4,358	6.15	1,191
1983	67,117	4,552	6.78	1,184
1984	64,062	5,116	7.99	1,195
1985	62,388	5,282	8.47	882
1986	61,620	5,946	9.65	800

Table 5 continued

Year	Total Births*	Non-Marital Births*	% of Total Births	No. of Adoptions
1987	58,433	6,347	10.86	715
1988	54,600	6,483	11.87	649
1989	52,018	6,671	12.82	615
1990	53,044	7,767	14.64	648
1991	52,718	8,912	16.91	590
1992	51,089	9,211	18.03	523
1993	49,304	9,826	19.93	500
1994	47,928	9,904	20.66	424
1995	48,530	10,788	22.23	490
1996	50,390	12,484	24.77	405
1997	52,311	13,892	26.56	422
1998	53,551	15,133	28.26	400
1999	53,354	16,461	30.85	317
2000	54,239	17,235	31.78	303
2001	57,882	18,049	31.18	293
2002	60,521	18,815	31.09	266
2003	61,517	19,313	31.39	263
2004	61,684	19,935	32.32	273
2005	61,042	19,528	32.00	253
2006	64,237	21,295	33.15	222
2007	70,620	23,170	32.81	187
2008	75,065	24,844	33.09	200
2009	74,728	24,532	32.82	190
2010	73,724	24,860	33.72	189
2011	74,650	25,157	33.70	39
2012	72,225	25,344	35.10	49
2013	68,930	24,393	35.40	116
2014	67,462	24,514	36.30	112
2015	65,909	23,990	36.40	94
2016	63,897	23,348	36.50	95
2017	62,053	23,340	37.60	72
2018	61,016	23,061	37.8	72
2019	59,796	22,772	38.1	79
2020	55,959	21,478	38.4	81
2021	Not available at time of publication			101
TOTAL				44,864

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

Table 6 Domestic Adoptions by type 2017-2021.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Step Parent	37	35	51	58	65
Long Term Foster Care	21	25	21	16	24
Infant	7	7	6	5	2
Foreign to Domestic	2	3	0	0	5
Extended Family	3	2	1	2	5
Private Placement	2	0	0	0	0
Total	72	72	79	81	101

Table 7 Domestic Adoptions by Age of Child 2017-2021.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
17 Years Old	27	30	35	40	36
12-16 Years Old	21	23	24	23	45
7-11 Years Old	14	7	13	13	12
2-6 Years Old	5	9	4	3	7
0-1 Years Old	5	3	3	2	1
Total	72	72	79	81	101

Table 8 High Court Orders Granted Pursuant to Domestic Adoption Applications 2017-2021.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Section 18	5	1	0	3	2
Section 30	14	7	8	15	19
Section 54	19	13	5	11	14
Total	38	21	13	29	35

Table 9 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, 2010-2021 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	920	Colombia	19	Scotland	2
Romania	808	England	18	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	1
Thailand	135	South Africa	2	Hong Kong	1
United States of America	118	El Salvador	2	Malawi	1
Mexico	113	Jersey	2	Zimbabwe	1
Ukraine	100	Kenya	2	Moldova	1
Bulgaria	32	Lithuania	2	Total	5,039
India	25	Peru	2		
		Poland	3		

Table 10 Entries in the Register of Intercountry Adoptions, pursuant to Section 57(2)(b)(ii) of the Adoption Act 2010, for 2021 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 2021
Vietnam	8
Thailand	2
Philippines	0
USA	4
Poland	1
Moldova	1
Total	16

Table 11 Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised in 2021, where the adoptions were effected by adopters who were habitually resident abroad (Sections 57(2)(a) & 57(2)(b)(i) of the Adoption Act 2010 refer).

Country where the adoption was effected	No. Entered on the Register in 2021	Country where the adoption was effected	No. Entered on the Register in 2021	Country where the adoption was effected	No. Entered on the Register in 2021
Canada	2	Kazakhstan	1	Singapore	1
Cayman Islands	1	Malaysia	3	South Africa	1
China	2	Netherlands	1	Sri Lanka	1
Colombia	1	Philippines	4	USA	27
England	57	Northern Ireland	4	Vietnam	3
Guatemala	1	Russia	2	Zimbabwe	2
Hong Kong	4	Scotland	1		
Indonesia	1			Total	120

Table 12 Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 2014 and 2021,* 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
Bulgaria	4	8	4	8	1	1	0	0
Cambodia	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
China	0	15	7	10	4	3	1	0
England	2	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ethiopia	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Haiti	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
India	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Lithuania	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Mexico	5	11	0	1	0	0	5	0
Peru	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poland	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Russia	4	2	2	0	1	0	0	0
Thailand	6	1	4	2	8	0	4	2
USA	4	6	12	9	7	10	1	4
Vietnam	4	32	23	22	20	18	9	8
Moldova	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	32	83	55	53	41	33	21	16

*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 13 Total number of intercountry adoptions recognised between 1991 and 2021 (All Sections).

Year	Number Recognised*	Year	Number Recognised*	Year	Number Recognised*
1991	58	2002	439	2013	141
1992	305	2003	460	2014	106
1993	59	2004	484	2015	160
1994	64	2005	443	2016	214
1995	93	2006	409	2017	324
1996	117	2007	439	2018	313
1997	149	2008	488	2019	386
1998	260	2009	395	2020	184
1999	284	2010	290	2021	136
2000	324	2011	342	Total	8,392
2001	284	2012	242		



Other Information

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Appendix A

Dates of Meetings 2021		Board of the Authority Attendees
14 January	Full	All members
21 January	Full	All members
09 February	Full	All members
23 February		All members
02 March AM	Governance	All members
02 March PM	Full	All members
23 March		All members
13 April	Full	All members
27 April	Full	All members
11 May	Full	All members
25 May	Full	All members
08 June	Emergency	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, Prof. S. Greene, P. Harrison, Dr H. Buckley, Dr M. Anglim
22 June	Full	All members
22 June	Full	All members
06 July	Full	All members
20 July	Full	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, Judge P McMahon, P. Harrison, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene
24 August	Emergency	O Traynor, S. O'Brien, Judge P McMahon, Dr H. Buckley
07 September		All members
21 September AM	Governance	All members
21 September PM		All members
12 October	Full	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Dr M. Anglim, Prof. S. Greene
19 October		O. Traynor, Dr M Anglim, P Harrison, S. O'Brien
02 November	Full	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Prof. S. Greene, Judge P. McMahon, Dr H. Buckley
16 November	Full	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, P. Harrison, Prof. S. Greene, Judge P. McMahon, Dr H. Buckley
07 December	Full	All members
21 December	Full	All members
24 December	Emergency	O. Traynor, S. O'Brien, Dr H. Buckley, Dr M. Anglim



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