



Popular Baby Names in Northern Ireland: A user guide

Information Paper

May 2021

Introduction

The purpose of this information paper is to inform users about the quality of Baby Name Statistics in Northern Ireland. This document provides a range of information that describes the quality of the data and details any points that should be noted when using the outputs.

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Background to Baby Names Data

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) produce data on births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and adoptions from civil registration events which are registered with the General Register Office (GRO). Baby Name figures are derived from names recorded when a birth is registered in Northern Ireland. Statistics are published annually and include counts and ranks for all names registered in Northern Ireland.

Statistics which are produced from vital events registered in Northern Ireland are of a high quality and should have complete population coverage as it is a legal requirement to register all such events that occur in Northern Ireland.

Relevance

The annual **Baby Names, Northern Ireland** report presents statistics on the first names given to live born babies in Northern Ireland in a given calendar year. These figures were first published in 2000 and span back to 1997.

The report itself presents the most popular baby names that were registered in Northern Ireland in the calendar year and examines the top 100 first names for boys and girls, comparing the ranks of these names with those of previous years. It also discusses additional forenames, variation in forenames by mother's age & country of birth, and makes regional comparisons across Northern Ireland. In addition to the report, a suite of tables including a complete list of all names is also published for reference purposes.

Key users of baby name statistics are parents, soon-to-be parents and those who are interested in the popularity of their own name. Additional users include researchers who examine how names are changing over the years, and journalists who produce articles on the popularity of names.

How the Output is Created

Baby name statistics are derived from annual births registration data and represent all live births registered in Northern Ireland in the specific calendar year. The annual births file is a static file available at the time the dataset is closed (31st December). Revisions to records can still be made after the dataset has been finalised but these will not be reflected in the annual dataset or in published statistics. However, such revisions are few and far between and are highly unlikely to alter the thrust of the published statistics.

The annual births dataset includes:

1. All live births to resident mothers registered by the 31st December of the reference year.
2. All live births to women whose usual residence is outside Northern Ireland where the birth occurred in Northern Ireland (non-resident) and was registered by the 31st December of the reference year.
3. Live births to both resident and non-resident mothers occurring in the year prior to the reference year which were registered within the reference year.

What the dataset doesn't include:

1. Live births to resident and non-resident mothers occurring in the reference year, which are registered the following year.
2. Births to women usually resident in Northern Ireland who give birth abroad.
3. Stillbirths.

Only the first name is used for this analysis and is based on the exact spelling of the name given on the birth certificate. Surnames and additional forenames are not used in the calculation of the Top 10 names.

When preparing these statistics the following edits are made:

1. Apostrophes are removed from the name e.g. *Mika'il* becomes *Mikail*.
2. Question marks, commas and non English alphabet characters are removed from the name.
3. Where a hyphen is present any spaces occurring before or after it are removed e.g. *Lindsey- Louise* becomes *Lindsey-Louise*.
4. Where a name is not separated by a hyphen but has two names e.g. Lily Ann, this name has been separated with Lily taken as the main forename and Ann analysed as an additional forename.

Different spellings of a name have been treated as separate names, e.g. while there were 11 girls named Catherine (ranked 179th) in 2018, another 3 girls had the alternate spelling Kathryn which was ranked 434th. Names containing accents have been analysed without those accents, e.g. Séan was analysed as Sean. Names of equal rank have been placed in alphabetical order.

It is necessary to protect the confidentiality of uncommon baby names, to prevent the identification of individuals and the possible linkage of these data to other datasets, so all names with counts of fewer than 3 in a single year are suppressed. Further information on the Vital Statistics Unit's disclosure control is available in the [Confidentiality Policy for Population and Vital Statistics](#).

Data Quality

Registration of births in Northern Ireland is a legal requirement under the Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Act, 1863. All information provided at registration, which is normally provided by one or more parents of a baby, is collected by a District Registrar employed by the District Council. The number of cases where a birth is not registered is believed to be relatively small and is not considered to adversely affect published results. Birth registration data is therefore considered to be both comprehensive and highly accurate.

Further information on the quality of births registration data in Northern Ireland is provided in [Northern Ireland Birth Quality Assessment Report](#) on the NISRA website.

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Timeliness & Punctuality

Until 2014 the Top 10 Provisional names were published just before Christmas each year, and included all live birth registrations within the first 49 weeks of the reference year. The full and formal annual bulletin, including finalised figures, followed 8- 9 months after the end of the reference year. This approach led to confusion with both provisional and finalised figures in the public domain. From 2015, only final figures have been released, published within 6 months after the end of the reference year.

The results are based on analysis of all births registered within the relevant reference year. This is not necessarily the year these births will have occurred (e.g. a birth that occurs near the end of December 2020 may not be registered until early January 2021).

The Vital Statistics Unit Publication Schedule is available on the NISRA Website. This is published at the start of each financial year on the [NISRA website](#).

The [UK Statistics Release Calendar](#) provides 28 days advance notice of releases. In the unlikely event of a change to the Publication Schedule, the public would be advised of the change via the NISRA website and social media and any pre-announced dates would be updated on the UK Statistics Release Calendar, as well as the [Vital Statistics release calendar](#) on the NISRA website. A full explanation of the reason(s) for the change would be provided as set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Coherence and Comparability

Birth registration information has always been the source of birth statistics in Northern Ireland since they were first released in 2000. NISRA has historically provided a time series of counts and ranks of Baby Names back to 1997. However, baby names data back to when civil registration was first introduced in Northern Ireland (1887) but is not yet in the correct format or level of completeness for publication.

NISRA publish Baby Names around 6 months after the end of the reference year, but can be as early as 2 months after year end where resources allow.

The counts published by NISRA are based on the exact spelling of the first name given on the birth certificate. This is consistent internationally with countries such as England, Wales, Scotland, Republic of Ireland, the USA and Canada. NISRA, NRS and ONS all produce baby name statistics using information collected at birth registration for live births only.

There are however some differences internationally, for example both Northern Ireland and New Zealand use date of registration rather than date of birth, while England, Wales, Scotland, Republic of Ireland, the USA and Canada all use date of birth.

Other organisations also produce statistics using voluntary responses received from new mothers, however these statistics will not be as complete as those produced by NISRA, should not all women giving birth volunteer the information.

Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

All Vital Statistics publications specifically invite users to provide any feedback they might have in respect of the content, format and relevance of the release. No negative feedback on Baby Names has been received as part of this process.

We continue to welcome feedback from users on the content, format and relevance of this data series. Please take a few minutes to leave some feedback for the Vital Statistics Team at the following [online survey](#).

Useful Links

The latest baby name statistics in Great Britain and Ireland are available at the following links:

[Northern Ireland](#)

[England and Wales](#)

[Scotland](#)

[Republic of Ireland](#)

Contacts

Further details on any of the information provided in this paper should be directed to NISRA Customer Services at:

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