



Vital Statistics Unit

Background Quality Report (BQR) for Northern Ireland Stillbirth Statistics

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Product	Product Description	Author
Background Quality Report (BQR) for Northern Ireland Birth Statistics	The purpose of this BQR is to inform users about the quality of Birth Statistics in Northern Ireland and associated outputs. It describes the quality of the data and details any points that should be noted when using the outputs.	Ian Craig

Review Log:

Details of those that reviewed the document.

Version	Reviewer	Sent	Returned	Applied	Feedback
0.1	Deborah Lyness	06/08/2019	01/12/2019	Yes	Provided
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Signatory Sign Off

Deborah Lyness is the appointed signatory for this output manual.

Name	Role	Signatory Date	Comments
Deborah Lyness	Head of VARS	30/04/2021	No comments.

Review Schedule and Sign off

This document is to be reviewed initially in six months then annually thereafter.

Name of Reviewer(s)	Role	Review Date	Version	Comments
Claire Rocks	DP Statistician	15/04/2021	0.2	Impact of Covid-19 restrictions and changes to GDPR legislation due to Brexit added.



Background Quality Report (BQR) for Northern Ireland Birth Statistics

Introduction

The purpose of this BQR is to inform users about the quality of birth statistics in Northern Ireland and associated outputs. 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. The information has been assessed using eight dimensions.

Background to vital events data

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) produce statistics on births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and adoptions from civil registration events which are registered with the General Register Office (GRO). Figures on divorces and civil partnership dissolutions are compiled from returns of 'Decrees made Absolute' supplied by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. Vital Events data is produced on a weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual basis depending on user requirements.

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.

Contacts

Further information on any of the information provided in this paper should be directed to the NISRA Vital Statistics Unit at:

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Dimension 1 – Relevance

The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.

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. During registration all information is entered on to an electronic system called the Northern Ireland Registration Office System (NIROS), which is managed by NISRA's General Registrar Office (GRO). Statisticians within NISRA's Vital Statistics Unit have access to the data contained within the NIROS for analysis on behalf of the Registrar General for Northern Ireland.

In view of the legal requirement to register all births, the coverage of the data is complete for the population of Northern Ireland. The content of the information collected reflects what is possible legally and the ongoing needs of users.

Published figures relate only to births to resident mothers and do not include births to women usually resident in Northern Ireland who give birth abroad. They do include births to women whose usual residence is outside Northern Ireland where the birth occurred in Northern Ireland. Such numbers are relatively small and are not considered to adversely affect the inferences that can be drawn from the published results.

Key users of birth statistics include NISRA in the production of population (and in turn household) estimates/projections, the Department of Health (DoH), and the Department of Education (DE) to plan maternity services and future school provision respectively. Data are used, for example, to monitor teenage birth rates which are a DoH key indicator.

Lobby groups use birth statistics to support their cause, for example, campaigns against school closures or midwife shortages. Special interest groups, such as Birth Choice United Kingdom (UK), use the data to provide comparisons between maternity units to help women choose where they might like to give birth.

Other users include academics, demographers and health researchers, who conduct research into birth trends and characteristics. Organisations such as Eurostat and the United Nations use birth statistics to make international comparisons.



Births data in Northern Ireland is also available for research purposes within the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS) and Administrative Data Research for Northern Ireland (ADR-NI).

Dimension 2 - Accuracy

The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.

Data Collection

All babies born in Northern Ireland must be registered within 42 days of the birth. This process is informed by the detailed information captured on the Maternity System at the time of birth, which is passed to GRO. In the event where the birth is recorded on the Maternity System, but is not registered, GRO follow this up with the parent(s) to ensure registration takes place. Any birth not registered within one year from the date of birth can be registered by GRO on behalf of the Registrar General. 90 per cent of births in Northern Ireland are registered within 31 days of the date of birth, which rises to 98 per cent by day 42.

Occasionally, a birth may take place outside a hospital without a midwife in attendance. These births are not recorded on the Maternity System and GRO have no knowledge of their existence until a registration takes place. The number of cases where a registration does not take place is believed to be relatively small and is not considered to adversely affect published results.

Validation

During the registration a provisional copy of the information is shared with the informant before the registration is finalised and the informant is asked to check the information supplied (e.g. to check that all spellings/dates are correct). Any further errors can be addressed at this stage, before being finalised on GRO's electronic system (NIROS).

Appropriate validation checks are embedded within the NIROS to help the Registrar with this process. Information supplied at birth registration is generally believed to be correct since wilfully supplying false information may render the informant liable to prosecution for perjury.

Birth statistics are extracted directly from NIROS and are subjected to further validation checks by the Vital Statistics Unit in NISRA's Vital Statistics & Administrative Research and Support Branch (VARs). Further details of these checks are available from the [Northern Ireland Quality Assurance of Vital Statistics data](#) document.



Dimension 3 - Timeliness and punctuality

Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.

Timeliness

In Northern Ireland monthly birth registration totals are published on the last day of each month, one month in arrears. More detailed breakdowns are published in the Registrar General Quarterly Update, published on the last working day of the quarter, one quarter in arrears. Provisional annual figures for the reference year, including detailed breakdowns, are published within six months of the end of the reference year. Finalised figures are usually published within 11 months of the end of the reporting period through the Registrar General Annual Report. Similar arrangements pertain across the rest of the UK reflecting user needs in the respective territories.

For more information on related releases, the [Statistics Release Calendar](#) is available online and provides 28 days advance notice of release dates.

Punctuality

The [Vital Statistics work plan](#) that includes scheduled publication dates are available on the NISRA Website. This is published at the start of each financial year.

The [GOV.UK release calendar](#) provides 28 days advance notice of releases. In the unlikely event of a change to the pre-announced release schedule, public attention will be drawn to the change and the reasons for the change will be explained fully at the same time, as set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

The release of birth statistics has been delayed once. Following the introduction of a GRO's new electronic Civil Registration system (NIROS) in February 2016, quality checks carried out on the database suggested that the births data were incomplete. Further investigation by NISRA confirmed that there were missing entries across all registration districts in Northern Ireland. This was confirmed to be an error on the part of the system. A fix to this error was applied in early 2017. Following the receipt of the missing registrations, the first release for 2016 births data took place in April 2017 rather than September 2016 as originally planned.



From 15th March 2020 birth registrations figures are not a true reflection of births occurring at that time. Due to Covid-19, a number of registration offices reduced routine processing of births, marriage and civil partnership registrations with priority given to death registrations.

Dimension 4 - Accessibility and clarity

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.

Accessibility

The NISRA website is the primary vehicle for release of Births data in Northern Ireland. A combination of narrative, charts, graphs and data may be downloaded in PDF, Microsoft Excel and Open Document Spreadsheet (ODS) formats. The Vital Statistics Unit are working towards making available datasets for release on [OpenDataNI](#). This will allow users the flexibility of producing their own analysis. Updates will be posted on the [Vital Statistics area on the NISRA website](#) as they become available.

Births data by Northern Ireland administrative and statistical (including small area) geographies are available on the [Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information System \(NINIS\)](#). A combination of interactive maps, charts, graphs and data may be created and downloaded in Microsoft Excel, CSV and PDF formats.

NISRA vital statistics can provide ad-hoc analysis of births data free of charge to users upon request.

Births data in Northern Ireland is also available for research purposes within the

- [Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study \(NILS\)](#); a large-scale, representative data-linkage study created by linking data from the Northern Ireland Health Card Registration system to the 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011 Census returns and to administrative data from other sources, including vital events.
- [Administrative Data Research for Northern Ireland \(ADR-NI\)](#) which helps trained social and economic researchers to access project-specific linked, de-identified administrative data in a secure environment.



Clarity

Basic quality information relevant to each release is available in the background notes of the relevant Statistical Bulletin as outlined on the [NISRA births webpage](#).

Dimension 5 - Coherence and comparability

Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.

The Registration of Births and Deaths (Ireland) Act, 1863 made it a legal requirement for all births to be registered from 1 January 1864. Since then legislative changes have allowed for more detailed information to be collected from the informant at registration, but the basic information remains consistent e.g. name, date of birth, mother's name etc. Registration data is the primary source of births statistics in Northern Ireland.

Birth registrations have always been the source for birth statistics in Northern Ireland. Limited birth figures are available back to 1864, with more detailed tables being available for more recent years. Births outputs are produced using the geographic boundaries in place during the year the birth was registered. This approach means that changes in boundaries can affect the comparability of statistics over time.

There is a large degree of comparability in birth statistics between countries within the UK. Annual birth statistics for the UK and its constituent countries are all based on the details collected when births are registered. NISRA, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the National Records of Scotland (NRS) quality assure all data enabling comparable detailed birth statistics to be published.

For Northern Ireland and Scotland, birth statistics are based on the number of births *registered* in the reference period, while England and Wales statistics relate to the number of births *occurring* in the reference period. Any differences are relatively minor given the 42 day window to officially register a birth. Figures for the UK are produced by ONS compiling data for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In co-ordination with ONS and NRS, NISRA provide data to [Eurostat](#) each year to allow publication of UK birth figures alongside those for other European countries.



The definitions and classifications used across the UK in the production of birth statistics are consistent (for example, definition of a stillbirth) but there are some differences in the methods used. For example, Northern Ireland and Scotland code 100% of job titles for creation of the [Standard Occupational Classification](#) (SOC 2010), while England and Wales code only 10% of job titles. All jurisdictions use different coding tools. ONS also impute missing values for some data items whereas NISRA and NRS carry out no imputation. These differences are believed to have a negligible impact on the comparability of the statistics and the inferences that can be drawn from the information.

Dimension 6 - Assessment of user needs and perceptions

The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.

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

Customer satisfaction in NISRA is monitored through the People Survey. More specific feedback for Vital Events is sought through the [Vital Events Statistics User Survey](#). Feedback is incorporated into future outputs where possible.

Dimension 7 - Performance, cost and respondent burden

The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.

While there is a legislative requirement to register births within 42 days, there is no subsequent respondent burden unless of course they fail to fulfil their legal obligations in this respect. The production and quality assurance processes, which are considered to be both cost effective and efficient, have been streamlined wherever possible and are kept under review from a continuous improvement perspective.

Dimension 8 - Confidentiality, transparency and security

The procedures and policy use to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.

NISRA adhere to the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) in the collection and dissemination of birth statistics.



NISRA will comply with the [UK General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\) and the Data Protection Act \(DPA\) 2018](#), which protects the rights and privacy of individuals, in respect of the aforementioned legislation.