



## Vital Statistics Unit

# Background Quality Report (BQR) for Northern Ireland Civil Partnership Statistics

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Product	Product Description	Author
Background Quality Report (BQR) for Northern Ireland Civil Partnership Statistics	The purpose of this BQR is to inform users about the quality of Civil Partnership 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 who 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	Details of the impact of Covid-19 moved from data collection to the Punctuality section.

### 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



## Background Quality Report (BQR) for Northern Ireland Civil Partnership Statistics

### Introduction

The purpose of this BQR is to inform users about the quality of Civil Partnership 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. Civil Partnership Statistics are derived from information recorded when all civil partnerships are registered, as a legal requirement, as part of civil registration in Northern Ireland. 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 Event 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 any of these events that occur in Northern Ireland.

### Contacts

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## Dimension 1 – Relevance

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

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into force in December 2005 enabling same-sex couples to get legal recognition of their relationship in Northern Ireland. Couples who form a civil partnership have a new legal status, that of ‘civil partner’. A civil partnership can only be performed by the Registrar or Deputy Registrar for the council district in which it is to take place. A copy of the notice form is available at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/civil-partnership-notice-form>

Notice should be submitted to a District Registrar in a District Registration Office between 28 days and 12 months before the intended date of the civil partnership. Only in exceptional circumstances will the Registrar General allow a civil partnership to take place if 28 days' notice has not been given. Where the Notice is accepted, a civil partnership Schedule will be issued 14 days before the ceremony takes place. The couple will be asked to check the details on the Schedule to ensure that all information is accurate as this will form the basis for the registration.

Ahead of the scheduled date of a civil partnership, either party may be asked to visit the Registrar’s Office to clear up any queries, and/or to collect the civil partnership schedule. A Registrar may reject a Notice application if they have reasonable grounds for suspecting that the information or evidence provided is false, or if there is a legal impediment to the civil partnership. A civil partnership cannot take place in Northern Ireland unless a Schedule has been issued. All civil partnerships should be registered within three working days of the ceremony upon return of the Schedule. The Registrar or Deputy Registrar will normally register the civil partnership. During registration the information previously entered from the notice forms on the electronic system called the Northern Ireland Registration Office System (NIROS) will be checked before the registration is finalised.

In view of the legal requirement to register all Civil partnerships, 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 civil partnerships that took place in Northern Ireland. As such, this includes civil partnerships of individuals whose usual residence is outside Northern Ireland and



excludes civil partnerships of usual residents where the civil partnership took place while outside Northern Ireland.

Key users of civil partnership statistics include NISRA to report on social and demographic trends. Lawyers, solicitors and those involved in family law, lobby groups, as well as academics and researchers in demography and social sciences, are often interested in civil partnership statistics. Organisations such as Eurostat and the United Nations use civil partnership statistics to make international comparisons. Also, organisations in the voluntary sector use NISRA civil partnership statistics for comparison purposes and to support campaigns.

Those involved in catering for such events, for example hotels and catering businesses, bridal shops and wedding planners often wish to view civil partnership statistics.

Organisations covering gay and lesbian rights and equality issues, for example, Stonewall, use civil partnership statistics to support their campaigns and pass on the data to their own users.

## Dimension 2 - Accuracy

### The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.

#### *Data Collection*

All civil partnerships in Northern Ireland should be registered within three working days from the date of ceremony. There are occasions where the parties to the civil partnership do not return the schedule to the registrar to have the civil partnership registered. 98% of civil partnerships in Northern Ireland are registered within three days of the civil partnership and 100% within 28 days. GRO have a process in place to follow up on schedules that have not been returned and have the means to carry out a late registration of a civil partnership.

The registrars in Northern Ireland approve the venues for civil partnership ceremonies such as hotels, restaurants, historic buildings etc. If a civil partnership was arranged for a venue that had not been previously approved this would also have to be completed before the civil partnership took place.



### *Validation*

There are some validation checks built into NIROS to help the Registrar with this process.

Information supplied at civil partnership registration is generally believed to be correct as both parties sign a declaration on the civil partnership notice form to state that all the particulars provided are true. Wilfully supplying false information may render the informant liable to prosecution for perjury.

Civil partnership 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 breakdowns of civil partnership registrations 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, are published within 6 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 civil partnership 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 civil partnership 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 civil partnership data took place in April 2017 rather than September 2016 as originally planned.

From 15<sup>th</sup> 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 civil partnership data in Northern Ireland. A combination of narrative, charts, graphs and data (specifically tailored to draw out the key findings from the statistics) may be downloaded in PDF, Microsoft Excel and Open Document Spreadsheet (ODS) formats.

Civil Partnership data by Northern Ireland administrative 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 & PDF formats.

##### *Clarity*

Basic quality information relevant to each release is available in the background notes of the relevant Statistical Bulletin.

## 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 Civil Partnership Act 2004 made it a legal requirement for all civil partnerships to be registered. The act came into force in December 2005. Detailed information to be collected from the informant at registration includes; name, date of civil partnership, partners' name etc.

Registration data is the primary source of civil partnership statistics in Northern Ireland.

Figures are available for Northern Ireland from December 2005 onwards. Civil Partnership outputs are produced using the geographic boundaries in place during the year the civil partnership was registered. This approach means that changes in boundaries can affect the comparability of statistics over time. Civil Partnership figures for Northern Ireland and Scotland are based on date of registration (*the date on which the civil partnership is registered by the registrar*). England and Wales figures are based on the date of formation (*the date on which the civil partnership took place*). Date of formation and date of registration may be the same as or the registration date may differ by a few days.

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into effect on differing dates across the UK;

Northern Ireland: 5<sup>th</sup> December 2005

Scotland: 5<sup>th</sup> December 2005

England and Wales: 21<sup>st</sup> December 2005

### *Same sex marriage*

Civil partnership statistics are comparable across the UK between December 2005 and 2013. In England and Wales following the implementation of the [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#), the first marriages in England and Wales of same-sex couples took place on 29 March 2014. From the 10 December 2014, under [the marriage of same sex couples \(conversion of civil partnership\) regulations 2014](#), civil partners have been able to convert their civil partnership into a marriage, if they so desired. It is not possible in England and Wales, as yet, to convert an opposite sex marriage to a Civil Partnership.

In Scotland same sex marriages came into effect on 16 December 2014 following the introduction of [The Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#). Many civil partners converted their relationship into marriages, while the first ceremonies took place on 31 December 2014. It is not possible in Scotland, as yet, to convert an opposite sex marriage to a Civil partnership.

The [Northern Ireland \(Executive Formation etc\) Act 2019](#) enabled same sex civil marriages through the [Marriage \(Same-sex Couples\) and Civil Partnership \(opposite –sex couples\) \(Northern Ireland\) regulations 2019](#). The regulations came into force on the 13 January 2020 with the first same sex civil marriage taking place on the 11 February 2020. The Legislation also enabled opposite sex civil partnerships to take place. From the 7 December 2020 [the Marriage and Civil Partnership \(NI\)\(No2\) Regulations 2020](#) allowed a same sex couple to convert a previous civil partnership to a marriage. The regulations also permitted opposite sex couples to convert a previous marriage to a civil partnership.

Figures are presented on the number of i) Civil partnerships that have been converted to marriage; and ii) marriages which have been converted to CPs. The converting of a marital status will not change any previously published official marriage or civil partnership statistics.

#### 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 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 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 all civil partnerships should be registered within 3 days, there is no legislative requirement to do so. 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 Civil Partnership 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.