

Consultation on the tables for the Annual Report of the Registrar General

Frequency: One-off

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The Annual Report of the Registrar General is one of the flagship publications produced by NISRA which summarises General Register Office (GRO) vital event registrations in Northern Ireland each year. Vital events include marriages, civil partnerships, births and deaths but the report also contains information on adoptions, re-registrations and divorces. Accompanying the report are approximately 100 statistical tables covering each of the topic areas and this is then followed up with an additional 34 summary annual tables released separately after the annual report is published. The report itself underwent a significant refresh for the 2016 edition (published in November 2017) but the tables have not been formally reviewed but instead have been added to over time.

Given the scale of resource needed to produce the annual tables and bearing in mind changes to relevant legislation in recent years (such as same-sex marriage), NISRA considered now to be an appropriate time to consult users on the coverage of our data tables. A questionnaire was advertised via the NISRA website, social media and email during May and June 2023. A total of 6 responses were received which limits quantitative analysis of the results, however the following sections provide a response to the feedback received via the consultation process.

NISRA will take these comments into account when reviewing the tables with a view to producing a single, more streamlined, user-friendly set of tables in accessible format. This work is taking place in line with best practice as outlined in the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#).

Responses to comments made or queries raised in response to open questions

Question:

Is there any data relating to vital events registrations in Northern Ireland that you regularly need that isn't included in the current annual tables?

Comment:

It would be helpful if you were able to broaden the protected characteristics you cover in relation to cause of death - add race/ethnicity to age and sex. Greater breakdown of 'place of death' would be helpful rather than having hospices, home, etc all just grouped as "All other".

Response:

The Annual Report of the Registrar General is produced using data collected through the vital events registrations process only. Information on some protected characteristics e.g ethnicity are currently not collected via that process and to do so would require legislative change. However, NISRA are keen to maximise opportunities to develop robust analysis relating to protected or vulnerable characteristics. NISRA continues to maintain and update the [NI Longitudinal Study](#) and the [NI Mortality Study](#) as a means to conduct secure, approved research using linked datasets including the Census and GRO data and thus are able to provide access to a wider set of demographic variables than offered by the registration process in isolation.

There are also plans to include a more detailed breakdown of place of death in the revised annual tables. In addition to the feedback received here, this breakdown is already produced in a provisional form for the weekly tables on deaths registered as there was a clear need for it throughout the pandemic. Therefore, incorporating into the annual outputs would ensure consistency and will allow the data to be presented in final form as well as provisional.

Comment:

Could you please give deaths, births etc in the former 26 LGDs as well as the 11 LGDs like you did previously to compare population totals for planning of health services.

Response:

The boundaries for LGD were redrawn as set out in the Local Government (Boundaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 and these were fully implemented by 2015. Vital Statistics Unit (VSU) continued to produce analysis broken down for the former 26 LGDs until 2020, however, this geography is no longer included in standard outputs generally due to this now being an outdated administrative

geography. However, vital events data is generally made available where possible for the newer 11 LGDs back to 2008 to allow time series analysis. In addition to that, Vital Statistics Unit also provide breakdowns by Health Trust (HSCT), Assembly Area (AA), District Electoral Area (DEA) & Ward (Ward 2014), all of which will be updated on the NISRA Data Portal ([Data \(nisra.gov.uk\)](http://Data.nisra.gov.uk)) following the release of the Registrar General Annual Report each year.

Comment:

I would like to see more on farming deaths/ farming accidents/ suicide and mental issues/ young families/ Tourists to the council area, impact of Brexit on fuel poverty, food poverty and also business and tourists.

Response:

Not all of these areas are in the scope of VSU. The Annual Report of the Registrar General is produced using data collected through GRO vital event registrations (births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships etc.) There are supplementary annual reports that go into more detail on areas such as deaths due to [suicides](#). However, registration records do not include information such as mental health or other existing medical issues at time of death (if they did not contribute in some way to the death), or family composition or other wider characteristics but these areas of research are supported via the NI Longitudinal Study (<https://www.nils-rsu.co.uk/>) Information on accidents is available within the cause of death section of the Annual Report under [International Classification of Disease and Related Health Problems \(ICD\) codes V01-V99](#).

However, full details surrounding the nature of the accident is not always provided on the death certificate. Alternatively, the [Health and Safety Executive \(HSENI\)](#) is the lead body responsible for the promotion and enforcement of health and safety at work standards in Northern Ireland and as such information on accidents and fatalities in the work place are reported to them. The HSENI Annual report contains some information on fatalities and injuries in the workplace (including agriculture).

Comment:

Mere numbers of deaths by suicide or undetermined cause are not sufficient. Much more detail re cause/method (viz. hanging, poisoning/'overdosing', drowning, falling from a height, as result of single vehicle, driver only 'accident', whether or not publicly inquested.

Response:

More detail on deaths by suicide are available in the annual tables on Suicide deaths in Northern Ireland. There have been reports accompanying the last 2 sets of annual tables to help explain the data and the work that was undertaken to improve its quality and completeness.

There is some breakdown by method available in both the annual report and in the suicide deaths annual tables. The breakdown by ICD-10 code in table 6.4 in the annual report goes as far as specifying deaths by method. However, due to the

sensitive nature of these deaths, proper consideration must also be given to surviving family members in relation to how much detail is released.

Useful Links:

[Suicide Deaths | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk)

Question:

Do you have any other comments about the future content of the Annual Report of the Registrar General? - Any other comments?

Comment:

The Annual Report gives an opportunity to report data in a way that advances the wider equity agenda (see q34 re: race/ethnicity data). Five-year averages for death rates have been useful during and since covid but are increasingly being dropped - would be good to see that broader perspective.

Response:

Vital Statistics Unit have noted the comment in relation to 5-year averages. A 5-year average was used during the pandemic as a measure of 'expected deaths' based on the 5 preceding years. This methodology formed the basis of excess deaths statistics in NISRA, ONS and National Records Scotland, however other methodologies also existed. The ONS is currently leading on work to assess how this measure could be refined to account for factors such as recent mortality trends, demographic change (population size and age distribution) and expected seasonal variation in mortality as well as the impact of the pandemic year in calculating expected deaths. Once this work is complete VSU will be able to better assess how the methodology can be more broadly used in its outputs.

Comment:

The gulf between NISRA and DoH stats re Covid-19 was never explained. The latter was publicised while the former was largely ignored by media.

Response:

An explanation of the difference in the Covid-19 related deaths released by NISRA and the Covid-19 death statistics published by DOH was included in the weekly report that accompanied the NISRA weekly death tables each Friday.

Supplementary to that, NISRA held media briefings to explain the data and how it differed from the daily totals produced by DoH to media outlets and produced statistical press releases each week. The NISRA weekly statistics based on death registrations were regularly used and quoted by the media (particularly on a Friday when they were published) and discussed in various news items and podcasts where the definition, limitations, and advantages of using these data were considered.

[Weekly deaths - Week ending 20 May 2022 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)

See page 18 in the bulletin for an article on the differences between NISRA's death registration statistics and the DoH daily statistics based on positive tests for Covid-19.

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