



An
Phríomh-Oifig
Staidrimh

Central
Statistics
Office

Census 2022

Ireland's Census: Covid-19 impacts and lessons learned

Eileen Murphy

Head of Census Administration

Brief History of Census 2022 Project

- Census of Population takes place every five years
- De facto – Everyone in Ireland on a single night
- Traditional census – Enumerators hand deliver and collect paper forms
- Last census took place on April 24th, 2016
- Census was due to take place on 18th April 2021, postponed due to Covid-19 pandemic. Census Night 3rd April 2022.
- Census 2022 is the 26th census since 1841



Census Consultation process

- Public consultation for 2021 took place in 2017
- Request for submissions advertised online and in press
- Over 400 submissions received
- Group convened (Census Advisory Group)
- New topics agreed for testing in Census Pilot



Census Pilot 2018

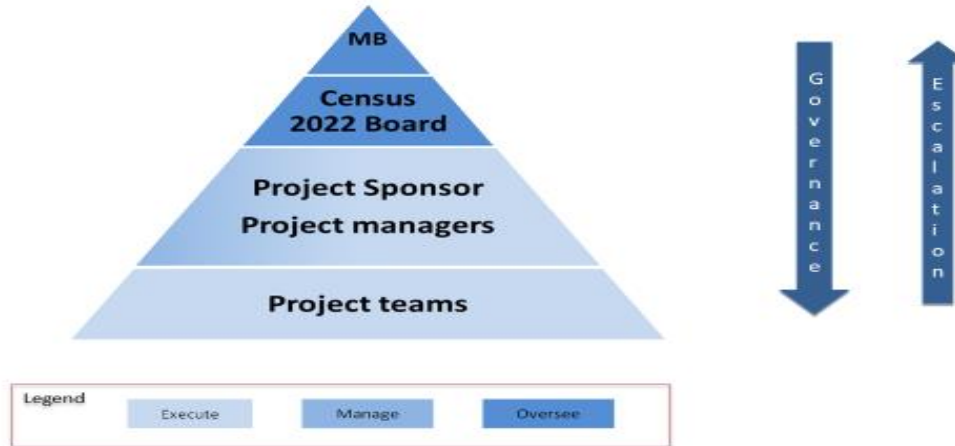
- Tested new and changed questions
- Took place on September 23rd, 2018
- Across 15,000 homes in seven counties
- 36 Census enumerators and 8 field staff
- Outcome - Eight new questions
- Revisions to 25 existing questions
- 11 questions unchanged



Census Governance

•Structure

•The pyramid below shows the structure in place in the CSO in relation to the Census 2022 Board. The board sits between the Management Board and the Census project management teams.



Census Heads of Division

**Head of Census
Outputs**

**Responsible for:
Processing
Dissemination**

**Head of Census
Collection**

**Responsible for:
Geography
Field
Logistics**

**Head of Census
IT**

**Responsible for:
Technology**

**Head of Census
Administration**

**Responsible for:
Procurement
Recruitment
Payments
Publicity
PM & Budget**



Risks

When Covid-19 hit in 2020 the key high-level risks identified were:-

- Field Staff
- HQ Staff
- Public Compliance/Response
- Governance/Budget



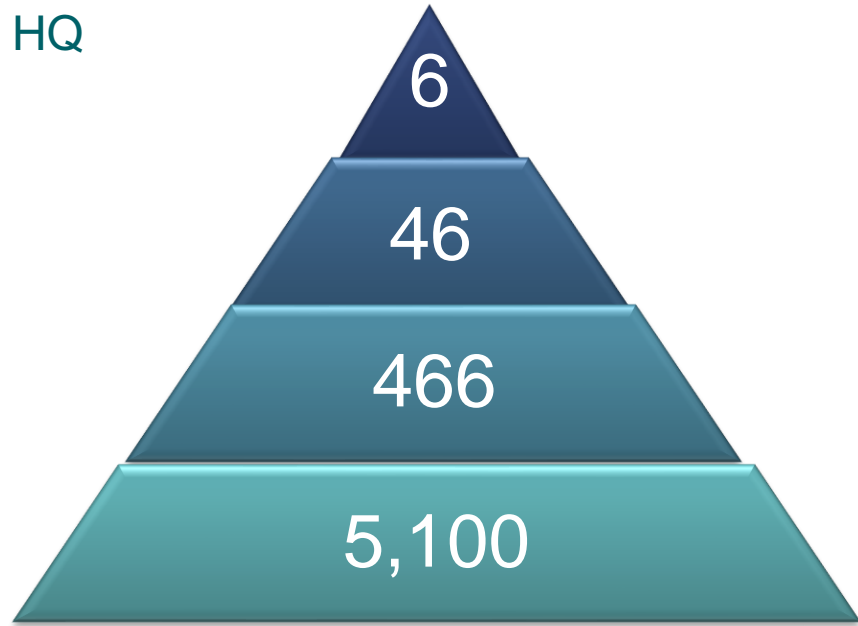
Decisions

- Summer 2020, the risk register contained multiple external red risks. The census senior managers held an emergency meeting with the Census Project Board. Recommendation to the Management Board of the CSO that due to the unprecedented number of serious risks to the project, a discussion should be had on the possibility of postponing the census
- The office also liaised directly with the public health authorities to seek advice on whether it would be prudent to continue or postpone the census. Discussions around external contract implications and general budget implications of postponement were reviewed
- The Management Board reflected on the advice and further investigated the options of postponing the census either by six months or one year. Finally, a recommendation was made to government to postpone the census by one year. The government made the decision to delay the census in September 2020 and set the new census date as 3 April 2022.
- Additionally, a separate project was put in place to establish if a population estimate could be made using administrative data sources. Some of the census team were tasked with analysing the many administrative datasets that the CSO collates to see if it might be possible to create a population count from these data sources.



Recruitment

- Census Liaison Officers (CLO) HQ
- Regional Supervisors (CRS)
Regional Offices
- Field Supervisors (CFS)
Own Homes
- Enumerators (ENU)



Field Staff - Risks

- Recruit staff who would be willing to undertake their roles and engage with the public during a pandemic
- Ability to carry out F2F recruitment processes
- Ability to carry out F2F training for the 5,600+ field staff
- Ability to acquire personal protective equipment (PPE) with global supply chain issues
- Rolling out untried and untested processes in the field
- Ability to acquire additional regional office space to allow for social distancing
- Delays in the delivery of essential equipment as supply chains shut down



Field Staff – Mitigations

- All the field recruitment processes were redesigned and moved online. Interviews were held virtually with required documentation uploaded to a specially designed portal. The whole process became virtually paperless
- Training of over 20,000 classroom hours for the 5,600+ field staff was redesigned to be provided online
- PPE was acquired in time for the revised census date
- Regional officers were moved to a mainly home working environment, rather than regional offices
- There were some issues with recruiting the volume of staff required and with staff succumbing to covid during the live field operation
- The office also continually liaised with the public health authorities ensure any processes required for census would be compliant with all current public health advice



Field Staff Competitions



HQ Staff - Risks

- The requirement for essential staff to come onsite 5 days a week with all covid restrictions in place in the office
- The ability to accommodate the required numbers of essential workers firstly became a capacity issue and also the additional risk if a significant number of key staff became ill
- The ability to recruit the additional staff who would be willing to undertake their roles in the office 5 days a week



HQ Staff - Mitigations

- Revised requirements for onsite attendance were put in place with social distancing
- Only essential workers were brought onsite to stay within capacity limits
- Strict protocols were put in place for covid incidences
- Additional staff were recruited for essential attendance onsite (but numbers were below those envisaged)



Public Compliance/Response - Risks

- The public acceptability of conducting a census during a pandemic
- The uncertainty of the public response to an enumerator calling to their door to deliver a census form
- The overall response rate to the census affecting the quality



Public Compliance/Response - Mitigations

- The delay to the census meant that conditions had improved significantly when the live field operation took place
- Communication was identified as a key way to engage the public and mitigate against any covid reluctance. The census team settled on a message of 'Be Counted' and emphasised the importance of the census in delivering key policy decisions around housing, health, transport, education etc.
- For the first time the form included a 'Time Capsule' where people could write a voluntary message to future generations, as our census forms are stored securely and released 100 years after census night. This also proved an excellent way to engage the public and gave further opportunities to reach out across multi-media and encourage census responses



Governance/Budget - Risks

- Freeze on recruitment and budget uncertainty due to diversion of government resources to pandemic funding
- The cost implications of external contractual implications had to feed into the decision-making process along with the additional staff costs for any postponement
- Review of risks to the overall project were undertaken and additional oversight meetings convened at both CMG and CPB level, with more frequent project updates



Governance/Budget - Mitigations

- A review of the immediate census budget needs and the changes to the overall costs of the census project began. Negotiations were undertaken both with the government finance authorities and the individual census contractors to secure the delivery of the project in the new timeframe, while minimising the additional costs and ensuring value for money
- Once the additional contractual and staffing resources were delivered, the census was able to proceed successfully within budget
- Revised project milestones were agreed to deliver the updated project systems and processes within the new timeframe



Lessons Learnt

- The importance of the governance structures
- Having the relevant expertise in the Census Management Group and the Census Project Board to give a 360-degree input into decisions
- Although recruitment and training of staff was necessarily online, we feel it was sub-optimal and although online will always have a place, where circumstances allow, some key elements should be in person
- We feel we should continue to deliver our recruitment in house, as discussions regarding outsourcing show it's not necessarily better
- From our interactions with countries who proceeded with Censuses in 2020/2021, the provision of an online response channel meant that the smaller field force required for Non-Response Follow Up (NRFU) gave them the confidence to proceed with their censuses
- As has generally been experienced, it is becoming more difficult to engage with people and continue to ensure the high response rates required to ensure a successful census. Providing a multi-mode option for people to engage with the census allows wider accessibility and engagement
- Examining administrative data to deliver or improve the quality of a census has opened up new options to the office



Conclusions

- The decision to delay the census by a year was the correct one for Ireland. The CSO would not have been able to deliver the high-quality census that was produced in 2022, if it had proceeded in 2021. Following on from a pandemic, it would be imprudent to plan to deliver the same traditional field methodology for the next census
- When the census was postponed, timelines for future censuses had to be reassessed. The CSO Management Board convened a team to carry out a feasibility report on delivery and timelines for future census. The recommendation was that an online response option be provided for the next census and that it should take place in 2027. In early 2022, government endorsed the recommendation and funding for the online platform element of the project was acquired under the EU National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)
- The project to establish an administrative population estimate delivered a publication called ‘Irish Population Estimates from Administrative Data Sources’ (IPEADS) in November 2021. It gives details on the population by geography. However, it currently does not contain the attribute data required for a census. It is being examined as an option for future annual population estimates required by the EU. It will also be taken into consideration for decisions around the future of census taking in Ireland for the 2027 census and beyond
- Preliminary results for the 2022 Census were successfully published on 23 June, with a full dissemination programme due in 2023
- The Proof of Concept for the online response option for the 2027 census is taking place as we speak



BE COUNTED

Sunday 3 April

CENSUS
www.census.ie

 An
Phríomh-Oifig
Staidrimh

Central
Statistics
Office



www.cso.ie