



General information about adoption in Ireland and the first steps in finding out more about an adoption

Adoption in Ireland

The Adoption Act 1952 introduced legal adoption into Ireland for the first time. The Adoption Act 2010 consolidates all of the legislation pertaining to adoption in Ireland as well as ratifying the 1993 Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-Operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

The nature and effect of an Irish Adoption Order is that the child becomes the child of the adopters as if born to them within marriage. This means the child has the same family name and the same legal rights as if he/she had been born into the adoptive family. Adoption in Ireland is regulated by the Adoption Authority of Ireland which is an independent quasi judicial statutory body appointed by Government. (See Adoption Authority website for details on all of the Adoption Acts governing adoption in Ireland and for the Authority's current functions and services: www.aai.gov.ie).

The Adoption Authority of Ireland is responsible for:

- The issuing of Adoption Orders
- The operation of the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR) which enables adopted people and birth family members to register their wishes regarding contact with each other.
- The registration and supervision of the Accredited Bodies. Some of these were previously known as Registered Adoption Societies.
- The regulation of domestic and intercountry adoption practices.
- The maintenance of the Irish and Intercountry Adoption Registers which records the birth names and adopted names of children who have been adopted.
- Issuing Declarations of Eligibility and Suitability to prospective adoptive parents.

Enquires about any aspect of adoption can be directed to the Adoption Authority: www.aai.gov.ie

Historical Context

Since 1952 almost 40,000 Adoption Orders have been granted in the State. Between the years 1951 to 1973, nearly 4,000 children were placed for adoption outside Ireland. The majority of these children were adopted by Irish-American families in the United States. Many Irish birth mothers also placed children for adoption in the United Kingdom.

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There are many reasons why children were placed for adoption in the past. These included:

- The social stigma attached to being a single parent and also the stigma attached to children born outside of marriage. This was particularly true until the end of the 1970's.
- Lack of financial support to single parents and their children. The first social welfare payment to single parents was made in 1973.
- The wish of single parents to have their children reared in a two parent family.

The spirit of the 1952 Adoption Act was based on a closed system of adoption. It was not envisaged that a birth parent or an adopted person would ever seek to have contact with each other again. Confidentiality surrounding adoption of children was of paramount concern. The majority of children were placed through registered adoption agencies or the local Health Boards (now Health Service Executive). Children were also placed in adoptive families in the following ways:

- Family Adoptions: Where a child was placed with a known family member, for example with the birth parent's sister, or aunt or with grandparents.
- Third Party Arrangements: Where a child was placed with a family by a third party, for example a doctor, solicitor, nurse or members of the clergy.
- Privately: Some children were placed privately in an adoptive family known to the birth mother, birth father or other birth family members.
- Informal arrangements: There is evidence that some babies were registered in their 'adoptive' family name as if they had been born into that family. No legal adoption order was made in those cases.

Trends in adoption placements

A major reduction in the numbers of Irish children being placed for adoption began in the late 1970's. By 1990 only 8% of children born outside marriage to Irish mothers were placed for adoption. Since the introduction of the Adoption Act 1991, the adoption of children from abroad by Irish residents has become the most common way for adoptive families to be formed. Between 1991 and 2008 over 5,000 children were adopted internationally (Adoption Board Annual Report 2008). An upward trend in international adoptions continued in the following years. However with the ratification of The Hague Convention in 2010 the number of countries from which Irish prospective adopters can adopt has decreased and it remains to be seen what trends will emerge in the future.

Adoption Services

All Health Service Executive areas provide an adoption service. See HSE Website for more details: www.hse.ie. Accredited Bodies registered by the Adoption Authority also provide a range of adoption services. See The Adoption Authority's website for all Accredited Bodies registered under the Adoption Act 2010 www.aai.gov.ie

Registration of a child's birth

Every birth in Ireland is entered in the Register of Births and a Birth Certificate can be issued from this Register. When a child is adopted into a new family an Adoption Order is granted, and the child's details are then registered in the Adopted Children's Register.

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A new Adoption Certificate, which has exactly the same legal function and standing as a birth certificate is issued for the child who has been adopted. This Adoption Certificate records the registration of the child's new identity/name and the certificate includes the names of the adoptive parents as the legal parents of the child. The certificate is a copy of the entry in the Register of Adopted Children.

Amended Baptismal Certificates

Once an Adoption Order is made, the adoptive parents' information is added to the original baptismal record. An amended baptismal certificate is issued for each adopted child in the parish area in which they reside. The original baptismal certificate is usually kept in the Diocesan office of the parish in which the child was born.

Access to Birth Certificates

Adopted people do not have an absolute right to obtain access to their birth certificates. However, adopted people can apply to the Adoption Authority of Ireland and request access to their birth certificate under Section 86 of the Adoption Act 2010. This section enables the Adoption Authority or a Court to direct that the adopted person be given access to the original entry of his or her birth in the records maintained by the Registrar General of Births.

All written enquiries can be sent to: Adoption Authority of Ireland, Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. Tel Ph: 01 2309300 and Freephone 1800 309 300. Email: info@aai.gov.ie Website : www.aai.gov.ie. The Adoption Authority applies certain criteria in relation to the release of birth certificates, one of which is that the birth mother is consulted as to her wishes in relation to the release of the birth certificate to the adopted person. Decisions by the Authority are made on a case by case basis and further information is available from the Authority.

First steps in finding information about an adoption

You can make a direct enquiry to the agency involved in you son/daughter's adoption. If you do not know the name of the agency this information will be available to you from: The Adoption Authority of Ireland, Shelbourne House, Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. Tel: 01-2309300 and Freephone 1800 309 300. Email: info@aai.gov.ie.

A letter or an email to the Adoption Authority or to the agency should include the following information:

- Your full name and any previous name.
- Your son/daughter's date and place of birth.
- Your current address and contact details including phone number.
- Some form of photo identification, for example; a copy of your passport or driver's licence.

You should also state what information you would like to obtain. The Adoption Authority and adoption agencies welcome enquiries, all of which are treated confidentially.

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National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR)

It is also advisable to consider placing your name on the National Adoption Contact Preference Register which is operated by The Adoption Authority. The NACPR was established in 2005 by the Adoption Board. The NACPR facilitates contact between an adopted person and a birth mother, a birth father, a sibling or other birth relatives. Participation is voluntary and contact through the NACPR will only be initiated where both an adopted person and a birth relative register and wish to have contact.

The NACPR allows you to choose whatever level of contact you wish to have. It also includes an option to have no contact with other parties to the adoption if this is your wish. Those who register on the NACPR can indicate their preference about the level of contact and this ranges from:

1. Willing to meet
2. Contact via telephone
3. Contact via email
4. Exchange of letters/information
5. No contact but willing to share medical information
6. No contact but willing to share background information
7. No contact at the moment

The NACPR is confidential and once a match is made through the Register the adopted person and the birth family member will be informed by the Adoption Authority. For further information contact the Adoption Authority of Ireland.

The application form for the National Adoption Contact Preference Register can be downloaded from the Adoption Authority website: www.aai.gov.ie