

Joint Committee Housing Local Government and Heritage

OPENING STATEMENT

Mr Cormac Halpin

Central Statistics Office

10 October 2023

Good morning, Chairman, and members of the Joint Committee. Thank you for the invitation to the Central Statistics Office to attend the Committee meeting to consider data relating to private rental accommodation.

I am Cormac Halpin, Senior Statistician for Census Outputs and I am joined today by my colleague Kieran Culhane, Senior Statistician in charge of the Statistical System Coordination Division in the CSO.

As Ireland's national statistical institute, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) is an independent Office under the Statistics Act 1993, responsible for the production, co-ordination, and qualitative oversight of Official Statistics for Ireland. The CSO provides independent statistical information to support and promote understanding and debate across Government, business, and society.

Data is a modern-day natural resource and the CSO's role is to extract value from that data. The CSO provides high quality statistics, independent insight, and information for all, in an accessible and user-friendly manner. Official Statistics are a public good and an essential input to creating an informed society for the people of Ireland.

Increasingly, the CSO is providing a suite of data and statistical services to the broader Civil and Public Service (CPS). This move towards a cross organisational, coordinator role across the entire CPS is mandated in both the European regulation on Statistics and in the Statistics Act 1993. There is an ever-increasing demand for our products, data, and services from across the Civil and Public Service as organisations work to extract the insights and evidence within data to inform policy development. To this end CSO has worked with several housing bodies and agencies to provide valuable statistical information to inform policy

with respect to the housing sector, including the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), with whom we have a data exchange agreement in place since 2016.

Turning to the Census of Population, this is our largest primary data collection activity, reaching every household in the State with the delivery and collection of more than 1.9 million forms to households and communal establishments in 2022. The production of results from Census 2022 commenced in May of this year and to date we have produced five detailed analytical reports and the Small Area Population Statistics which provide detailed statistical data for a wide range of geographies. Accompanying these releases are multiple statistical tables allowing users to generate their own analysis and insights into the Census data. These tables are available for all users on the CSO's Px-Stat database tool on the office's website www.cso.ie.

As part of the extensive Census 2022 dissemination programme, the CSO has to date produced over 80 statistical tables relating to housing as well as a dedicated thematic release in July which aims to interpret some of the key findings for a broad audience.

The data CSO produced on the number of households which rent from a private landlord was based upon a question which appeared on the second page of the Census 2022 form. The questions on this page relate to the accommodation in which the household lives and are answered by an adult member of the household present on Census Night. The question, number H2 is in two parts. The first part asks "Does your household own or rent your accommodation?" The householder is instructed to mark one of the four response options, namely Own with mortgage or loan, Own outright, Rent or Live here rent free. The

second part of the question is directed to those who indicate that they rent their accommodation. It asks, “If renting, who is your landlord”. The three response options to this part of the question are Private Landlord, Local Authority and Voluntary/Co-operative housing body.

The headline findings from this question were that 330,632 households indicated that they rented their homes from a private landlord. A further 531,207 households owned their homes with a loan or mortgage, 679,718 owned their homes without a mortgage or loan, 153,192 rented from a Local Authority, 29,880 rented from a voluntary or co-operative housing body, 31,864 lived in their home rent free and no data was available for 80,235 households.

The 330,632 households who rented from a private landlord represented an almost 7% increase compared with Census 2016 when 309,728 households indicated that they rented from a private landlord. The 2016 figure was in turn a more modest increase of just over 1% relative to the number of private tenancies reported in Census 2011. It should be noted that the question used to capture this information has remained unchanged since 2011 which facilitates direct comparison between the data generated from each iteration of the Census in 2011, 2016 and 2022.

To provide some background on the phrasing of the Census question on nature of occupancy, it was originally introduced in Census 2011 following a public consultation on the Census questionnaire and subsequent Pilot testing. Following this process, the Census Advisory Group, a representative body of Census data users and key stakeholders, recommended the question be adopted in Census 2011, a decision which was subsequently approved by government. It

was retained in Census 2016 when no public consultation was conducted, and again for Census 2022 when the Census Advisory Group again recommended its retention to government which approved this recommendation.

The RTB estimates that there were 276,223 private rented tenancies registered at the end of 2021. This represents a gap of over 54,000 tenancies compared with the Census 2022 figure indicated previously. When the CSO became aware of the discrepancy, we met with the RTB to discuss possible reasons for the difference and undertook some initial analysis to identify some high-level potential reasons for the gap.

At this juncture and following this analysis, it is possible to identify some possible reasons for the differences between the two data sources.

First, it should be noted that the method of data collection is significantly different. This can cause differences to arise between ostensibly highly comparable datasets. The Census data is compiled from self-completion paper questionnaires, with an adult member of the household, in this case a tenant, responsible for completing the form. The RTB data is based upon registration by private landlords.

We have also estimated that approximately one thousand dwellings that were reported as private rental dwellings by householders in the Census may more appropriately be categorised as having a landlord that is a Voluntary or Co-operative housing body. This again is based on preliminary analysis of both the RTB and the Local Property Tax (LPT) data and further work is required to confirm this number.

We are aware that there may be differences in how student accommodation is treated between the two data sources. In the census, some student specific accommodation may have been included as private rentals, whereas they may have been removed from the figure that the RTB has reported. While more analysis is required to better quantify this difference, it is unlikely to account for a large number of tenancies in the census data.

Finally, it is possible that more informal letting arrangements, for example between parents and children, are captured in the census as private rentals but may not be registered with the RTB. It is difficult to estimate the extent of this currently, but further analysis may reveal more detail.

These initial findings are indicative but given the importance of understanding the discrepancies and CSO's access by law to both the Census 2022 housing data and the RTB data relating to registered tenancies, the CSO is proposing to undertake a matching exercise between the two files to better understand and quantify as much as possible the reasons for the differences between the two published figures. The expected output from this exercise will be a statistical report providing more insight into the discrepancies potentially including a geographical breakdown and more information on the characteristics of the households involved. Depending on how this exercise develops it may be necessary to involve other data sources to shed more light on the discrepancies such as the data from Census 2016, the LPT and Housing Assistance Payments. The CSO is planning to begin this work in November. On completion, the CSO will be happy to share this report with the Committee and generally make it publicly available. It should be noted that consistent with Section 33 of the

Statistics Act 1993, the CSO cannot provide information about individual dwellings to any other organisation, and this will not be an outcome of the matching exercise.

As the CSO works through the planned analysis, we will continue to collaborate with the RTB to assist in the understanding of both data sets and to discuss their views on the findings from the work and their views on the possible reasons for the discrepancies in the data.

Kieran and I are happy to take any questions the committee may have.