

**Statement by the Minister of State Mr. Jack Chambers T.D., on  
the Revised Estimates for Public Services 2020  
Vote 4 - Central Statistics Office**

**Select Committee on  
Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and the Taoiseach  
Thursday 3 June 2021.**

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before the Select Committee as you continue your consideration of the 2021 Estimates for Votes 1 to 6.

You have been supplied with a detailed briefing document for Vote 4, the Central Statistics Office in advance of this meeting and briefing for the other Votes before the previous meeting of the Committee on 27th April.

As the Taoiseach has already provided a statement to the committee I will limit my opening comments to the CSO which has not yet been discussed.

The Central Statistics Office is Ireland's national statistical institute and is responsible of the production and oversight of the production of all Official Statistics for Ireland. The CSO is an independent Office of the Civil Service under the aegis of the Taoiseach.

The role of the Director General of the CSO, as prescribed by the Statistics Act 1993, provides that the officeholder acts independently and exercises sole responsibility in professional Statistical matters.

The National Statistics Board, with the agreement of the Taoiseach, has the general function of guiding the overall strategic direction of the CSO. This

independent position reflects international best practice for the organisation of official statistics.

The Central Statistics Office plays a vital role in the functioning of the State in providing independent and verifiable data to citizens and policy makers on a broad range of topics including social, economic and environmental issues. The ability of the CSO to inform has been evident throughout the current pandemic.

The CSO delivered on the vast majority of its planned Statistical Work Programme for 2020, publishing 421 releases and publications. Of these 29 were new products specifically related to providing insight on the impact of the pandemic across Irish society and businesses, for policy makers and Irish citizens alike.

The CSO delivered 59 individual publications from the 29 new products, which focused on the business and social impact of COVID-19, the numbers of deaths and cases, the impact on the labour market and experimental outputs on excess deaths and on mobility during the pandemic amongst others.

Alongside the new products developed and delivered to provide additional insight, the CSO provided statistical and analytical expertise and new data services to support analysing health data sources in a safe and secure environment.

The CSO has supported modelling, analysis of health and of real time data and analysis to provide insight regarding trends and identifying emerging issues all to support central government's response to the pandemic.

COVID-19 has, of course, impacted on CSO's statistical work programme during the last year with the greatest impact on processes that require face to face interactions with survey respondents.

The single largest casualty by scale was the postponement of the **Census of Population** from 2021 to 2022. On consideration of the challenges caused by COVID-19 the Government decided to postpone the 2021 Census until April 2022 to enable the CSO to undertake a comprehensive, inclusive and safe Census in 2022 which will provide valuable and accurate data for our country in the years ahead.

Other surveys such as pilots for the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC); and the Household Budget Survey were postponed until 2021. Face to face collection at airports and ports also ceased during 2020. While face to face interviewing for household surveys ceased, new technological solutions and mixed mode collection options were implemented to maximise the delivery of the Statistical Work Programme.

The CSO has also developed new interactive graphics, infographics, new formats (Bulletins and Frontier Series) and outputs to provide the additional insight needed by the public, businesses and policy makers on the impact of the pandemic.

The CSO has continued to publish key economic indicators and has tracked the impact of the crisis on business sectors and the economy including via the Monthly Exports and Imports of Goods, the Quarterly National Accounts, Government Deficit and Debt, the Quarterly Balance of Payments, the Labour Force Survey, the Monthly Unemployment and Live Register, the Survey on Income and Living Conditions, amongst others.

Planning has continued for Census 2022 with the options for a potential Census in 2026 also being considered. In both cases an increase in the use of administrative data is being explored and the possibility of the development of an online response facility is being considered in respect of Census 2026, which if approved by Government, would mark 100 years since the first State Census.

The CSO is continuing to work on a survey on the prevalence of sexual violence, with a pilot going into the field in 2021, and is progressing work on the data collection and processing of the next wave of the States longitudinal study of children and youth, Growing up in Ireland, from 2023.

The CSO now faces a different challenge in measuring how our economy and society emerges from the Covid restrictions. Sustainable, secure access to data and the reuse of high value data sources in the form of administrative data and some private data sources is essential for the CSO to provide timely and accurate data that is meaningful to policy makers. To enable this the CSO has been to the forefront of building the National Data Infrastructure under action 24, “Improve how data is collected, managed and shared” of the Civil Service Renewal Program.

The pandemic has confirmed what we have always known, that along with access, the quality of the data sources is crucial. Continuing to build the National Data Infrastructure across the public service is a key component-to delivering on the quality necessary for the creation of Official Statistics and to deliver the broader data framework to serve the needs of the State.

There is a significant international dimension to the work of the CSO. The EU institutions, Eurostat and the ECB primarily, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

and other international bodies are all important users of official statistics. These bodies also have a significant role in defining and monitoring standards for the compilation of comparable information. The CSO subscribes to the standards set out in the UN's Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice.

New EU legislation introduced in 2015 fundamentally changed the role of the CSO, and that of its Director General. Following this legislation, the Director General of the CSO now has responsibility for coordinating and overseeing the quality of all European Official Statistics in Ireland. It is now the responsibility of the CSO to ensure that all compilers of European Statistics in Ireland are adhering to the quality and methodological standards set out by the EU and detailed in the European Statistics Code of Practice (ESCoP).

Turning to the CSO's budget, the net allocation for 2021 is €63.155 million. The funding provided reflects the Government's commitment to the Office to meet its obligations under national and EU law, continue to develop the Irish Statistical System and produce new outputs to meet domestic demand through the provision of trusted and robust official statistics. Members of the public are increasingly aware of, and able to access, statistics and indicators on the social, economic and environmental issues, as demonstrated by nearly 15 million web hits on the CSO website in 2020.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the values and principles which inform the CSO's work. The CSO makes an important contribution to Ireland's public policy, by providing a high-quality and most importantly – an independent statistical service.