

How to search the 1926 Census

AGI Irish Census Records

Exactly 100 years later to the day, the National Archives of Ireland (NAI) have released the 1926 Census, the first census of the newly formed Irish Free State (IFS). In a continuing commitment to public service, the NAI has made the 1926 census available online free of charge. This leaflet aims to provide a guide to help search the 1926 census to best advantage.

On census night 1926 the population of the Irish Free State was 2,971,992.

Format of the 1926 Census

The format of the 1926 census is quite different to the earlier censuses of 1901 and 1911, with one of the biggest differences being that everyone is captured in just two forms, the Household Return FORM A and the House and Building Return FORM B (no separate forms for institutions, hospitals, barracks, prisons etc., as was the case in 1901 and 1911). Also, a great deal more information is captured in FORM A than in earlier censuses, including questions about all the following (**bold text** indicates new questions not included in the 1901 or 1911 censuses):

Household Return FORM A (available in Irish or English) Records:

- Name and surname and Relationship to Head of Household
- Age, Sex, Marriage or **Orphanhood (if 14 years or under)**
- Birthplace – including **County and Townland within Ireland (or if born outside Ireland, County or State, Province or District)**
- **Detailed spoken Irish/English language ability** and Religion
- Occupation, including **precise branch of Profession, Trade, Manufacturing, Service, etc.**
- **Specific categories for those working in Agriculture e.g. Farmer, Farm Labourer, Farm Steward etc. as well as total area in statute acres of all agricultural holdings situate in the IFS.**
- **If 'Unemployed', length of time 'Out of Work'**
- **Information about nature of Employment for e.g. name of employer, if working on 'Own-account' etc.**
- Present and **Previous marriages for men and women**, years lasted and children born.
- **Total area in statute acres of all agricultural holdings (if any) situate in the IFS.**

How to Search FORM A

Presently, Form A can be searched by name (forename and surname) and place (Townland/Street, District Electoral Division [DED] and County). It is envisaged that in due course, further search variables will be added. Significantly, Form A records information for up to 10 individuals (unlike the possible 15 on one page on a single form in 1901 and 1911). This means that for large households with over 10 occupants on census night and for institutions there will be several FORM A's. The good news is that to avoid scrolling through multiple FORM A's, the NAI have included an **asterix *** beside the FORM A that lists the person being searched. This is a hugely beneficial inclusion and one that time stretched researchers are very grateful for.

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A search for suffragette and Irish nationalist, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington returns her household on the first result under her name. While the transcript records her religion as “Church of Ireland”, the original return reveals that both Hanna and her son stated, “No Church”. This highlights the importance of consulting the original image rather than relying on the transcript.

Click on link to open 1926 Census Record: [Hanna Sheehy Skeffington 1926 Census](#)

The return also provides further insight into her life at the time. Hanna described herself as a “Freelance Journalist” and noted that she could speak “English” and “Some Irish”, while her son, Owen Lancelot, could speak both “Irish and English”. Hanna declared she was a “Widow”, a stark reminder of her husband’s Francis Sheehy Skeffington’s murder in 1916. In addition, her place of birth is recorded as “Kanturk, Co. Cork”, thus highlighting a key benefit of the 1926 Census, which provides more precise birthplace details than earlier returns.

The House and Building Return – FORM B

In addition to the Household Return FORM A, the 1926 Census includes the House and Building Return, FORM B.

While broadly similar to earlier returns, FORM B is more streamlined. All building types such as a private house, hospital or barracks, are recorded together in a single form for each townland or street. In the case of urban areas, the number of each is the postal number (as opposed to enumerators number in earlier censuses). This format provides a clear overview of the landscape of a community.

Another feature of the 1926 return is the clear breakdown of household members by male and female. This breakdown offers a more structured outline of the family unit.

Some details included in earlier censuses were no longer recorded by 1926. These include the name of the landlord, the number of windows in the front of the house, and the materials used in the construction of walls and roofs. Descriptions of outbuildings and farm steadings were also omitted. While not essential for genealogical research, such details did offer additional context on the living conditions of earlier generations. Although this is somewhat unfortunate, their absence reflects the more streamlined nature of the 1926 return.

How to search the 1926 census using the MAP of Ireland

The NAI have included a map of Ireland (6” Ordnance Survey map) to accompany the 1926 census. The lowest level searchable via the map is DED, however, all townlands/streets within a specific DED are listed in a drop-down menu. It is then possible to access each of these townlands/streets individually and see the list of those living there, each linked to their specific return. Significantly, and most usefully, the NAI have highlighted the location of ‘Institutions’ on the map, making them easier to locate than in earlier censuses.

Like all new resources, especially ones of this scale, some errors exist but the NAI are committed to an ongoing process of updating and amending the resource well into the future.

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