Ireland's digital economy grows: new .ie domain registrations increased 24% in 2021 compared to pre-pandemic 2019 — report

62,198 new .ie domains registered last year as businesses built websites and online stores in direct response to locked-down economy

- **As .ie domains are a recognised *forward* economic indicator of digital intentions of Ireland's SMEs and citizens, this growth augurs well for future digital-led productivity gains**
- **The .ie domain accounts for 52.6% of all top-level domains hosted in Ireland, ahead of .com**
- **.ie one of the fastest growing country domains in Europe, ahead of .fr, .de, and .uk**
- **54% of .ie websites have a security certificate but use of other security features low as .IE warns of growing cyber threats**
- **.IE CEO: "Businesses are investing in new websites, integrating e-commerce technology, and making use of productivity-enhancing tools all year round because they now recognise the huge role they play in profitability and customer acquisition."**

New .ie domain registrations increased by 24% in 2021 compared to pre-pandemic 2019 as tens of thousands of SMEs built websites and online stores, according to new figures from .IE, Ireland's country domain manager.

A total of **62,198 new .ie domains were registered in 2021** compared to 50,167 in 2019. H1 2021 was the best half-year period on record for new .ie domain registrations, although they decreased 4.5% in the full year of 2021 compared to 2020. As of 31 December 2021, the total .ie database stood at **330,108 domains.**

The 2021 .IE Domain Profile Report, which explores and analyses the .ie database, shows that for most of last year, **the rate of new .ie domain registrations largely reflected Government lockdown policy.**

"In the months of 2021 when Ireland was in strict lockdown and non-essential retail was closed, new .ie domain registrations surged," **said David Curtin, Chief Executive of .IE.**

"SMEs whose physical premises were shuttered or only partially open moved online in order to continue selling to their customers and stay connected. In July, registrations bottomed out as reopening continued and the Government encouraged a focus on outdoor activities."

However, the pandemic's link to new .ie domain registrations appeared to 'decouple' in August as .ie domain registrations once again increased despite the Government's accelerated reopening plans.

"We believe this decoupling occurred when it did because the Irish economy has, for the most part, exited the 'acute response' phase of the pandemic. Businesses have factored-in the uncertainty of restrictions and reduced trading ability to their commercial operations and planning.

"SMEs are also no longer simply reacting to the pandemic. Instead, consumer behaviours are changing, and SMEs are changing with them. Businesses are investing in new websites, integrating e-commerce technology, and making use of productivity-enhancing tools all year round because they now recognise the huge role they play in profitability and customer acquisition."

International and county growth

At the end of December 2021, the **.ie domain accounted for 52.6% of all top-level domains hosted in Ireland,** an increase of 1.6 percentage points compared with the same month in 2020. In comparison, .com accounted for 30.8% of all domains, followed by .uk (7.6%) and .eu (2.3%).

At 6.5% year-on-year growth, **the .ie domain remains one of the fastest growing country domains in Europe**, behind only .ee (Estonia, +8.8%) and .pt (Portugal, +10.2%) and ahead of .fr, .de, and .uk.

All counties on the island of Ireland, excluding Armagh, **recorded an increase in percentage growth in new .ie domain registrations in 2021 compared to pre-pandemic 2019**. Counties Longford, Mayo, and Meath recorded the highest overall increases; Galway recorded the highest percentage increase among the urban counties, beating Dublin, Cork, Limerick, and Waterford.

The .ie domain ecosystem: cybersecurity and keywords

54% of all .ie websites are secured with a security certificate. A much smaller percentage of .ie domains use other cybersecurity features, such as DNSSEC (0.16%), which adds an additional layer of cryptographic security to a domain, and Registry Lock (0.03%), which protects a domain from malicious or accidental changes.

"It's encouraging to see that the majority of .ie websites are secured with a security certificate, which ensures that consumers are protected from having their personal details stolen by cyber-criminals during an online transaction," said Mr Curtin.

"However, comprehensive domain cybersecurity entails using the full range of available tools, such as DNSSEC and Registry Lock. While the number of .ie domain owners using these tools is increasing, the base number is still small.

"Given the clear and serious impact of the HSE ransomware attack last year, as well as myriad other high-profile incidents, it's very important that all .ie domain owners, particularly businesses and those that have a responsibility to protect sensitive information, are doing as much as possible to protect their users and their internal systems from cyberattacks."

New .ie registrations with **Covid-related keywords** (such as 'vaccine', 'Covid', 'mask') decreased in 2021 compared with 2020, with just 187 recorded mentions in the database. However, registrations of **general health-related keywords** (such as 'fitness', 'pharmacy/pharmacist', and 'counselling') remained strong, with 1,343 registered.

Reflecting growing personal and commercial interest in **sustainability and environmental issues,** 789 new .ie domains with climate-related keywords were registered in 2021. The top three keywords were 'green' (311), 'solar' (118), and 'carbon' (81).

ENDS

Read the 2021 .IE Domain Profile Report in full.

For media enquiries, contact:

Nuala Ryan │ nuala@weare360.ie │ 083 421 2733

Lauren Ennis │ lennis@weare360.ie │ 086 161 1912

Cillian Harford │ cillian@weare360.ie │ 087 442 8328

About .IE

.IE is the national registry for .ie domain names and the trusted and progressive guardian of Ireland's unique online .ie address. Our purpose is to enable and empower people, communities, and businesses across Ireland to thrive online.

We operate the domain name system (DNS) for the .ie namespace, facilitate an independent dispute resolution service, and operate a public WHOIS lookup service for .ie domains.

In cooperation with our Registrars, technical partners, and stakeholders, we help advance Ireland's internet ecosystem. Good governance is evidenced in our policy development process for the .ie namespace, which follows a bottom-up, consensus-driven approach through a multi-stakeholder Policy Advisory Committee.

At .IE we are committed to digital advocacy for SMEs and for local communities. Through stakeholder engagement initiatives such as .IE Digital Town, we work with and support SME organisations to improve their members' online presence and e-commerce capabilities so they can unlock the power of the internet to boost sales to local consumers.

We also produce fact-based research for the business community and policymakers, such as the .IE Domain Profile Report and the .IE Tipping Point, which charts the attitudes to digital of Irish SMEs and consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are over 330,000 .ie domain names registered. Since March 2018, it is easier and faster to register a .ie domain. As part of the domain registration process, every applicant must provide tangible evidence of a connection to Ireland.

www.weare.ie