

COMMENTARY : ABORTION

Ireland's Abortion Laws Continue to Harm Women



by [Mara Clarke](#), Abortion Support Network
June 13, 2014 - 5:34 pm

On June 12, the UK Department of Health published its report on [abortion statistics for 2013](#). The numbers show that the abortion rate fell slightly in 2013, to 15.9 per 1,000 women, the lowest rate in 16 years. A great analysis of the report was done by the [British Pregnancy Advisory Service](#) and can be [found here](#). (As an American ex-pat, I'd also like to take a moment to gloat over the fact that in England, Scotland, and Wales abortion is free on the National Health Service. No, that wasn't a typo. FREE.)

The statistics also cover a group of women for whom abortions are not free: women who travel from

Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to England to access a safe, legal abortion. Abortion, while legal under extremely restrictive circumstances in both parts of Ireland—like if you can prove that birthing a baby will actively kill you—is virtually impossible to obtain in these countries. This means that, when faced with an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy in Ireland, women with money have options, and women without money have babies—or, in some cases, do dangerous and desperate things.

The numbers show a reduction in the number of women from Ireland and Northern Ireland traveling to England to access a safe and legal abortion—4,481, down from 4,887—the lowest reported number since 1969. While some organizations and groups in Ireland and Northern Ireland will undoubtedly greet the news of a reduction in numbers with positive fanfare, these numbers only tell part of the story. They do not include the women who come to England and give the address of a local friend or family member, the women who travel to other countries to access abortions, or the hundreds, if not thousands, of women who obtain early medical abortion pills online from [Women on Web](#). These numbers also do not capture the women who cannot travel—women who need but can't get passports or visas to travel, women who can't escape from violent partners, women who don't have anyone who can watch their children while they travel, and women who do not have the £400 to £2,000 (\$675 to \$3,350) it costs to travel to England and pay privately for an abortion. If these women cannot access Women on Web, they are forced to choose between continuing the pregnancy anyway, or attempting to self-abort in much more dangerous ways.

While the Department of Health is reporting a year on year decline in the numbers of women traveling, another group is reporting an increase. [Abortion Support Network](#) (ASN) is a grassroots charity that provides financial assistance, practical information on how to



Abortion, while legal under extremely restrictive circumstances in both parts of Ireland—like if you can prove that birthing a baby will actively kill you—is virtually impossible to obtain in these countries. (*Ireland map via Shutterstock*)



Tell Twitter: No ban on advertising contraception

LEARN MORE AND SIGN

Twitter

Follow [@rhrealitycheck](#) 27.4K followers

RH Reality Check @rhrealitycheck 30m
Virginia moves forward with governor's directive to review #abortion clinic regulations
[rhrc.us/1obgQe6](#) #VApol #reprorights
Expand

RH Reality Check @rhrealitycheck 1h
New Hampshire governor signs buffer zone bill
[rhrc.us/1obea05](#) #nhpolitics #protectthezone
Expand

RH Reality Check @rhrealitycheck 3h
ICYMI: Vague Louisiana bill would force brain-dead pregnant women to serve as incubators
[rhrc.us/1n2yQSS](#) #lalege
Expand

Facebook

Like [Ali Ojanen-Goldsmith](#), [Lori Adelman](#) and 47,340 others like this.



Popular

Today This Week Discussions


[Loving Day, Juneteenth, and the Right to Family](#) by Cynthia R. Greenlee



[Woman Dies After Being Sent to Pennsylvania Jail Over Unpaid Children's Truancy Fines](#) by Tara Murtha



[Why the 'End Demand' Approach to Sex Work Doesn't Work](#) by Berlin

organize the least expensive abortion, and accommodation in volunteer homes for women traveling from Ireland to England. We have experienced a steep increase in calls from women in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In 2013, ASN was contacted by 446 women and couples seeking support in order to access a safe and legal abortion; this is up from 363 in 2012 and 253 in 2011. We have heard from more than 250 in the first six months of 2014. Every day, ASN receives calls, texts, and emails from women and couples in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In addition to deciding whether or not to terminate a pregnancy, these women must also find the money to pay for the procedure, which can range from £330 to £1,350 (\$550 to \$2,250) depending on the stage of pregnancy, plus a mandatory consultation fee, not to mention a bus to the airport, plane tickets, a passport, child care, and other costs. This cost is an especially heavy cross to bear for women in Northern Ireland. Though they are also taxpaying citizens of the United Kingdom, [they are denied abortion care](#) on the National Health Service.

The continued increase in women contacting ASN is further proof that [criminalizing abortion does not end abortion](#)—it simply makes it more difficult for poor women and families to access. (Do you hear that, [Texas](#) and [Louisiana](#) state legislators?) The sustained economic slump is making it even more of a struggle for women and families to keep their heads above water and Ireland's severe abortion restrictions make it even harder for this group.

These are some examples of the women and families who have contacted ASN:

"My partner and I found out that the baby we're expecting is incompatible with life, the baby has a rare abnormality and will not survive outside the womb and because of backward Irish law we don't know where to turn."

"I'm a mother of 3 and am in absolute shock that I am pregnant – I never wanted any more kids. My relationship is not stable enough to be having a new baby and financially I can't afford it. I was totally against abortion but it is the only thing that I want to do. I am trying to get the money together to go if there is any help at all it would be appreciated or even if you know the best clinics or the cheapest ones."

"Please help. I've tried everything to try to miscarry. I've been drinking excessively. I've tried throwing myself downstairs, and even tried to overdose. I can't have this child. I don't want it! I'm completely on my own. No one else knows and I'm at the end of my tether, I feel like I'm going to have a breakdown."

"I'm a student and I'm approximately 18 weeks pregnant. I can't financially and emotionally support a child so I'm planning on having an abortion. The problem is my partner and I have both been saving and scraping money together but we're still short. I was enquiring as to whether we could get any assistance, be it monetary or just providing us with somewhere to stay when we get there."

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Since opening in October 2009, ASN has heard from more than 1,400 women, couples, and families forced by Ireland's draconian abortion laws to call a complete stranger in another country to ask for money to help pay for their abortions. Some of these women, before finding out about ASN, have taken dangerous and desperate action to try and get money together or, worse, to self-abort. Women have sold the family car, chased packets of birth control pills with bottles of vodka, rationed food for their kids, skipped meals, borrowed money from unscrupulous money lenders, returned Christmas presents, and drunk bleach trying to procure an abortion. Because no matter what the "pro-life" lobby says, there is no world where all women who become pregnant carry those pregnancies to term and everyone lives happily ever after. Women who do not want to be pregnant will try literally anything not to be pregnant.

Other than ending patriarchy and changing the beliefs of people who can't seem to grasp that choosing not to have a child at a particular point in your life, or ever, is in itself a valid, moral decision that is, to put it bluntly, not their business, there are interim solutions. Ireland's [Abortion Rights Campaign](#) and Northern Ireland's [Alliance for Choice](#) are fighting tooth and nail for law reform, while groups like [Speaking of I.M.E.L.D.A](#) (Ireland Making England the Legal Destination for Abortion) and [Dublin Nights for Choice](#) take less traditional



[Eugenicists Never Retreat, They Just Regroup: Sterilization and Reproductive Oppression in Prisons](#)
by Loretta Ross



[Here Are All the 'Privileges' I've Experienced as a Survivor of Sexual Assault](#) by Lynn Beisner



[Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals Says Catholic Groups Must Comply With Contraception Benefit](#) by Jessica Mason Pieklo



[Ireland's Abortion Laws Continue to Harm Women](#) by Mara Clarke



[Don't Tell Me It's 'Not All Men'](#) by Sarah Jaffe



[Want to End Violence Against Women? Don't Read the Washington Post](#) by Andrea Grimes



[Five Ways Men Can Embrace a Culture of Consent](#) by Marcus Lee

RH Wire

[What Happens If You Have No Welfare and No Job? - The Atlantic](#)

[Sustainability -- And Marketing To Women -- Comes to Condoms - Forbes](#)

[Taking action against sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ... - The Guardian](#)

[6 Questions About Contraception Coverage And The Supreme Court - WJCT NEWS](#)

[Does Feminism Have a Class Problem? - Truth-Out](#)

[HIV in Africa: Young rural women not at greater risk from older partners - HSPH News](#)

approaches to raising public awareness and helping women access abortions.

The UK Department of Health numbers are not the full truth, but the people and groups working directly with women and families in Ireland know that when it comes to abortion, the statistics seldom tell the real story.

Like this story? Your \$10 tax-deductible contribution helps support our research, reporting, and analysis.

Follow Mara Clarke on twitter: @maraclarke

Tagged: Abortion, Abortion Criminalization, Abortion in Ireland, Abortion restrictions, Access to abortion, Commentary, Illegal abortion, International Abortion Access, Ireland, Medical abortion, Safe Abortion Care, Surgical abortion



House Appropriations Committee Passes Abortion Restriction for Detained Women



Virginia Moves Forward With Governor's Directive to Review Abortion Clinic Regulations



Dallas Abortion Providers Settle Out of Court, Retain Admitting Privileges

17 Comments

RH Reality Check

Login

Sort by Best

Share Favorite

Join the discussion...



Idwendy • a day ago

"Because no matter what the "pro-life" lobby says, there is no world where all women who become pregnant carry those pregnancies to term and everyone lives happily ever after."

But but but ...women who become pregnant should carry those pregnancies because adoption! And make adoption plans! - sez the forced-birth advocates who have never seen an adoption they didn't like.

/sarcasm off

Mara, thanks for showing us what will happen if abortion becomes illegal again in the United States. The details about women attempting to self-induce a miscarriage are so sad.

16 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



purrtriarchy → Idwendy • a day ago

They don't care if women die from botched abortions should abortion become illegal.

The view them as criminals who deserve what's coming to them should they die from self induced abortions. They also think a few dead women is an acceptable price to pay for millions of fetal lives saved.

http://blog.secularprolife.org...

The thing is, they claim to care deeply about women's lives.. Yet treat them as criminals

13 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Ella Warnock → purrtriarchy • a day ago

Criminals . . . and livestock.

40 ^ | v • Reply • Share >

12 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**cjvg** → Ella Warnock • 20 hours ago

And you know what they do with life stock, they use them for their benefit

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Ella Warnock** → cjvg • 16 hours ago

Yep, exploitation at its finest.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Guest → purrtriarchy • 16 hours ago

Odd that a primarily Catholic country so overwhelmingly supports Martin Luther's position: "If [women] become tired or even die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth - that is why they are there."

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**colleen2** → Guest • 2 hours ago

Martin Luther was a Catholic Priest so it seems perfectly natural that he would regard women as breeding livestock and wish for our deaths in childbirth.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**cjvg** • 2 days ago

This is just so incredibly sad.

An unwanted child will be the first one to tell you that these women should not be forced to have children they do not want, nothing good comes from that.

Even if you make it, grow up and have a wonderful live ever there after, nothing, absolutely nothing will heal the great gapping holes in the soul of children who grew up that way.

Some will attempt to justify their own existence by forcing others to be born (human misery truly does love company) some will go the other way. Some will volunteer and try their utmost to help others like them, Some will just drink, do drugs, seek out thrills or seek out any other means to fill the holes. But those holes can not be filled

14 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**catseye** → cjvg • 2 days ago

Mommie Dearest hated my guts from the moment she knew I was going to survive to term, and she made my life growing up a living hell.

10 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**cjvg** → catseye • 2 days ago

I'm so sorry

I know that word can never convey the depth of my sincerely held grieve for you, but it is all I have.

10 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**catseye** → cjvg • a day ago

It's enough, and I'm grateful. Blessings.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**cjvg** → catseye • a day ago

Thank you, many blessings to you too

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**purrtriarchy** • 2 days ago

Heartbreaking.

8 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**RNRDOCTOR** • a day ago

Why are there so many religious nutters in Ireland? All the Irish people I know are intelligent and forward-thinking, is that maybe why they left?

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**ldwendy** • 4 hours ago

It's interesting that shortly after Mara's article was posted, [Lifeneews.com](http://lifeneews.com) issued a report

saying that the number of Irish women traveling to England for abortions have decreased.

<http://www.lifenews.com/2014/0...>

Is the HSE/Crisis Pregnancy Programme a valid data source?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



colleen2 → Idwendy • an hour ago

Perhaps Irish women have better sources for effective contraception and mifepristone.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



lady_black → Idwendy • 4 hours ago

It doesn't include women who obtained medication from Women On The Web and self-aborted.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

ALSO ON RH REALITY CHECK

WHAT'S THIS?

Here Are All the 'Privileges' I've Experienced as a Survivor of Sexual ...

214 comments • 5 days ago

L-dan — Really? Putting sexual assault in scare quotes two paragraphs in, while equating sexual assault and rape isn't ...

Eugenicists Never Retreat, They Just Regroup: Sterilization and ...

6 comments • 3 days ago

cjvg — Sigh, we is it never the men who are faced with these things, not that I agree with forced vasectomies either, ...

Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals Says Catholic Groups Must Comply With ...

6 comments • 3 days ago

Shan — Grief, how complicated does it have to be? We should have national health insurance so that everybody ...

Supreme Court Asked to Review NYC Law Regulating Crisis Pregnancy ...

5 comments • 6 days ago

David Young — thats just a SMALL portion of what has them worriedThey want the Supremes to say that Christians have a ...

[Subscribe](#)

[Add Disqus to your site](#)

Topics

- [Abortion](#)
- [Contraception](#)
- [Faith and Ideology](#)
- [Family](#)
- [Health Systems](#)
- [Law and Policy](#)
- [Maternity and Birthing](#)

- [Media](#)
- [Politics](#)
- [Race and Class](#)
- [Sexual Health](#)
- [Sexuality](#)
- [Violence](#)

Social Media

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Tumblr](#)
- [You Tube](#)
- [Reddit](#)
- [Digg](#)

More

- [Login](#)
- [RHRC Data](#)
- [Donate](#)
- [About RH Reality Check](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Daily and Weekly Emails](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [Jobs](#)