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**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW  
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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRELAND  
FOR THE 53<sup>RD</sup> SESSION OF THE  
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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## Status of Human Rights in Ireland for the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Universal Periodic Review

### Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in Ireland for the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

### Background

2. Ireland is a country located in Europe and has a population of approximately 5.3 million people.<sup>1</sup> The population is predominantly Christian, with approximately 92.2% of the population identifying as Christian, 6% as Agnostic, and 1.2% as Muslim.<sup>2</sup>

3. Ireland's last review was held on November 10, 2021.<sup>3</sup> As a result of the review, Ireland received 260 recommendations, 221 of which it accepted.<sup>4</sup> It was recommended by Switzerland, and noted by Ireland, that the government “[e]stablish an action plan to ensure the access and availability of safe abortion services”<sup>5</sup> While there were no recommendations made regarding euthanasia in Ireland,<sup>6</sup> the Irish Parliament recommended that the government permit euthanasia for individuals with incurable diseases who have less than six months to live.<sup>7</sup> In our last report on Ireland, we expressed concern over the legalization of abortion.

### Legal Framework

#### *Abortion*

4. In 2018, a referendum was held that resulted in the repeal of language in the Constitution of Ireland<sup>8</sup> that “acknowledge[d] the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ireland, BRITANNICA (Oct. 22, 2025), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ireland>.

<sup>2</sup> Ireland: Major World Religions (1900-2050)(World Religion Database, 2025), THE ASSOCIATION OF RELIGION DATA ARCHIVES, <https://www.thearda.com/world-religion/national-profiles?u=112c>.

<sup>3</sup> Universal Periodic Review – Ireland, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ie-index>.

<sup>4</sup> Infographic – Ireland, OHCHR, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Infographic\\_Ireland.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Infographic_Ireland.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> OHCHR, UPR of Ireland (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle – 39<sup>th</sup> Session) Thematic List of Recommendations, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/UPR39\\_Ireland\\_Thematic\\_List\\_of\\_Recommendations.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/UPR39_Ireland_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations.docx).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Marci Eccles, Ireland Moves to Allow Assisted Dying, POLITICO (Mar. 20, 2024), <https://www.politico.eu/article/ireland-moves-allow-assisted-dying-social-reform-catholic-liberalization/>.

<sup>8</sup> Outcome of Irish Referendum on Abortion is a Momentous Result of Reproductive Rights, CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS (May 26, 2018), <https://reproductiverights.org/news/outcome-of-irish-referendum-on-abortion-is-a-momentous-result-for-reproductive-rights/>.

<sup>9</sup> Eighth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1983, available at <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1983/ca/8/enacted/en/print#sec1>.

of Article 40 of Ireland’s Constitution and paved the way for abortion to be legalized.<sup>10</sup> Article 8 stated:

5. That same year, Ireland passed the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, which expanded access to abortion.<sup>11</sup> Under Article 12 of this Act:

(1) A termination of pregnancy may be carried out in accordance with this section by a medical practitioner where, having examined the pregnant woman, he or she is of the reasonable opinion formed in good faith that the pregnancy concerned has not exceeded 12 weeks of pregnancy.

(2) A termination of pregnancy shall not be carried out under this section unless the medical practitioner referred to in *subsection (1)* has certified his or her opinion as to the matter referred to in that subsection.<sup>12</sup>

6. Ireland is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),<sup>13</sup> Under Article 6 of the ICCPR, “[e]very human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.”<sup>14</sup>

7. Ireland also has a responsibility to protect the lives of preborn babies under other international agreements such as the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development.

#### *Assisted Suicide*

8. Under Article 2 Sec. 2 of the Criminal Law (Suicide) Act, 1993, “[a] person who aids, abets, counsels or procures the suicide of another, or an attempt by another to commit suicide, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Outcome of Irish Referendum on Abortion is a Momentous Result for Reproductive Rights*, CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS (May 26, 2018), <https://reproductiverights.org/news/outcome-of-irish-referendum-on-abortion-is-a-momentous-result-for-reproductive-rights/>.

<sup>11</sup> HEALTH (REGULATION OF TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY ACT) 2018, <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/act/31/enacted/en/pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* art. 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ratification Status for Ireland*, OHCHR, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=83&Lang=EN](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=83&Lang=EN).

<sup>14</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 6, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> [hereinafter ICCPR].

<sup>15</sup> CRIMINAL LAW (SUICIDE) ACT, 1993 art. 2 § 2, <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1993/act/11/section/2/enacted/en/html>.

9. Ireland is a party to the ICCPR and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).<sup>16</sup> It also has a responsibility to uphold the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 6 of the ICCPR states that “[e]very human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.”<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the CRPD requires States Parties to recognize “the need to promote and protect the human rights of all persons with disabilities, including those who require more intensive support.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, under Article 10 of the CRPD, “States Parties reaffirm that every human being has the inherent right to life and shall take all necessary measures to ensure its effective enjoyment by persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.”<sup>19</sup>

## Abortion

10. In our last report on Ireland, we shared that legalizing abortion would only result in the deaths of thousands of preborn babies and harm women. Unfortunately, both these things have come true. We noted that in 2019, the first full year that abortion was legalized, approximately 6,666 abortions were carried out.<sup>20</sup> That number has only continued to rise. In 2024, there were 10,582 abortions carried out, a 62.8% increase from 2019.<sup>21</sup>

11. Proponents of abortion claim that abortion is healthcare. However, when looking at the statistics, it is clear that abortion is not being used for healthcare. In Ireland, the vast majority of abortions are not being performed to protect the health of the mother.<sup>22</sup> In 2024, 98.7% of the abortions that were carried out were not medically necessary.<sup>23</sup> This means that thousands of preborn babies were killed simply because they were not wanted.

12. Additionally, legalizing abortion has caused harm to women. A four year study following the legalization of abortion in Ireland found that 58% of the women examined had “moderate harm,” with most women experience heavy or irregular bleeding.<sup>24</sup> The Assistant National Director for the Health Service Executive’s National Quality and Patient Safety Directorate noted that there is a risk to abortion of “[i]nfection, heavy bleeding, damage to the womb or retained pregnancy tissue.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ratification Status for Ireland*, *supra* note 13.

<sup>17</sup> ICCPR art. 6, *supra* note 14.

<sup>18</sup> Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities pmbl., *adopted* Dec. 12, 2006, 2515 U.N.T.S. 3, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* art. 10.

<sup>20</sup> *Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 – Annual Report on Notifications 2019*, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (30 Jun. 2020), *available at* <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b410b-health-regulation-of-termination-of-pregnancy-act-2018-annual-report-on-notifications-2019/>.

<sup>21</sup> Simon Caldwell, *Ireland’s Abortion Rates Record High; Catholic Advocates Call it a Tragedy*, AMERICA MAGAZINE (July 2024), <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2025/07/24/ireland-abortion-rates-rise-5-years-251181/>.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *State-Sponsored Abortion in Ireland Putting Women’s Health at Risk*, THE CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE (June 25, 2025), <https://www.christian.org.uk/news/state-sponsored-abortion-in-ireland-putting-womens-health-at-risk/#:~:text=Risks,were%20performed%20before%20twelve%20weeks>.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

13. The factors discussed above are the reasons many doctors in Ireland are wary of performing abortions.<sup>26</sup> Dr. Ronan Cleary, the chairman for Doctors for Life, stated that “[t]he vast majority of GPs in Ireland are not performing abortions” and that abortion “is not healthcare. It’s the opposite.”<sup>27</sup> He is right, abortion is not healthcare. Nothing that deliberately takes the life of a preborn baby can be considered healthcare. Abortion strips the right to life that is enshrined in the UDHR, UN Charter, and the ICCPR away from the preborn baby, and fosters insensitivity to, and disdain of, life in the womb.

### *Assisted Dying*

14. While the practice of euthanasia is currently illegal in Ireland, efforts have been made to change that.<sup>28</sup> In October 2024, seventy-six Irish MPs voted in favor of a report that called for the government to legalize assisted suicide. For assisted suicide to be legalized, it would still need to be passed by the Irish parliament and then signed by the President.

15. Legalizing assisted suicide will have disastrous impacts and results in the lives of thousands of individuals. This can be seen simply by looking at other countries that have legalized assisted suicide. For example, in Belgium in 2024, euthanasia accounted for 3.6% of all deaths that year, equaling 3,991 people.<sup>29</sup> In Canada, the picture is even more grim. In Canada, euthanasia accounted for 4.7% of all deaths in 2024.<sup>30</sup> To put this in simpler terms, assisted suicide now accounts for almost one out of every twenty deaths in Canada.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, since assisted suicide was legalized in Canada in 2016, approximately 76,475 people have been killed by assisted suicide.<sup>32</sup>

16. Irish doctors recognize the dangers of legalizing assisted suicide, and on March 20, 2024, the Royal College of Physicians issued a statement stating that it would oppose “the introduction of any legislation supportive of assisted suicide because it is contrary to best medical practice.”<sup>33</sup> Diarmuid O’Shea, the president of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, further shared that assisted suicide is not health care, stating:

Dying and death are part of a continuum of care for any person with a chronic or life-limiting illness. Dying with dignity in our society is made possible by the

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<sup>26</sup> Colin Gleeson, *Doctors Should Speak with “One Voice” On Right to Opt Out of Abortion, Doctors Conference Hears*, The Irish Times (Jan. 14, 2024), <https://www.irishtimes.com/health/2023/01/14/doctors-should-speak-with-one-voice-on-right-to-opt-out-of-abortion-doctor-conference-hears/>.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> Hayley Halpin, *Dáil Passes Vote on Assisted Dying Report*, BBC (Oct. 24, 2024), <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8rlx84pee2o>.

<sup>29</sup> *Euthanasia Surged by 17% in Belgium in 2024 and Killed One Child*, SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF UNBORN CHILDREN (Mar. 21, 2025), [https://spuc.org.uk/euthanasia-surged-by-17-in-belgium-in-2024-and-killed-one-child/#:~:text=Almost%204%2C000%20people%20were%20killed,\(e.g.%20personality%20disorders\)](https://spuc.org.uk/euthanasia-surged-by-17-in-belgium-in-2024-and-killed-one-child/#:~:text=Almost%204%2C000%20people%20were%20killed,(e.g.%20personality%20disorders))”.

<sup>30</sup> Nadine Yousif, *Assisted Dying Now Accounts for One in 20 Canada Deaths*, BBC (Dec. 12, 2024), <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0j1z14p57po>.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *Sixth Annual Report on Medical Assisted Dying in Canada*, GOVERNMENT OF CANADA (Nov. 2025), <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/health-system-services/annual-report-medical-assistance-dying-2024.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Kelly, *Irish Doctors Oppose Euthanasia, Urge More Support for Compassionate Care*, DETROIT CATHOLIC (Mar. 25, 2024), <https://www.detroitcatholic.com/news/irish-doctors-oppose-euthanasia-urge-more-support-for-compassionate-care>.

delivery of compassionate, supportive, and expert care by physicians, nurses, health and social care professionals, and others working in hospitals, hospices, GP practices, and other community settings across our country.<sup>34</sup>

17. This opinion was also shared by a group of UN human rights experts who are concerned that the legalization of assisted suicide will pressure those individuals who are near the end of their lives or dealing with a terminal illness to prematurely end their lives.<sup>35</sup>

18. Assisted suicide is also in contravention of numerous international agreements like the ICCPR, UDHR, and the CRPD. Again, the ICCPR states that “[e]very human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.”<sup>36</sup> Further, general comment no. 36 on Article 6 of the ICCPR states:

The right to life has crucial importance both for individuals and for society as a whole. It is most precious for its own sake as a right that inheres in every human being, but it also constitutes a fundamental right, the effective protection of which is the prerequisite for the enjoyment of all other human rights and the content of which can be informed by other human rights.<sup>37</sup>

19. Ireland has an obligation to protect the lives of its citizens and not allow its citizens to be intentionally killed. It is troubling that Ireland has recommended the legalization of assisted suicide, despite the opposition of doctors.

## Recommendations

20. Just as we did in our last report, we urge Ireland to reform its laws to protect the sanctity and dignity of all human life, in line with numerous international agreements. Further, we ask that Ireland reinstate its constitutional guarantee for the right to life, including for preborn babies.

21. We also urge Ireland to protect the dignity of human life and reject all efforts to legalize assisted dying. Assisted dying is in contravention of the right to life, which has been enshrined in numerous international agreements. Ireland must live up to its obligations to protect all human life, not just healthy human life.

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<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Disability is not a Reason to Sanction Medically Assisted Dying – UN Experts*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/01/disability-not-reason-sanction-medically-assisted-dying-un-experts>.

<sup>36</sup> ICCPR art. 6, *supra* note 14.

<sup>37</sup> *General Comment No. 36*, CCPR/C/GC/36, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3884724?v=pdf>.