

Table of Contents

- ***Ireland to lay bare scandal of baby deaths at Church-run homes***
- ***'The lowest of the low' – Hundreds of thousands of intimate images of Irish women released online without consent***
- ***Ireland must prioritise female healthcare, urges women's council***
- ***Government ratifies Istanbul Convention obliging it to tackle violence against women***
- ***Pope Francis greeted by protests in Ireland, following child sex scandals, abortion rights fight***
- ***Irish parliament could decide on abortion referendum by end-2017***
- ***Women must play bigger role in church, Synod hears***

Ireland to lay bare scandal of baby deaths at Church-run homes

Relatives have alleged the babies at mother and baby homes were mistreated because they were born to unmarried women.

Al Jazeera (12.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3i783Zy> - One of the Catholic Church's darkest chapters will be revisited on Tuesday when an Irish inquiry into death rates among newborns at church-run homes for unwed mothers hands down its final report.

Relatives have alleged the babies at the mother and baby homes were mistreated because they were born to unmarried women who, like their children, were seen as a stain on Ireland's image as a devout Catholic nation.

The 3,000-page report is due to be published by mid-afternoon following the five-year investigation by the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation.

It is expected to reveal that 9,000 children – one in seven – died in the 18 institutions investigated between 1922 and 1998, when the last one closed, according to a leaked version of the report obtained by the Sunday Independent, an Irish newspaper.

The institutions, which doubled as orphanages and adoption agencies, were established across Ireland throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

While run by nuns, they received state funding and were also regulated by the state.

Deputy Prime Minister Leo Varadkar on Monday said the report into their history made for difficult reading.

"One of the things that hit me was the extent to which this was an enormous societal failure and an enormous societal shame that we have a stolen generation of children who did not get the upbringing they should have," he told national broadcaster RTE.

Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin is expected to issue a formal state apology to the victims in the country's parliament on Wednesday.

Tuam 'chamber of horrors' prompts investigation

Tens of thousands of women, including rape victims, were sent to the homes to give birth.

Government records show that the mortality rate for children at the homes was often more than five times that of those born to married parents.

The commission into the institutions was formed in 2014 after evidence of an unmarked mass graveyard at an institution in Tuam, in the western county of Galway, was uncovered by amateur local historian Catherine Corless.

Corless found death certificates confirming that nearly 800 children had died at the site, but there were no burial records.

She said she had been haunted by childhood memories of skinny children from the home.

Excavations in 2017 revealed "significant quantities of human remains" in 20 underground chambers in a decommissioned sewage tank on the site's grounds, the commission said in an interim report.

Then-Prime Minister Enda Kenny described the burial site at Tuam as a "chamber of horrors".

The grim revelations have further tarnished the Catholic Church's reputation in Ireland, which has been shattered in recent years by a series of tragedies that includes abuse at workhouses, forced adoptions of babies born out of wedlock and priests who have sexually assaulted children.

During the first papal visit to the country in almost four decades in 2018, Pope Francis begged for forgiveness for the scandals.

'The lowest of the low' – Hundreds of thousands of intimate images of Irish women released online without consent

Government facing pressure to criminalise the non-consensual sharing of intimate images.

By Ellen Coyne

Independent (19.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3qoXMeX> - The Government is under pressure to urgently ban image-based abuse after it emerged that hundreds of thousands of intimate images of Irish women were released online without their consent.

A victims support group has said that 140,000 intimate and sexual pictures, including many of Irish women, have been leaked and shared on the internet.

It is understood that some images were leaked from private social media accounts without consent, while others appear to have been taken without the woman's knowledge. Some of the files also include images of underage girls, which is an offence.

The non-consensual sharing of intimate images is not a criminal offence in Ireland.

Those sharing the images have been “trading” pictures of women, and boasting about having access to pictures of women on a county-by-county basis. The files were first uncovered by the Victim’s Alliance, a lobby group representing victims of crime.

Linda Hayden, the group’s founder, said it first uncovered a server with a file containing 11,000 images that were “mostly of Irish women”.

After searching through more websites and servers, the group said it is now aware of at least 140,000 stolen images of women. In some cases, there are multiple pictures of the same women or duplicates of the same image.

The Irish Independent understands that one server which was hosting the files this week has now been taken down. Ms Hayden said that the Victim’s Alliance has been going through the images, and trying to identify and find the victims involved.

“We are not equipped for this,” Ms Hayden said. “We believe that Irish women were targeted because the perpetrators know there is no law against sharing intimate images without consent. There seems to be a blind spot.”

Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald told the Dáil that the “megafiles” of images had been uncovered by the Victim’s Alliance.

“This is a profound violation of women and girls’ rights and demonstrates again the inadequacy of Irish law in protecting them against such abuse,” Ms McDonald said.

She said that 18 months had passed since the former justice minister got Cabinet approval to amend a Labour Party bill that would criminalise the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Ms McDonald said the “glacial pace” of the law had to be improved by the Government.

Some of the images were taken from women’s private social media accounts. In some cases, images were widely shared without consent from websites like OnlyFans.

Labour TD Duncan Smith criticised the men who thought that sharing such images was “acceptable, laddish behaviour”.

“Nothing could be further from the truth, this has to be refuted by every man in Ireland. It is the action of a degenerate, it is scummy, it is the lowest of the low.”

Helen McEntee, the justice minister, told the Irish Independent abuse in any form “is utterly unacceptable and has no place in Irish society”.

The Women’s Aid helpline is 1800 341 900.

Ireland must prioritise female healthcare, urges women’s council

Group seeks free contraception, universal pension system and support for lone parents.

By Shauna Bowers

The Irish Times (20.01.2020) - <https://bit.ly/369TcWN> - Ireland has had a "litany of historic health scandals" affecting women and female healthcare must now be prioritised, the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) has said.

In its "feminist Ireland manifesto", published on Tuesday, the NWCI called on general election candidates to show their commitment to gender equality by signing up to 10 key issues, relating to women's health, domestic violence and accommodation.

Among the feminist lobby group's demands were calls for free universal contraception, support for lone parents, establishment of domestic homicide reviews and the introduction of a universal pension system.

Orla O'Connor, director of NWCI, said the election has the potential to "set the political agenda for the next five years" and will be "crucial" in deciding the future direction of the country.

"We have seen from recent controversies such as CervicalCheck that women's health must be given consistent focus and dedicated resources," Ms O'Connor said. "We have to put a sustained focus on women's health, on the gaps that exist in services and in driving the change that women have been so active in calling for publicly.

Delivery of SláinteCare

"We're calling on candidates to commit to the delivery of SláinteCare, to develop women-centred mental health services, to introduce universal, free contraception and to ensure access to the full range of abortion services across the country."

The NWCI also raised the issue of domestic violence and called for an increase in the number of domestic abuse refuge spaces available across the State.

"One in four women in Ireland experience physical and sexual violence," Ms O'Connor added. "After Ireland finally ratified the Istanbul Convention on violence against women in 2019, we need candidates who will prioritise its full implementation, including strengthening legislation and investing in frontline services, and ensuring Ireland has enough refuge places."

Ms O'Connor said Ireland has "the highest childcare costs in Europe, one of the highest rates of women's homelessness in Europe, and only one third our recommended refuge spaces for women fleeing violence", adding that it is "critical" that the incoming government tackle gender equality.

The 10 issues in NWCI's feminist Ireland manifesto

- End the housing and homelessness crisis
- Prioritise women's health
- Deliver a public childcare service
- Change Ireland's record on violence against women
- Ensure safe, legal and local access to abortion
- Eliminate poverty
- End the gender pay gap and deliver decent work for women
- Advance women's leadership
- Lead a green new deal
- Guarantee access to justice

Government ratifies Istanbul Convention obliging it to tackle violence against women

By Kitty Holland

The Irish Times (08.03.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2UCLDTA> - After many years of campaigning by women's groups, the Government on Friday ratified the Istanbul Convention - a key international instrument to tackle violence against women.

Though Government signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, in November 2015, it has taken over three years to put the legislative framework in place to enable ratification.

The convention, which includes 72 actions, obliges signatory states to:

"protect women against all forms of violence, and prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence;

"contribute to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and promote substantive equality between women and men, including by empowering women;

"design a comprehensive framework, policies and measures for the protection of and assistance to all victims of violence against women and domestic violence;

"promote international co-operation with a view to eliminating violence against women and domestic violence" and;

"provide support and assistance to organisations and law enforcement agencies to effectively co-operate in order to adopt an integrated approach to eliminating violence against women and domestic violence".

Dunja Mijatovic, the council's commissioner for human rights, noted ratification on Twitter, saying: "I welcome #Ireland's ratification of the #IstanbulConvention on the International #WomensDay - 34th @coe state to ratify. And I urge all member states to ratify and fully implement this landmark instrument to #EndViolenceAgainstWomen".

Women's Aid, which supports women and girls experiencing abuse in Ireland, said the Government must now "step up" fully to the commitments made in ratifying the convention.

Director Margaret Martin said "the ratification of the Istanbul Convention is a major milestone in tackling domestic, sexual and gender based violence. At the heart of any progress there must be the increased safety and protection for women and children affected by domestic violence.

"Only effective implementation, including resourcing, will make a very real difference. It is worth remembering that one in five women experience some form of domestic abuse in Ireland and our 24-hour national helpline responds to 50 calls a day."

She said there was "no reason not to prosecute and properly sanction offenders.

"An Garda Síochána will have to respond to calls for help, collect evidence and assess the risk of further violence to adequately protect victims. Judicial proceedings will have to be

carried out in a manner that respects the rights of victims at all stages of the proceedings and that avoid secondary victimisation.

“And the State will have to account for progressing this implementation of the convention through a monitoring system that sees a key role for NGOs in providing information on change. Making the change real for women and children and increasing their safety should be the most important priority.”

Women’s Aid can be contacted on freephone 1800 341 900.

Pope Francis greeted by protests in Ireland, following child sex scandals, abortion rights fight

The pontiff finds an Ireland marked by social change, less deference to Catholic Church

By Casey Quinlan

Think Progress (26.08.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2okkhD0> - Pope Francis is in Ireland this weekend for the first papal visit since Pope John Paul II’s in 1979. As the Pontiff might quickly have gleaned from the protests joined by thousands of demonstrators, things have changed since then with Ireland’s Catholic faithful.

For one thing, there is less far deference to officials in the Church hierarchy, after a determined fight by women in Ireland for reproductive rights. And the Catholic Church in Ireland and abroad has been rocked by multiple sexual abuse scandals, including a recent report involving over 1,000 victims in Pennsylvania.

According to the Independent, some people have refused to attend events presided over by Pope Francis in silent protest and “disavowal” of the church’s “stranglehold” on culture and government in Ireland.

Other protesters gathered at Dublin Castle after Pope Francis’ arrival on Saturday to demonstrate against child sex abuse in the Catholic Church. Margaret McGuckin, herself a survivor of sexual violence, said she wanted the church to know survivors were still making their voices heard.

“The Pope now needs to stand up to the plate and do something for the survivors. We need redress, we need the church held to account,” McGuckin told the Independent.

The share of young people who identify as Catholics is now much lower than in previous generations. In 2015, Ireland voted to legalize same-sex marriage. Its Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, who is gay, welcomed Pope Francis to the country on Saturday.

Earlier this year, Ireland voted overwhelmingly to repeal its near-total ban on abortion, with two in three Irish voters approving to legalize it. A 1990s case of a girl who had been raped and sought an abortion outside of the country, and who was only allowed access to the procedure after she became suicidal, started a national discussion about abortion. In 2012, a woman died of a cardiac arrest after doctors refused to perform an abortion, even though physicians knew she expected a miscarriage — a horrifying incident which gained national attention.

Meanwhile, just this month, a Pennsylvania grand jury report detailed abuse that spanned several decades and accused more than 300 priests of sexually abusing children across six Roman Catholic dioceses.

There were reportedly more than 1,000 victims, and those are just the victims who were willing to come forward. Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston, the head of Pope Francis' Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, canceled his visit to Dublin so that he could look into investigations into alleged sexual misconduct in Boston that were separate from the grand jury report.

Questions swirl around what Pope Francis himself knows about sexual abuse within the church. A letter from Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò alleges that he told Pope Francis about sexual abuse allegations against former D.C. archbishop Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and that the Pope did nothing.

"In this extremely dramatic moment for the universal Church, he must acknowledge his mistakes and, in keeping with the proclaimed principle of zero tolerance, Pope Francis must be the first to set a good example to Cardinals and Bishops who covered up McCarrick's abuses and resign along with all of them," Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò wrote.

In a huge demonstration on Sunday, people protested the Pope's visit at the Garden of Remembrance in Dublin.

Other protests involved people tying baby shoes with black mourning ribbon to the railings of former Magdalene laundries, according to Dublin Live. These church-run institutions were for "fallen women" and they experienced abuse and ill treatment in these laundries. In the 1990s, a mass grave was discovered on the grounds of one of the laundries.

Another group called We Are Church also held a protest on Dublin's Ha'penny Bridge — tying blue ribbons and rainbow flags to the bridge — and said the church must accept female priests, welcome LGBTQ members, and truly confront its sexual abuse problem.

Pope Francis acknowledged abuse allegations and said to lawmakers and diplomats in Dublin on Saturday, "I cannot fail to acknowledge the grave scandal caused in Ireland by the abuse of young people by members of the church charged with responsibility for their protection and education."

But survivors of sexual abuse and other critics of the church's handling of sexual abuse have said his remarks were not enough and that he didn't provide any indication of what steps the church would take on the issue. According to the Washington Post, Mark Vincent Healy, an Irish victim of church sexual abuse, the pope's speech was "empty."

"I was with a group of survivors, and they were all upset with the statements as being ineffectual," Healy told the Post.

Irish parliament could decide on abortion referendum by end-2017

Reuters (25.10.2016) - <http://reut.rs/2eFtksd> - Ireland's parliament could be in a position to decide on whether to hold a referendum to repeal restrictive abortion laws by the end of next year if a citizens' assembly recommends a vote should be held to widen access.

Regulations in the once stridently Catholic Ireland are among the strictest in the world and Prime Minister Enda Kenny this month called together 99 members of the public to advise government on the politically-divisive issue.

The assembly has been asked to deliver its report in the first half of 2017 and the government said on Tuesday that a parliamentary committee due to be set up to respond would be convened immediately and have six months to do so.

If a referendum is recommended, a vote would then be needed in parliament to set one up, potentially paving the way for a plebiscite in 2018.

Activists who marched in their thousands last month to seek the abolition of the eighth amendment of the constitution, which enshrines an equal right to life of the mother and her unborn child, have pressured the government not to delay a decision.

Abortion has long been a controversial topic in Ireland where a complete ban was only lifted in 2013 when terminations were allowed if a mother's life is in danger. Anti-abortion supporters demand no further changes to safeguard all life.

The timetable set out by the government on Tuesday was in response to opposition attempts to provide for a referendum immediately that threatened a split among the minority coalition government.

Women must play bigger role in church, Synod hears

Limerick Diocesan Synod hears call for lay-led liturgies without priests on weekdays

The Ireland Times (10.04.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1qHwwIP> - Women need to play a much more important role in the church, the first Synod in Ireland in 50 years has been told.

Some 400 delegates spent three days at the Limerick Diocesan Synod where they voted on 100 proposals to help map out the future of the church and how it serves the local community in a time of falling vocations.

A motion to establish a working group to explore and scope out how and where women can play a leadership role in the governance of the church received the highest number of priority votes at the Synod.

A proposal to develop and support lay-led liturgies and the celebration of sacraments was supported by more than 90 per cent of delegates.

Lay-led liturgies

Speaking at the Synod Fr Eugene Duffy, a lecturer in theology and religious studies at Mary Immaculate College, recommended that occasional lay-led liturgies without priests should be introduced on weekdays as a way of preparing for the reality of priests not being available to every parish in the years ahead.

"If we can get used to having lay-led liturgy on week days first then people will begin to appreciate it, understand it, grow in their own acceptance of it and see the value of it," he said.

"In the absence of a priest that's what they will have to do on a Sunday. We have to start by doing it on a week day and then people become familiar with it. The foundational thing that people have to do is to gather on a Sunday to worship, however we do it.

Fr Duffy also said that the Catholic Church can learn from the Church of Ireland in this regard.

"The Church of Ireland has readers who look after the liturgy on a Sunday if an ordained minister cannot be present. We are going to have to get used to this situation and have no option to prepare for it. Otherwise there is going to be a trauma some Sunday.

The role of women in the church was also discussed as part of the universal themes which could not be voted on but were discussed on the final day of the Synod.

Vincent Hanley, a delegate from Knockaderry/Clouncagh, Co Limerick, said the issue of women priests was a popular theme during the three-year listening process which took place before the Synod.

"Up to now we have been very pragmatic in our discussions but there are elephants in the room and especially the situation around women priests. This issue came up again and again in our listening process, in the questionnaires and our assemblies," said Mr Hanley.

Marian Wallace, a delegate from Ardpatrick, Co Limerick, said women, in particular mothers, were tired of "religious apartheid".

"Mothers are the backbone of the church, we teach our children we bring them to church but we are tired of inequality we are tired of religious apartheid," she said.