



Universal Periodic Review
REVIEWING HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRELAND
Your Rights. Right Now.

Fact Sheet No. 1

Historical Abuse of Women and Children in Medical/ Institutional Care

The controversial surgeries of symphysiotomy and pubiotomy, involving sundering the pelvis to enable vaginal birth in obstructed labour, were undertaken in Catholic hospitals between the 1940s -1980s, and principally carried with them a range of harmful consequences.

In 2014, Ireland published a review of Symphysiotomy. However, no independent inquiries have been held despite calls from UN Committees. A Government Redress Scheme provides for limited compensation, and requires extensive evidence to be provided to support claims of ill health and complications that arose as a direct consequence of the procedure. The Scheme also requires women to waive all rights and entitlements and indemnify scheduled parties potentially liable before compensation will be awarded.

Recommendations

Implement full and independent inquiries into the practice of symphysiotomy and into the treatment of women in Magdalene Laundries leading, where wrongdoing is identified, to prosecutions

Adopt and implement a consistent approach, in line with international human rights law, to all inquiries into historical abuse of women and children

Abolish redress scheme waivers that prevent survivors from exercising their constitutional rights

Similarly, a full independent inquiry into the experiences of women in Magdalene Laundries has yet to occur, and the official report on the matter has been heavily criticised 'for its narrow remit and ignoring survivors' testimonies'. This criticism led to the issuing of a formal apology by An Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Enda Kenny in 2013 to all victims who were confined in such institutions.

In 2014, following media reports of the discovery of mass graves at the sites of former Mother and Baby Homes, the Government established an independent Commission of Inquiry into the matter, which has full investigatory powers 'regarding the care, welfare, entry arrangements and exit pathways for the women and children who were residents of these institutions between 1922-1998.' The Commission has yet to report.

Facts and Figures

Over 10,000 girls and women were detained in Magdalene Laundries, forced to carry out unpaid labour and subjected to psychological and physical mistreatment.

The last institution ceased to operate in 1996.

About Your Rights. Right Now

Your Rights. Right Now is a coalition of 17 Irish NGOS, trade unions and civil society groups established by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) in 2010 to coordinate the civil society response to Ireland's first examination under the Universal Periodic Review. This group was re-convened in 2015 in advance of Ireland's second examination. The coalition conducted a number of general and thematic consultations and invited written submissions to inform its report which was submitted to the UN in September 2015.

Members of the coalition are:

- Age Action
- Educate Together
- Free Legal Advice Centres
- Gay and Lesbian Equality Network
- Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Irish Council for Civil Liberties
- Irish Family Planning Association
- Irish Penal Reform Trust
- Irish Traveller Movement
- Mercy Law Resource Centre
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- NUI Galway, Centre for Disability Law and Policy
- Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
- Transgender Equality Network Ireland
- Union of Students in Ireland
- Disability Federation of Ireland

