



NEWSLETTER #9, SEPTEMBER 2022

Free Contraception Scheme

*Launch of scheme for 17-25 year olds &
Budget 2023 commitment for expansion to 16 and 26-30 year olds*



September 2022 marked a major milestone for SRHR in Ireland, as the free contraception scheme was launched for 17-25 year olds. The scheme will ensure that young women and girls can make decisions about their reproductive health based on personal need and preference rather than cost. Furthermore, commitments have been made to extend the scheme to 16 and 26-30 year olds in Budget 2023.

As legislation to provide for the scheme was rushed through the Oireachtas before the summer recess, APG members David Cullinane TD, Roisin Shortall TD and Brid Smith TD worked with the IFPA to raise concerns with the Minister for Health about the potential exclusion of under 17s from the scheme. As a result of these interventions, Minister Donnelly confirmed to the House his intention to extend the scheme to girls under 17 and committed to bringing forward proposals to address the issue by the end of October.

EPF Parliamentary Dialogue: SRHR in Fragile Contexts



APG Co-Chair, Senator Lorraine Clifford Lee, attended the Parliamentary Dialogue on SRHR in Fragile Contexts in September. This event was organised by the European Parliamentary Forum on SRHR and the Basque Parliament, among others. It brought together parliamentarians from EU countries and other regions, UN agencies, experts, as well as members of civil society in the Basque Country to discuss the progress and challenges in the provision of SRHR within international cooperation in fragile contexts.

Upon return, Senator Clifford Lee raised the issues discussed in the Seanad, calling for a debate with the Minister of Foreign Affairs on sexual violence in conflict.

APG ACTIVITIES

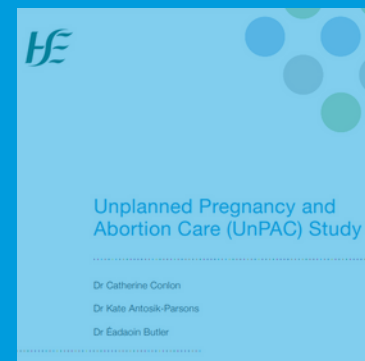
Parliamentary Questions

APG members Holly Cairns TD, Neasa Hourigan TD, David Cullinane TD, Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD and Roisin Shortall TD submitted Parliamentary Questions (PQs) on policy issues relating to abortion access and the free contraception scheme. The IFPA also worked with Deputies John Brady and Charlie Flanagan of the Oireachtas Foreign Affairs Committee to table PQs about SRHR funding in Ireland's overseas development assistance.

Launch of HSE abortion research

In July, the APG was briefed by Dr Catherine Conlon following the launch of the Unplanned Pregnancy and Abortion Care (UnPAC) report. This major study, commissioned by the HSE, details the experiences of people who accessed unplanned pregnancy support and abortion care since the mainstreaming of termination of pregnancy services in Ireland. Through lived experiences, the report highlighted the need to improve abortion service delivery and remove unnecessary legislative barriers to care.

APG member Ivana Bacik TD raised the importance of the UnPAC findings with An Taoiseach during Leaders' Questions on 12 July. An Taoiseach responded by confirming that the abortion law review will be published by the end of this year.



Safe Access Zones

In August, Minister Donnelly published the General Scheme of the Safe Access Zones legislation. The Oireachtas Health Committee is now commencing pre-legislative scrutiny and has invited the IFPA and other organisations to make written submissions.

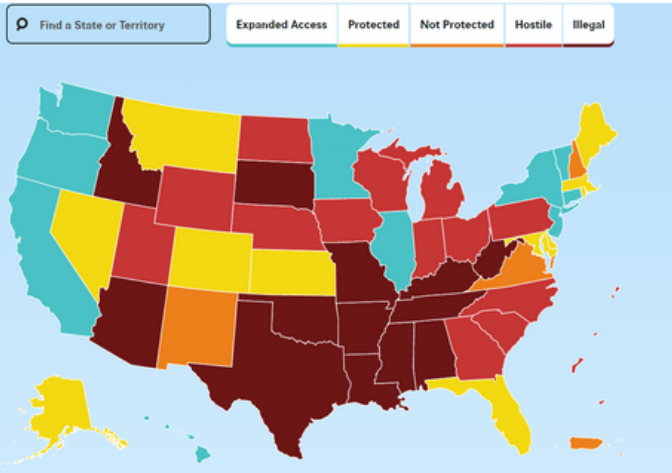
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

PACE Resolution on Stopping Anti-choice Harrasment

In a recent resolution, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) called on Member States to ensure access to abortion in practice, where provided for by national legislation, and to guarantee that any obstruction “is prohibited and criminally sanctioned”, advocating for the creation of “buffer zones” in the proximity of healthcare facilities and stressing that conscientious objection should never restrict actual and timely access to abortion.

US Supreme Court overturns Roe v Wade

Devastating news for women, girls and pregnant people in the US as a Supreme Court ruling overturned Roe v Wade, opening the door for states to ban abortion outright. Abortion access across the country has been heavily affected since, with the map below outlining the status as of October 2022.



Scotland makes period products free

Scotland has become the first country in the world to make period products free for anyone who needs them. Products are distributed through councils and education providers under the Period Product Act, which came into force in August.

Contact

Secretariat to the All Party Group
c/o Irish Family Planning Association
E: APG@ifpa.ie



SEXUALITY, INFORMATION
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & RIGHTS

Publication of 2021 Abortion Statistics

Department of Health figures on access to abortion services show that at least 6,700 women, girls and pregnant people accessed abortion care in Ireland in 2021. However, abortion statistics from England and Wales for the same period demonstrate that at least 206 pregnant people travelled to the UK to access care, illustrating the harsh reality for those excluded from care by Ireland’s abortion law. The majority of this cohort were over 12 weeks pregnant and 50% represented fetal anomaly cases.



On 30 June, APG Co-Chairs Holly Cairns TD and Senator Annie Hoey raised this issue of forced travel for abortion care in the Dáil and Seanad respectively. Deputy Cairns debated the UK abortion statistics with Junior Minister Anne Rabbitte, highlighting that women and families who receive a fatal foetal anomaly diagnosis are still travelling abroad for abortion care in significant numbers. Senator Annie Hoey called for clarity on the abortion law review process and reminded members that the public voted in 2018 to end all travel for abortion care.

Transforming Education Summit

The UN Transforming Education Summit took place in September, convening heads of state, civil society, youth activists and other stakeholders. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) was included as a key demand in the youth declaration and gender equality in education was a strong theme throughout the summit.

INTERNATIONAL DAYS

- World Contraception Day, 26th September
- International Safe Abortion Day, 28th September

UPCOMING

- International Day of the Girl Child, 11th November
- International Conference on Family Planning, 14-17th November