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Abortion in Ireland: Public Opinion

For more than a decade, there has been a significant shift in public attitudes towards abortion in Ireland. Opinion polls and research consistently show increased support for access to abortion within Ireland:

- In **October 2016**, an [Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll](#) ^[1] found that almost 75% of respondents support repeal of the [Eighth Amendment](#) ^[2].
- In **July 2016**, an [Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll](#) ^[3] found that **67%** or two thirds of respondents support repeal of the [Eighth Amendment](#) ^[2] to allow for abortion in cases of rape or fatal foetal anomaly.
- In **March 2016**, a [Red C poll](#) ^[4] commissioned by Amnesty International Ireland found that **87%** of respondents want abortion access expanded and **72%** believe abortion should be decriminalised. The poll also found that:
 - **87%** supported wider access to abortion in Ireland and **72%** supported the decriminalisation of abortion.
 - **69%** wanted the expansion of Ireland's abortion laws to be a priority for the new government (when 'don't knows' and those who were neutral are excluded).
 - **73%** believed that the new government should hold a referendum on repeal of the [Eighth Amendment](#) ^[2].
 - **66%** consider it "hypocritical" that the Constitution bans abortion in Ireland but allows women to travel abroad for abortion.
 - **72%** believed that the fact that women must travel for abortion services unfairly discriminates against those women who cannot afford or are unable to travel.
 - **68%** described Ireland's abortion laws as "cruel and inhumane" (when 'don't knows' and those who were neutral are excluded).
 - **80%** supported abortion at least in cases where a woman's life or health is at risk or where the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest. **38%** favoured abortion access as women choose. **7%** supported abortion access only in cases of fatal foetal anomaly.
 - Only **5%** were opposed to abortion in all circumstances. Of that group, **72%** were not aware that the penalty for an unlawful abortion is up to 14 years imprisonment.
 - **55%** did not know that having an abortion in Ireland is a crime when a woman's life is not at risk.
 - **80%** agreed that under international human rights law, women have a right to access abortion in Ireland in cases of rape or incest, where their health is at risk or in cases of fatal foetal anomaly.
- In **February 2016**, an [Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll](#) ^[5] found that **64%** of people surveyed were in favour of repealing the [Eighth Amendment](#) ^[2]. Support for repeal was highest amongst younger and middle-aged voters, with about **70%** of those under the age of 49 supporting repeal.
- In **January 2016**, a [Newstalk/Red C poll](#) ^[6] found that **78%** of respondents supported abortion in cases of rape or incest and **76%** in cases of fatal foetal anomaly. **41%** agreed that abortion should be an option in all circumstances felt necessary by a woman, while **48%** supported removal of the [Eighth Amendment](#) ^[2].
- In **August 2015**, the majority of Fine Gael TDs who responded to a [Sunday Times survey](#) ^[7] (63%) were in favour of a referendum to widen access to abortion in the lifetime of the next Dáil.
- In **July 2015**, a [Red C poll commissioned by Amnesty International Ireland](#) ^[8] found that two thirds (**67%**) of people surveyed believed the Government should decriminalise abortion. The poll also found that:
 - **64%** did not know that having an abortion in Ireland is a crime when a woman's life is not at risk. **50%** believed that it is legal for doctors to make referrals for women to abortion services abroad.
 - **9%** knew that the penalty for an unlawful abortion is up to 14 years imprisonment - when informed **87%** disagreed that it is a reasonable penalty.
 - **81%** were in favour of widening the grounds for abortion **45%** were in favour of access to abortion as women choose, while **36%** were in favour of abortion only where a woman's life or health is at risk, or in cases of rape, incest and fatal foetal anomaly.
 - **7%** were opposed to abortion in all circumstances, while **9%** were in favour of abortion only where a woman's life is at risk.

- **70%** agreed that under international human rights law, women have a right to access abortion where their life or health is at risk, and in cases of rape, incest and fatal foetal anomaly.

- **65%** agreed that Ireland's ban on abortion makes women have unsafe abortions.

- **71%** agreed that the criminalisation of abortion adds to the distress of women who need abortion.

- **64%** agreed that the criminalisation of abortion contributes to stigma experienced by women who have had abortions.

- **70%** disagreed that travelling abroad for an abortion is not especially traumatic for women.

- In **June 2015**, a [Sunday Times Behaviour and Attitudes Poll](#) ^[9] found that 76% of people surveyed were in favour of abortion in cases of fatal foetal anomaly, while 70% supported abortion in cases of rape or incest.
- In **April 2015**, a [Sunday Independent/Millward Brown poll](#) ^[10] found that 70% of people surveyed supported abortion where there is a medical risk to a woman's life other than suicide. 63% of people supported abortion in cases fatal foetal anomaly, while 60% were in favour of abortion in cases where a woman is suicidal.
- In **October 2014**, an Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll found that 68% of people surveyed were in favour of a referendum to be held on whether or not to allow for abortion in cases of rape and fatal foetal anomaly.
- In **September 2014**, a Sunday Independent/Millward Brown poll found that of those who expressed an opinion, over 75% of people surveyed were in favour of holding a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. 69% of respondents believed abortion should be allowed in cases of rape, while 68% were in favour of abortion where there is a threat to the long-term health of a woman.
- In **June 2013**, an Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll found that 75% of people surveyed were in favour of the Government decision to introduce legislation to give effect to the X case judgment, which provides for abortion in circumstances where a woman's life is at risk, including the threat of suicide.
- Also in **June 2013**, a Sunday Independent/Millward Brown opinion poll found that 58% of people surveyed said they would support legislation for the X case, which provides for abortion where there is a risk to the life of the woman, including the risk of suicide.
- In **May 2013**, a Sunday Independent/Millward Brown opinion poll found that 53% of people surveyed supported legislation that would allow for abortion in cases where a risk to life occurs because of a threat of suicide. 78% of people surveyed said they would support legislation that would permit abortion in cases where the mother's life is at risk.
- In **February 2013**, an Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll found that 71% of people surveyed supported legislation for the X case. 85% of people surveyed said abortion should be allowed in certain circumstances where a woman's life is at risk.
- In **January 2013**, a Sunday Times Behaviour and Attitude Poll found that 60% of people surveyed supported legislation for the X case, which provides for abortion in circumstances where there is a risk to the life of the woman, including the risk of suicide.
- Also in **January 2013**, a Paddy Power/Red C Poll found that 64% of people surveyed were in favour of more liberal abortion laws.
- In **December 2012**, a Sunday Business Post/Red C Poll found that 85% of people surveyed supported legislation for the X case, allowing abortion where a woman's life is threatened, including by suicide.
- In **September 2012**, a Sunday Times Behaviour and Attitude Poll found that 80% of people said they would support a change in the law to permit abortion in cases where the mother's life is at risk.
- In **2011**, a [study](#) ^[11] of 500 established GPs and almost 250 GPs in training revealed that 75% of Irish GPs feel that there are situations in which abortion should be available in Ireland with 52% believing that abortion should be available to any woman who chooses it.
- In **2010**, an Irish Examiner/Red C Poll found that 60% of people supported legal abortion and three in five people aged 18-35 believed abortion should be legalised.
- Also in **2010**, a Marie Stopes/YouGov opinion poll indicated that 79% of those questioned were in favour of liberalisation of Irish abortion laws in certain circumstances.
- In **2007**, an Irish Times Behaviour and Attitudes Poll found that 54% of women believe the Government should act to permit abortion.
- A **2004** Crisis Pregnancy Agency study found that 90% of 18-45 year olds support abortion in certain circumstances, with 51% stating that women should always have to right to choose an abortion.

Referenda in **1992** and in **2002** rejected proposals to further restrict access to abortion. No referendum has ever been held to offer Irish people the opportunity to make access to abortion less restrictive; opinion polls, however, consistently indicate public support for less restrictive abortion regulation.

Despite much media and political attention on the abortion issue during the Lisbon Treaty debate [independent research from the EU](#) ^[12] indicated that only 2% of respondents cited the Treaty allowing the introduction of EU legislation in Ireland, such as gay marriage, abortion and euthanasia, as a reason for voting no.

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Source URL: <https://www.ifpa.ie/Hot-Topics/Abortion/Public-Opinion>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/irish-times-poll-majority-want-repeal-of-eighth-amendment-1.2819814>
- [2] <https://www.ifpa.ie/Hot-Topics/Abortion/Abortion-and-the-Irish-Constitution>
- [3] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/majority-support-repeal-of-eighth-amendment-poll-shows-1.2714191>
- [4] <https://www.amnesty.ie/amnesty-internationalred-c-poll-reveals-irish-public-want-expanded-access-abortion-political-priority-incoming-government/>
- [5] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/majority-for-repeal-of-eighth-amendment-poll-shows-1.2544564>
- [6] <https://www.newstalk.com/reader/47.1252/63650/-/>
- [7] http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/ireland/News/Irish_News/article1591535.ece?CMP=OTH-gnws-standard-2015_08_08
- [8] <https://www.amnesty.ie/support-decriminalisation-abortion-ireland-topline-results/>
- [9] <http://banda.ie/sunday-times-behaviour-attitudes-opinion-poll-june/>
- [10] <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/politics/most-voters-back-abortion-if-threat-to-mothers-life-31135407.html>
- [11] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/over-half-of-doctors-support-abortion-1.15955>
- [12] http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_284_en.pdf