

## **Irish Abortion Statistics**

At least 117,673 women travelled from Ireland to the UK for abortions between January 1980 and December 2004.

6,217 Irish women travelled to the UK for abortions in 2004. This represented a drop of 103 on the previous year. Women aged between 20 – 30 years represented the majority of those who travelled to Britain for abortion services in 2004.

These figures undercount the amount of women travelling to the UK for abortions as they only include those who choose to give Irish addresses to clinics at which they obtain abortion services.

The IFPA have increasingly noticed that there are women attending our post abortion medical and counselling services who have had their terminations in other European counties including the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain. Lower airfares and access to the internet has enabled Irish women to investigate other options outside of Britain.

There is a real need for Irish statistics on abortion. Unless we can develop a real picture of the numbers of women travelling for abortion services, we will not be in a position to develop strategies and services that deal with the needs of women.

Statistics produced by the Department of Health in Britain demonstrate quite clearly that neither the Eighth Amendment nor the restrictions on information which flowed from it, lessened the number of women travelling from Ireland for abortions in Britain. In fact, the number has increased from 3,677 in 1984 to 6,217 in 2004 (See Appendix 1).

The IFPA recognises that abortion is a difficult decision for women faced with a crisis pregnancy and advocates strategies to reduce the number of abortions in Ireland. It is important to remember that there will always be situations in which women will seek to terminate their pregnancies.

At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, governments agrees that:

“In no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning. All governments and relevant intergovernmental and non-intergovernmental organisations are urged to strengthen their commitment to women’s health, to deal with the health aspect of unsafe abortion as a major public concern and to reduce recourse to abortion through expanded and improved family-planning services”

Gynaecologists advise that abortion in the first trimester is significantly preferable to a later abortion from the point of view of the woman's health.<sup>1</sup> It is important therefore that women access abortion as early as possible and that Irish women, once they have made the decision to travel, are able to do so quickly. However, the optimum way of ensuring first trimester abortion is to provide abortion domestically. Increasing access to contraception and comprehensive sex education are essential in reducing the number of crisis pregnancies. US data indicates that women using a method of contraception are only 15% as likely as women using no method at all to have an abortion.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ICGP Guidelines??

<sup>2</sup> Henshaw SK and Kost K, *Abortion patients in 1994-1995: characteristics and contraceptive use*, Family Planning Perspectives, 1996, 28(4):140-147 & 158