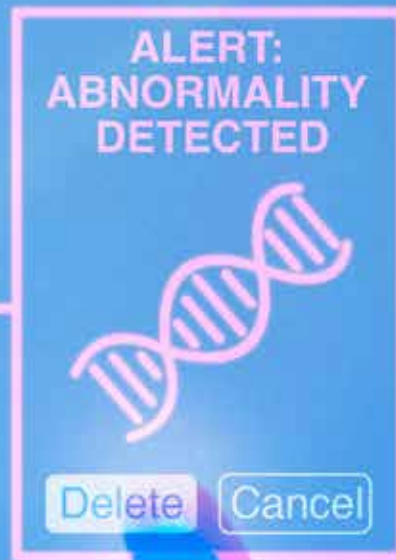


# HOW **EUGENICS** HAS TAKEN HOLD IN **IRELAND**





# INTRODUCTION

BY DAVID QUINN

The Iona Institute has been writing about the issue of eugenics for a number of years. What we present in this paper are some of those writings. They look at the history of eugenics, how it has evolved over the decades, and in particular how it has taken root in Ireland. Children with Down Syndrome are the most high profile victims of this philosophy. We feel it is important to bring these writings to a wider audience because the issue of eugenics is not being debated in Ireland at all, despite its lethal effects.

Literally speaking, 'eugenics' means "well-born". With the rise of Social Darwinism in the 19th century, much attention began to be focused on the concept of the 'survival of the fittest'. Leading scientists asked what could be done to make society 'fitter', and indeed, who should be allowed to have children, and who should not.

This terrible philosophy found its way into law in some countries and led to tens of thousands of people in places like the United States, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and, of course, Germany, being sterilised if they were judged 'unfit' to have children. Racist ideas were also strongly intertwined with eugenics.

Nazi Germany took the idea to its logical extreme. Not alone did it sterilise thousands of people, it also began to kill those put away in institutions because they suffered from a disability. In the early stages of Nazi rule this took place in secrecy.

Almost no-one today advocates coercive eugenics, let alone the racist doctrines often attached to it. But we do see what amounts to voluntary eugenics being advocated, and practiced, by many people, and it is becoming more widespread.

What they did not have in the past were pregnancy screening tests that allowed doctors and patients to discover before a child was born whether it had a genetic abnormality like Down Syndrome. Now such tests exist and are being used earlier in pregnancy than was once the case.

The result is that fewer children with genetic abnormalities are being born. They are being deliberately aborted, and this is a form of eugenics in that it is eliminating from society those considered by someone to be 'unfit', and overly burdensome both to themselves and those who would have to care for them.

The British commentator, Dominic Lawson, who has a child with Down Syndrome, has repeatedly condemned as eugenics the practice of screening for the condition, and then aborting children discovered to have it.<sup>1</sup>



Foto de Antoni Shkraba / Pexels



**Children with Down Syndrome are the most high profile victims of this philosophy."**

Writing in *Psychology Today*, Dr Richard Gunderman, has said: "The point is not that parents facing perhaps the most difficult decision of their lives should be branded eugenicists, but simply to indicate that despite protests to the contrary, eugenics has not been fully consigned to history's dustbin. As a society, we are still deciding who is and is not born based on genes, and the decisions we make shape humanity not just into the next generation, but generations to come."<sup>2</sup>

The actress Sally Phillips, who, like Dominic Lawson, has a child with Down Syndrome, worries that people with the condition will eventually be virtually eliminated entirely from society.

Phillips and Lawson say that life with the condition is portrayed in overly negative terms.

Recently, Dr Fergal Malone of the Rotunda hospital said in an interview that 95 percent of parents who discover through a screening test that their children have Down Syndrome will opt for an abortion. They will normally go to England for a termination as it is still illegal in Ireland to abort a child specifically because it has a non-fatal genetic abnormality.

Unfortunately, the progressive elimination of children with Down Syndrome and other genetic abnormalities from society has caused no national soul-searching to date. Even those who are pro-choice should be troubled by what is happening. What are parents being told by doctors when their children are discovered to have the condition? What social pressures are being placed upon them?

We hope our new paper will make a contribution, however small, towards raising awareness of what is taking place.

*David Quinn is head of The Iona Institute*

<sup>1</sup> Dominic Lawson, "The inconvenient truth: we practise eugenics". *The Times*, 22/10/2020.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Gunderman, "Is reducing Down Syndrome births a form of eugenics?". *Psychology Today*, 3/1/2021.



# SCREENING OUT DOWN SYNDROME SHOWS TRUE NATURE OF MODERN IRELAND

The Master of the Rotunda, Dr Fergal Malone, admitted in December 2022 that 95pc of couples who are told by the hospital that their baby has Down Syndrome, opt for an abortion. This commentary on the revelation was posted on our blog of January 3, 2023.

BY DAVID QUINN

In 2016, comedian Sally Phillips presented the BBC documentary, 'A World Without Down Syndrome'. Phillips, who has a son with the condition, showed how a growing number of couples are using ever more sophisticated pregnancy screening tests to discover if the child they are expecting has the genetic abnormality and are often opting for terminations if they discover that this is, indeed, the case.

Ireland did not feature in the programme. We still had a very strict anti-abortion law which was only repealed in a constitutional referendum in 2018. Instead, Phillips highlighted the example of Iceland where almost all babies are aborted once they are diagnosed with Down Syndrome. The same situation obtains in other Scandinavian countries such as Denmark.

But if Phillips was making her documentary today, she would be



**If we deleted the pro-life clause from our Constitution, we would quickly change our attitude towards children with genetic abnormalities."**



well served to look at the example of Ireland. Last week, *The Irish Times* ran with the front-page story, 'Rotunda says parents choose abortion in 95% of Down Syndrome cases'.<sup>3</sup>

Professor Fergal Malone, the outgoing Master of the Rotunda, which is the busiest maternity hospital in Europe, announced the dramatic figure in an interview with the newspaper. He was confirming a figure he had already mentioned to *The Irish Independent*.

His revelation does not mean that 95 percent of all babies with Down Syndrome are aborted, because we don't know how many couples decide not to have the relevant screening test, but it is a very stark figure no matter what.

The issue of Down Syndrome was raised during the abortion referendum of 2018. Irish pro-life campaigners had seen the Sally Phillips documentary and warned that if we deleted the pro-life clause from our Constitution, we would quickly change our attitude towards children with genetic abnormalities. If aborting 'normal' children was suddenly seen as acceptable, surely children with abnormalities would be even more vulnerable?

The Government dismissed the warning, but it was worried about the matter all the same. To assuage public concerns, the current law in Ireland does not permit an abortion when a baby has a non-fatal genetic



**As the Catholic Church, and Christianity, fade, we are adopting an increasingly utilitarian approach to life. Why should we burden ourselves if we can avoid it? What is to be gained?"**

abnormality. Irish women who are told their child has a condition like Down Syndrome still travel to England for terminations. But in light of the figure revealed by Professor Malone, perhaps the Government's worry, about the effect on public opinion, was misplaced.

There has been a big increase in the numbers making the journey to England when a non-fatal genetic abnormality is confirmed. During the abortion referendum four years ago, Malone told State broadcaster, RTE, that 56 percent of couples who were informed that their baby had Down Syndrome opted for an abortion.<sup>4</sup> Now, as he has confirmed, the figure is 95 percent.

It appears that Irish people are embracing eugenics with gusto. That is a somewhat emotive word to use, of course, as it is often associated with coercive State practices such as existed in Nazi Germany. But eugenics eliminates those someone considers unfit to live. It could be the State that makes the decision to eliminate the 'unfit', or it could be parents. The end-result is the same.

The dramatic switch in attitudes is strongly linked to the secularisation of Irish society. As the Catholic Church, and Christianity, fade, we are adopting an increasingly utilitarian approach to life. Why should we burden ourselves if we can avoid it? What is to be gained? Once, we might have said that a child, no

matter what, is a gift from God, and we must simply accept it. That view is not so widely held anymore.

The result in that, in years to come, people with Down Syndrome will become increasingly rare in Irish life, as is already the case in countries like Iceland and Denmark. Ireland likes to boast that we have become more 'tolerant' and 'compassionate' as we have shed our former Catholic faith. But a society which eliminates those with genetic abnormalities like Down Syndrome is neither tolerant nor compassionate and should not pretend otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Cullen, "Rotunda says parents choose abortion in 95% of Down Syndrome cases". *The Irish Times*, 26/12/2022.

<sup>4</sup> Liveline, 10/5/2018.





# HOW EUGENICS TARGETED UNMARRIED MOTHERS

*The report into Ireland's Mother and Baby homes was published to huge coverage in 2021. An aspect of the report that garnered very little attention was what it revealed about how unmarried mothers were treated in other countries, and in particular how they were often made victims of eugenics and 'science', unlike in Ireland where religion was often the justification for ill-treatment. We summarised what the report had to say about the matter on January 22, 2021.*

BY ANGELO BOTTONE

Among the many other things it examines, the report on the Mother and Baby Homes published last week also looks at how other countries in the past, other than Ireland, treated unmarried mothers. It throws a spotlight on how various societies in the first part of the last century promoted eugenics, and frequently targeted unmarried mothers by labelling them 'feeble-minded', often incarcerating them, or even sterilising them. This was done in the name of science, not religion.

The report presents examples of countries that introduced policies and legislation inspired by eugenic ideology. It says: "In the early-twentieth century a number of countries legalised the non-consensual sterilisation of women who were believed to be 'feeble-minded' or behaved immorally, including unmarried mothers."

The countries it lists include the US, Canada, Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden. It points out that in the US as late as 1968, a "total of 27 US states had compulsory sterilisation laws."

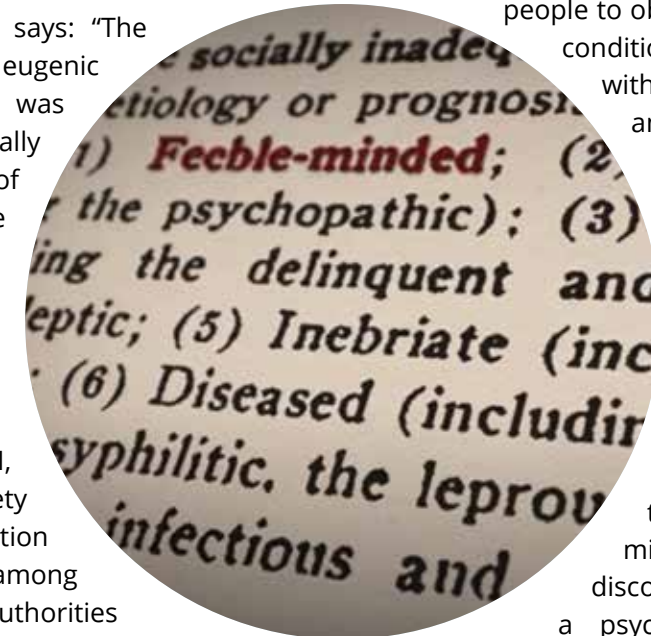
It quotes a study which says: "The more recent application of eugenic legislation [in the US] was punitive or economically motivated as in the case of women with illegitimate children supported by welfare payments".

About Switzerland, Denmark, and Scandinavia in general, it states: "In the aftermath of World War I, in order to protect society against 'a visible dissolution of sexual morals among women', the Danish authorities opened an institution on an island, close to Copenhagen, where 'slightly imbecile, erotic girls' were confined and sterilised. It was widely believed throughout Scandinavia that 'the "degenerate" were more promiscuous, had more children and threatened social order'. In Switzerland, where compulsory sterilisations were carried out on the basis of agreements between local authorities and doctors, most sterilisations were carried out on 'unmarried, socially deprived women with children born out of wedlock who were categorised as "maladjusted", 'sexually promiscuous', 'mentally disabled' or 'feebleminded'".

In the UK, in 1913 the Mental Deficiency Act created the category of "feeble-minded person" that was used to incarcerate or put in institutions women who had children outside of marriage and could become pregnant again.

After World War II, out-of-wedlock births in Britain, the report says, were taken as "a prime example of something which interrupted the

proper functioning of social processes, and revealed a failure of social control, the control of individual behaviour by family and kin, by political and education authority, by all the influences which persuade most people to obey the established order. The



conditions which were associated with high illegitimacy levels in any one locality tended to be thought of as pathological, and the individuals who engendered bastards as in some way victimized, disordered, even mentally abnormal." (The report is quoting here a writing by Martine Spensky<sup>5</sup>).

About the Netherlands, the report says: "From the mid-1950s the moral-religious discourse was replaced with a psychiatric discourse in which the single mother was no longer represented as a sinner who had to do penance, but as a woman suffering from psychiatric illness."

What was the main voice of opposition to eugenics and sterilisation in this period? It was the Catholic Church.

The 1930 papal encyclical *Casti Connubii* reiterated Church teaching against divorce and artificial contraception, but it was also one of the most important documents of its time that condemned eugenics, which was becoming more and more popular across the political spectrum.

If the Catholic Church did not exist, would Ireland in the 1930s have embraced eugenics and compulsory sterilisation of anyone considered 'feeble-minded' as countries such as Sweden did? It's a question worth contemplating.

*Dr Angelo Bottone is research officer with The Iona Institute*



**"The more recent application of eugenic legislation [in the US] was punitive or economically motivated as in the case of women with illegitimate children supported by welfare payments".**

<sup>5</sup> Martine Spensky, "Producers of legitimacy". Routledge, 1992.



# THE ABORTION MOVEMENT AND ITS ROOTS IN EUGENICS

*It should not come as a surprise that the abortion movement and the eugenics movement have historically been heavily intertwined. This blog which appeared on our website on August 9, 2019, shows how some of the founders of modern pro-abortion organisations were also enthusiastic proponents of eugenics and were sometimes racists as well.*



This poster from the 1930s promotes the idea of 'positive' eugenics through the figure of the 'healthy' sower of seed, but also proposes unspecified 'checks' or 'negative' eugenic methods to prevent supposedly hereditary conditions and 'unfitness'

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## BY ANGELO BOTTONE

In a recent decision on the abortion law of two US states, Supreme Court Justice, Clarence Thomas, wrote an opinion of his own that drew attention to the embrace of eugenics by some of the founders of the modern 'reproductive health' movement. As he says: "From the beginning, birth control and abortion were promoted as means to effectuating eugenics."

Eugenics is the attempt to 'improve' the human race through ensuring that only the 'fit' are born. This can be achieved through birth control and sterilisation, which prevents the conception of 'defective' individuals, or through abortion, which eliminates them.

In the past, the State often enforced eugenics through practices like compulsory sterilisation. Today, we do it voluntarily in the name of 'choice' through prenatal testing and the wholesale aborting of babies with genetic or chromosomal abnormalities.

In his opinion, Justice Thomas mentions two prominent early supporters of 'reproductive health' who also supported eugenics: Margaret Sanger and Alan Guttmacher. Sanger was the founder and first president of Planned Parenthood, while Guttmacher was its second president and also the vice-president of the American Eugenics Society.

As Justice Thomas points out, Sanger "emphasized and embraced the notion that birth control 'opens the way to the eugenicist.'" She said that as a means of reducing the "ever increasing, unceasingly



spawning class of human beings who never should have been born at all, ... birth control ... is really the greatest and most truly eugenic method of 'human generation.' In her view, birth control had been "accepted by the most clear thinking and far seeing of the Eugenists themselves as the most constructive and necessary of the means to racial health".

Justice Thomas says that even if Sanger was not promoting abortion in these statements, her "arguments about the eugenic value of birth control in securing 'the elimination of the unfit' apply with even greater force to abortion, making it significantly more effective as a tool of eugenics."

Alan Guttmacher endorsed the use of abortion for eugenic reasons. In 1959, he wrote that "the quality of the parents must be taken into account" and, also, "it should be permissible to abort any pregnancy ... in which there is a strong probability of an abnormal or malformed infant".

Justice Thomas, who is African-American, highlights the racial element that emerges when abortion statistics are taken into consideration: "The reported nationwide abortion ratio – the number of abortions per 1,000 live births – among black women is nearly 3.5 times the ratio for white women. ... There are areas of New York City in

which black children are more likely to be aborted than they are to be born alive – and are up to eight times more likely to be aborted than white children in the same area".

The Indiana *Sex-Selective and Disability Abortion Ban*, which the Court was asked to consider, was produced against this background, in order to put some limits to what is effectively eugenics. The Supreme Court declined to consider the law, which had been struck down by the lower courts.

Justice Thomas notes that the Supreme Court rejection of a judicial review leaves the constitutionality of similar anti-discrimination laws an open question. (The court did uphold the part of the Indiana law requiring respectful disposal of foetal remains).

"Enshrining a constitutional right to an abortion based solely on the race, sex, or disability of an unborn child, as Planned Parenthood advocates", said Justice Thomas, "would constitutionalize the views of the 20th-century eugenic movement". He concludes, "Although the Court declines to wade into these issues today, we cannot avoid them forever. Having created the constitutional right to an abortion, this Court is dutybound to address its scope." [This was said before the repeal of Roe vs Wade]

“arguments about the eugenic value of birth control in securing 'the elimination of the unfit' apply with even greater force to abortion, making it significantly more effective as a tool of eugenics.”



# WHAT RICHARD DAWKINS TOLD BRENDAN O'CONNOR

Richard Dawkins is a leading biologist. His books include *The God Delusion*.



*This was published on May 14, 2021. The famous atheist, Richard Dawkins, had appeared on the Brendan O'Connor Show on RTE, and O'Connor challenged him about his views on whether children with Down Syndrome should even born.*

BY ANGELO BOTTONE

On Sunday on RTE radio, Brendan O'Connor gently challenged Professor Richard Dawkins, the famous atheist and scientist, about why he believes it is better for a couple to abort a disabled child rather than carry it to term. Professor Dawkins applied ruthlessly utilitarian logic to the topic. It is because a disabled child is likely to cause less happiness than one that is able-bodied, he argued. He correctly pointed out that, in practice, most people agree with him.

A few years ago, Dawkins caused controversy when he told a woman who was wondering what she should do if she became pregnant, and the child had Down Syndrome: "Abort it and try again. It would be immoral to bring it into the world if you have the choice."

Under a bit of pressure from O'Connor, Dawkins admitted that might have been putting it too strongly, but he did not step back from his general point of view.

He told O'Connor: "It seems to me to be plausible that if a child has any kind of disability, then you probably increase the amount of happiness in the world more by having another child instead".

O'Connor then asked him if there were other "imperfections" he would "screen out".

He responded: "Will, I think deafness and blindness. It seems to me ... when you have the choice, when it is early in pregnancy and the foetus has started to



develop, almost everybody as a matter of fact does abort a child if it has an easily diagnosable disability".

He said: "It would be wise and sensible to abort a child who has serious disabilities at early in pregnancy. This is what everybody does in practice".

Professor Dawkins is, of course, correct about what people do in practice. For example, in Western countries the vast majority of couples will abort a child if they discover it has a serious condition like Down Syndrome.

We might not like to talk about this in public, and during the abortion referendum of 2018 pro-life campaigners were condemned<sup>6</sup> for raising it, but we are, in fact, aborting almost every child that has a serious disability if and when we discover the fact through a diagnosis.

“

**It seems to me to be plausible that if a child has any kind of disability, then you probably increase the amount of happiness in the world more by having another child instead".**

In practice we are every bit as ruthlessly utilitarian about the matter as Dawkins. Like him, most of us believe that it would be too burdensome to raise such a child and we probably convince ourselves that the child would also find their life too burdensome. This, of course, is also eugenics, and it has become commonplace.

Professor Richard Dawkins is at least open about what he believes even if most of the rest of us would rather not put it so bluntly. His matter-of-factness at least have the benefit of honesty. Most of the rest of us are utilitarians who won't admit it, which is a lot more hypocritical than Dawkins.

<sup>6</sup> Kitty Holland, "Down Syndrome group calls for respect during abortion referendum". *The Irish Times*, 24/1/2018.





# HOW THE 8TH AMENDMENT SAVED HUNDREDS OF BABIES WITH DOWN SYNDROME

*The issue of what would happen to babies with Down Syndrome featured during the abortion referendum of 2018. Pro-life campaigners argued that the 8th amendment had saved many lives, including of children with disabilities. This article, which we published on January 25, 2021, comprehensively demonstrates that this was indeed the case.*

**BY ANGELO BOTTONI**

Thanks to prenatal screening, far fewer babies with Down Syndrome are being born than was once the case. A recent study<sup>7</sup> published in the European Journal of Human Genetics shows that across Europe as a whole, the reduction is in the order of half, but in Ireland prior to the introduction of abortion two years ago, it was 'only' 8pc, whereas in Spain it is above 80pc. This may become even worse with non-invasive prenatal testing becoming more widely available.

The researchers, led by Dr Brian G Skotko from the Department of Pediatrics of Harvard Medical School, studied the period 2011-15 and discovered that 10.1 out of 10,000 live births in Europe involved children with Down Syndrome. They estimated that, in the same period, on average 54pc of babies found to have DS were aborted. Without these abortions, the prevalence would have been 21.7 per 10,000 live births.

As mentioned, this varies greatly country by country. It was very low here so far, up to a few years ago, but very high in countries like Spain, Portugal, Italy and

Denmark. The fact that it is so high in the first three, shows how a eugenic mentality has overridden the Catholic culture of those societies.

Ireland had the highest prevalence of live Down Syndrome births in Europe: 27.8 per 10,000 against the European average of 10 per 10,000.

The population of Down Syndrome in Europe is estimated by this study at 5.6 per 10,000 inhabitants. In Ireland it is 13.9 per 10,000 inhabitants, the highest rate in Europe. What made Ireland different? Its pro-life culture and the 8th amendment.

The study estimated that without selective abortions, which are a form of eugenics, the number of people of all ages with DS would be 27pc higher in Europe than it is. This would be much worse than it is were it not for the fact that many people with Down Syndrome were born before prenatal testing became widespread.

It would also be worse were it not for the fact that people with Down Syndrome, once born, live much longer than they used to because of medical improvements.

It is a paradox that when people with DS can live longer more fulfilling lives, they are also killed before birth as never before.



**It is a paradox that when people with Down Syndrome can live longer more fulfilling lives, they are also killed before birth as never before."**



Things are likely to become even worse as noninvasive pre-natal screening is made available to more and more couples. These tests can detect conditions like Down Syndrome at earlier and earlier stages of pregnancy.

Under Irish law you cannot have an abortion specifically because a baby has a serious (but non-lethal) chromosomal or genetic abnormality. If you want an abortion for that reason, you must still travel to Britain, and in 2019, 27 Irish women did so. Nonetheless, you can have an abortion here for any reason up to 12 weeks. If Down Syndrome can be detected before 12 weeks, it will almost certainly lead to a big reduction in the number of children being born here with DS.

The study itself acknowledges that "reduction [abortion] rates are very



**Before the 2018 abortion referendum, the pro-life side warned that with the repeal of the 8th amendment more Irish babies with Down Syndrome would be aborted.**

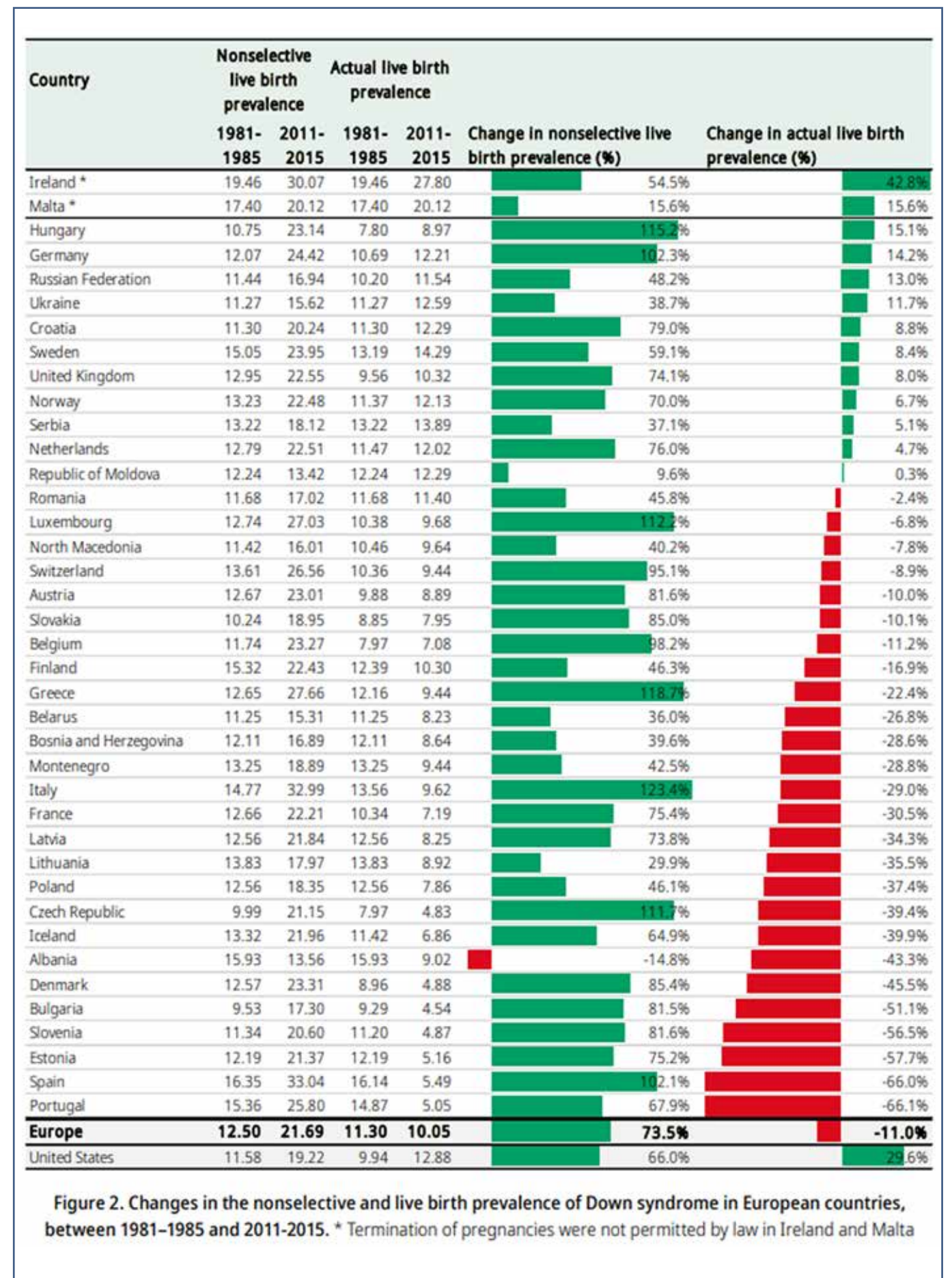
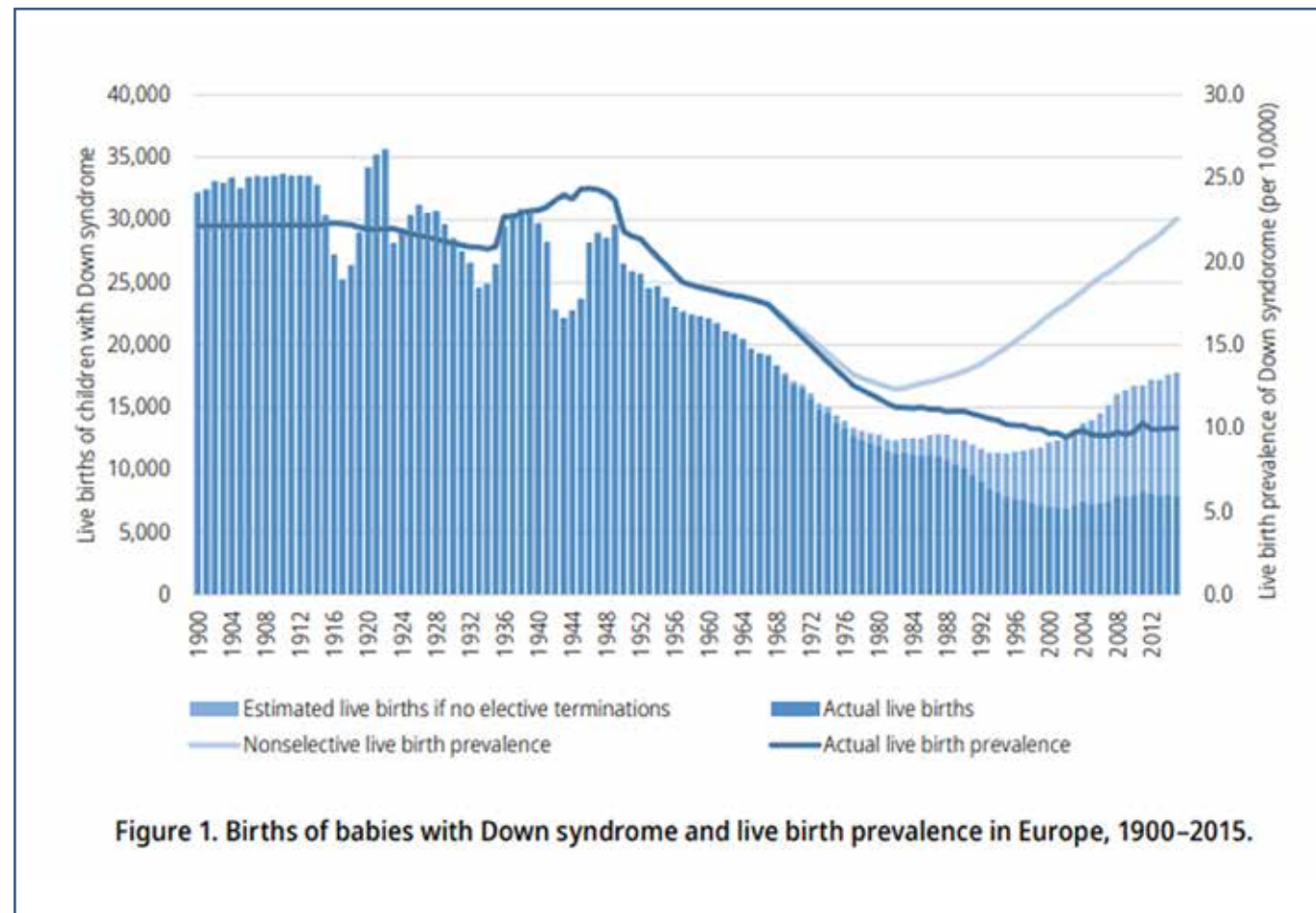
**The experience of other countries shows this is absolutely true."**

low in Malta and Ireland where terminations are highly restricted". (It refers to the years 2011-2015, before we changed our abortion law). The 8th amendment has without doubt saved thousands of lives, including the lives of hundreds of babies with chromosomal or genetic abnormalities.

Before the 2018 abortion referendum, the pro-life side warned that with the repeal of the 8th amendment more Irish babies with Down Syndrome would be aborted.

The experience of other countries shows this is absolutely true.

7 Gert de Graaft et al., "Estimation of the people with Down Syndrome in Europe". *European Journal of Human Genetics*, n. 29 (2021).







## WHAT DR PETER MCPARLAND TOLD THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

*In the run-up to the abortion referendum, the Citizens' Assembly was convened to consider the issue. One of the experts it heard from was Dr Peter McParland. He admitted the trend in Ireland would be towards ever more babies with Down Syndrome being aborted. We carried his comments on our blog of February 23, 2017.*

BY ANGELO BOTTONE

The issue of disabled unborn children has been raised at the Citizens' Assembly by Dr Peter McParland, who is the Director of Fetal Maternal Medicine at the National Maternity Hospital, Dublin and Associate Clinical Professor at UCD. Talking about a new technology for genetic screening he claimed that: "The impact of this type of testing in other countries has been huge. In Iceland, no babies have been born with Down Syndrome in the last four or five years. There is a State sponsored funded system where all mothers are offered this test and all mothers when they are diagnosed with this problem are availing of a termination of pregnancy. And in Denmark in the past four or five years there have been only a handful of babies with Down Syndrome born. ... So this is the way the rest of the world is going."

At the end of his presentation he made some very important remarks about women travelling abroad for an abortion: "why are they going over to have a termination of pregnancy? Well, again, they gave a comprehensive breakdown of Irish figures. Sixty-nine go over because of chromosome problems. And the biggest group by far is Down Syndrome. Forty with Down Syndrome. I don't think anyone



**In 2017, the Dutch Minister of Health, Mrs. Schippers answered: "If freedom of choice results in a situation that nearly no children with Down Syndrome are being born, society should accept that"**

here would say that this is a fatal, lethal, life-limiting condition. Though Down Syndrome babies now live till their 50s or 60s, they might not live as long as the normal life span, maybe into the 80s now, but 40 of these are for Down Syndrome. If you think of the figures I said to you earlier on about Iceland and Denmark, we would expect to have about 100 babies born with Down Syndrome in Ireland. Now, not all babies with Down Syndrome in the womb would survive the pregnancy. It is reasonable to assume that a third would probably die in the womb, but you are left perhaps with 30 babies with Down Syndrome and who could have been born in Ireland and are not being born in Ireland. We are not Iceland and we are not Denmark but there is a trend there."

He paints a bleak, but accurate picture. Nordic countries like Denmark and Iceland are renowned for their generous welfare states, but this hasn't prevented the almost total elimination of Down Syndrome people from their populations. According to a survey mentioned by the Copenhagen Post<sup>8</sup>, the majority of Danes see the steep drop in Down Syndrome births as a positive development. Sixty percent believe it was good there were considerably fewer children with Trisomy 21 (Down Syndrome) being born.

In 2017, the Dutch Minister of Health, Mrs. Schippers, was asked if she planned to take any measures to prevent the Danish and Icelandic scenario from unfolding in the Netherlands. Mrs. Schippers answered: "If freedom of choice results in a situation that nearly no children with Down Syndrome are being born, society should accept that".<sup>9</sup>

When the unborn are not protected, genetic screening leads to the progressive eradication of disabled children.

<sup>8</sup> Christian W, "Down Syndrome heading for extinction in Denmark". *The Copenhagen Post*, 20/10/2015.

<sup>9</sup> Renate Lindeman, "Dutch Minister of Health: if National screening program leads to disappearance of people with Down Syndrome, society has to accept that". *The Huffington Post*, 9/1/2017.





# HOW SOCIAL DISAPPROVAL OF DOWN SYNDROME AFFECTS MY CHILD

*The articles so far have dealt with the history of eugenics, and how the philosophy is taking a grip today in Ireland and elsewhere. This blogpost, which we carried on March 6, 2018, is by Renate Lindeman whose daughter has Down Syndrome. She very much brings to life the consequences of the philosophy for her child.*

## BY RENATE LINDEMAN

Today my 12 year old daughter with Down Syndrome delivered a speech on inclusion in her school.

*"Segregation makes a child feel lonely and not liked. It also teaches other students that it is okay to segregate children who are different. Students with special needs who are included are happier and more confident about themselves. Nobody wants to be left out."*

It seems obvious: bad examples teach young people to discriminate and segregate people with differences. We all fear rejection and yearn to be accepted for who we are.

So why do we fail to see how the government teaches society that it's okay to reject children with disabilities through bad examples? Governments invest millions in selection programs that result in the ultimate act of segregation: to deny participation in life based on disabilities such as Down Syndrome.

Media and law-makers pretend that the routine offer of eugenic abortion does not affect those living with disabilities. That's an illusion.

All eugenics defines some people as biologically unacceptable. That is why moms tell us they are asked "Didn't you know?" or "Why didn't you choose to abort ...."



Some parents are reminded how much their child with Down Syndrome costs society or that they have a moral or social duty to abort<sup>10</sup>.

As a disability advocate and a mother I am involved with Blackbook Downs. We collected these stories and others, that tell of pressure towards abortion. In 2016 we offered the Blackbook to the Dutch government. (I am from the Netherlands)

With Blackbook we show that prenatal selection programs reinforce the social inequality and stigma surrounding Down Syndrome. This doesn't magically disappear after birth but takes root in every aspect of society. Women who decline screening or abortion face a lifetime of stigma. And so do their children. Anxiety about social disapproval likely is the greatest influence on 'free choice'<sup>11</sup>.

However, society desperately wants to believe that the small minority of children who escaped prenatal selection are treated as equal, valued human beings. That's why scrolling through my news feed nowadays, feels like riding a roller coaster. An uplifting story about the first Gerber baby with Down Syndrome is followed by headlines such as "A Down-free society" and "The ethical duty to abort" (Gerber is a clothing brand).

A story of a woman with Down Syndrome who, after being told by employers she 'doesn't fit in', starts her own cookie business and creates jobs for others with disabilities,



is followed by a study "where NIPT indicated a high risk of Down Syndrome... there were no live births in studies from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, France and Spain."<sup>12</sup> (NIPT stands for Non-Invasive Prenatal Testing)

Reality hits me: We're not on a slippery slope, we've reached rock bottom. An entire population who it is -scientifically proven- are quite happy being themselves, is classified, dehumanized, discriminated against and eliminated, all dressed up as 'health-care'. When Downpride (which I head) pointed out that offering eugenic abortion does not lead to treatment or health benefits -and therefore doesn't fit the purpose of public health- we were told it's an 'individual choice'.

This is in sharp contrast with the government's ban on the 'individual choice' to select girls, or boys in the Netherlands. Because choosing the sex of your child is (rightly) gender-discrimination.

I teach my daughter that differences



**arguments about the eugenic value of birth control in securing 'the elimination of the unfit' apply with even greater force to abortion, making it significantly more effective as a tool of eugenics."**

are beautiful. I am confident that – despite the apparent normalisation of eugenics- she believes this message. Not because I tell her, but because she sees only the beauty in other people.

Unfortunately, I can see the ugly side: every intensification in screening during the past decades has led to increased eugenic abortion. In fact, it has been made into a symbol of 'freedom' and 'women's rights'.

No smiling Gerber baby, how cute and adorable he is (and he is!), can distract from the reality that people like him and my daughter, are intentionally eliminated. So, I am using my woman's rights to stand up for their equal human rights.

*Renate Lindeman is the head of Downpride.*

<sup>10</sup> Renate Lindeman, "A moral duty to abort". *The Huffington Post*, 21/9/2017.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Hubbard and Stuart Newman, "Yuppie Eugenics". *Z magazine*, 1/3/2001.

<sup>12</sup> Melissa Hill et al., "Has noninvasive prenatal testing impacted termination of pregnancy and live birth rates of infants with Down Syndrome?". *Prenatal Diagnosis*, vol. 37 (2017).



## About the Iona Institute

The Iona Institute promotes the place of marriage and religion in society. We defend the continued existence of publicly-funded denominational schools. We also promote freedom of conscience and religion.



**The Iona Institute**

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