

Expert panel to examine abortion law in Ireland

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Pro-choice groups in Ireland have expressed hopes that a new expert committee set up by the Government will recommend that the laws on abortion will be relaxed.

The Government has appointed the panel to examine a ruling from the European Court of Human Rights that the Irish State had failed to implement existing rights to a lawful abortion albeit only where a mother's life is at risk.

The 14-member expert group – headed by Mr Justice Seán Ryan - consists of consultant obstetricians, GPs, legal experts and senior civil servants. Mr Justice Ryan also headed the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse.

It is due to report back to the Government with a range of options within the next six months.

While it is lawful in Ireland for a woman to have an abortion if her life is at risk, following a Supreme Court ruling almost 20 years ago known as the X case, the Government has yet to legislate for this. This failure to legislate was at the centre of a case taken by three women against the State, which the European Court of Human Rights ruled on in December 2010. The court found in favour of one of the women – known only as "C" – who had a rare form of cancer. She feared she would relapse after she became unintentionally pregnant.

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