



Citizens' Assembly of Ireland

What is this initiative?

With growing calls by the political and civic community to review the Eighth Amendment of the Irish Constitution (that the State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn), the Citizens' Assembly of Ireland in 2016 was set up as a successor to the 2012-14 Convention to deliberate the matter among other policy issues.

The Irish Citizens' Assembly built on Ireland's earlier Convention on the Constitution, which brought together citizens and politicians to consider constitutional reform. Together, these processes helped establish Ireland as one of the most prominent international examples of deliberative democracy influencing public decision-making.

How does it work?

There were 99 citizen Members of the Assembly, in addition to the Chairperson. Members were chosen at random to represent the views of the people of Ireland, and were broadly representative of society as reflected in the Census, including age, gender, social class, regional spread etc. They must also have been on the electoral register to vote in a referendum.

Members heard evidence from legal experts, medical professionals, advocacy organisations, and people with lived experience. They had opportunities to question witnesses, discuss evidence in facilitated small groups, and consider a range of perspectives before voting on recommendations.

Proceedings were livestreamed and supporting materials were published online, helping to ensure transparency and public confidence in the process.

The Assembly met over twelve weekends. Five of the meetings focused on deliberations over the Eighth Amendment. Two meetings were held on the issue of the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population: two on climate change and one each on referendums and fixed-term parliaments.

One of the recommendations from the Assembly was for a change to the eighth amendment and a constitutional provision that explicitly authorised the Oireachtas to legislate to address three distinct and connected issues: termination of pregnancy; any rights of the unborn; and any rights of the pregnant woman.



Impact

In May 2015, referendums were held on two of the changes to the constitution that were recommended by the Irish Constitutional Convention, the predecessor of the Assembly. One such referendum was on a change to the constitution which would enable marriage equality for single-sex couples. This change to the constitution passed with 62% of voters voting in favour of the extension of marriage rights to single-sex couples.

The Houses of the Oireachtas passed the Thirty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution Act 2018 to allow for a referendum on amending the Constitution and repealing the Eighth Amendment. Making way for the Thirty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland which permits the Oireachtas to legislate for abortion was approved by referendum on 25 May 2018 with 66% of voters in favour.

The Citizens' Assembly helped demonstrate that members of the public can engage constructively with complex constitutional and social questions when supported by evidence, expert input, and structured deliberation.

The process attracted international attention and has become one of the most widely cited examples of deliberative democracy shaping public debate and decision-making. The process is often cited internationally because it showed how deliberation can support progress on issues that are politically difficult, socially sensitive, and deeply contested.

Where to find out more?

[2016-2018 Citizens' Assembly](#) | [Citizens' Assembly](#)

[Convention on the Constitution \(2013-14\)](#)

[Reports](#) | [Citizens' Assembly](#)

[Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution](#)