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**Shocking report on unmarried mothers in Ireland. President of Catholic bishops: “the Church was clearly part of that culture. I apologise.”**



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[The Irish Government commissioned an inquiry into one of the darkest pages of Ireland's history and to provide a comprehensive account of the events affecting unmarried pregnant women and their babies in institutions and homes from 1922 to 1998. The 3,000-page Report by the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes revealed a "cold and uncaring" picture of Ireland's attitude towards single mothers, placed in homes and institutions where they were subjected to physical and emotional deprivation, where infant mortality was high and where women felt they had no other choice than to put their children up for adoption. The comprehensive Report - the result of five years of investigation - thus stands as a strong indictment not only of the institutions but also of society as a whole that requested them. The Taoiseach Micheál Martin the Report describes "a dark, difficult and shameful chapter of very recent Irish history" where an "extraordinarily oppressive culture" had "treated women exceptionally badly." About 56,000 unmarried mothers and 57,000 children passed through the institutions' doors, according to the Commission's estimates. Most admissions occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s. The Commission said there were likely a further 25,000 unmarried mothers and a larger number of children which were not investigated. Although these homes are not peculiar to Ireland, the figures recorded in the country were "the highest in the world", the Report said. As many as 80% were aged between 18 and 29, while 11.4% \(5,616 women\) were underage. The investigation also revealed that some pregnancies were the result of rape; some of the women had mental health disorders, others intellectual disabilities. Many of them were indigent. Some of the women sought refuge in the homes for "privacy" and fear of their families and neighbours discovering their pregnancies. Some, for the same reason, decided to move to Britain. The fact is that the vast majority of children born in these institutions were 'illegitimate' and, because](#)

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of this, faced discrimination for most of their lives. However, the child mortality rates came as the greatest shock to the members of the Commission, with an estimated 15% of children dying in these institutions. Institutions with different governance, agreements and financial procedures were part of the 'system'. Some were run by local public health authorities. **Others were owned and run by religious orders**, such as three homes run by the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in Bessborough, Sean Ross, Castlepollard or the Bethany Home established by an evangelical Protestant group.



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