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August 10, 2008

# Irish head to Europe for egg donation

**More women are turning to fertility clinics abroad**[Gabrielle Monaghan](#)

Hundreds of Irishwomen are travelling to clinics across the Continent to receive IVF treatment using eggs donated from young European women.

Childless couples are increasingly bypassing the small number of Irish clinics that offer donor eggs for up to €10,000. Instead, they are taking advantage of cheaper treatment, shorter waiting lists and a more plentiful supply of donors at clinics in Spain, the Czech Republic and Crete, often combining treatment with a holiday in those destinations.

Low-cost flights to Spain, which has a reputation for high standards of fertility treatment, has made the country the destination of choice for Irish couples. Dr Raul Olivares, director of the international department at the Instituto Marques clinic in Barcelona, says his clinic has treated 70 Irishwomen so far this year, compared with about 50 for the whole of 2007. Most are aged between 40 and 45.

"There are very few egg donors in Ireland, so women who have tried one or two IVF treatments with their own eggs and failed will come here for donor eggs," Olivares said. "Plus we can offer anonymity, so the child born from a donated egg can't come looking for the donor 18 years later."

Unlike Ireland, where there are no laws to guarantee anonymity or payment of expenses for donors, legislation passed by the Spanish parliament in 2006 means there is no longer a limit on the number of eggs that can be inseminated.

In addition, eggs can be donated to lesbians and single women and the identity of the donor cannot be revealed. Spanish women, usually university students, typically receive about €900 in expenses.

Fertility treatment in Ireland is in a legal limbo after the government failed to regulate egg donation and the fertility industry as a whole, despite recommendations drawn up three years ago by the Commission on Assisted Human Reproduction.

As a result, each of the country's IVF clinics have to decide the rules for themselves. The greatest problem, however, is the reluctance of Irishwomen to donate their eggs out of altruism, according to Dr Aonghus Nolan of the Galway Fertility Clinic.

"There's no legislation and there is no incentive for women to donate," said Nolan. "We are working in a legal vacuum where the parenthood of these children is concerned. So we don't offer egg donations but generally send people to Spain where they get good results.

"Donating eggs is a complicated and time-consuming procedure. The donor has to go through a complicated drug regime and invasive procedure to get the eggs out and there's a danger to all procedures. So that's probably a deterrent for Irishwomen."

Egg donation in the United States, on the other hand, can be lucrative. Clinics pay donors between \$6,000 (€4,000) and \$8,000 per retrieval and considerably more if the couple are looking for a highly educated, attractive

donor or one of a specific religion or ethnicity.

Reprofit, a fertility clinic in the Czech city of Brno, charges a third of the €9,500 cost at Barcelona's Instituto Marques for IVF with egg donations. However, Czech women earn only between €200 and €500 for their efforts, said Dr Stepan Machac, an IVF specialist at the clinic who treats about six Irish couples a month.

Unlike its more expensive Spanish counterpart, whose waiting period is two to four weeks, Reprofit has a waiting time of about eight months. "They usually stay for a holiday for a week and take in Prague and Vienna," Machac said.

The Mediterranean Fertility Centre in Chania, Crete, has treated about 50 Irishwomen in the past year, according to Monica Tsuroupaki, its embryologist and laboratory director.

"They come to our clinic because the waiting list is only two months and they can have a vacation at the same time," she said. "Most Greek people have brown hair and blue eyes, although they can be a bit darker than the Irish.

"But the Irish couples say they don't care if their children look different to them because they have been waiting for a child for many years."

Helen Brown, co-founder and chairwoman of the National Infertility Support Group, is concerned about Irishwomen who travel further afield than Spain for IVF treatments and also about the eastern European women who are paid for their eggs. "I would suggest that anyone going to a clinic abroad ask where the eggs are sourced from. It would upset me if any of these women were being exploited," she said.

Dr Martine Millett-Johnston, clinical director of the Kilkenny Clinic, agrees there is a "pressing need" to put regulation in place to address fertility, "particularly the donation of embryos and eggs".

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