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8th amendment

History is made: Ireland votes by landslide to legalise abortion

Monday 28 May 2018, by [GRAHAM-HARRISON Emma](#), [McDONALD Henry](#), [O'CARROLL Lisa](#) (Date first published: 26 May 2018).

Leo Varadkar vows legal terminations by end of year after huge vote for change. Ireland to start abortion law reform after historic vote.

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History is made as Ireland votes to repeal anti-abortion laws – video report

Ireland has voted by a landslide to legalise abortion in a stunning outcome that marks a dramatic defeat for the Catholic church's one-time domination of the Republic.

The Irish electorate voted by 1,429,981 votes to 723,632 in favour of abolishing a controversial constitutional amendment that gave equal legal status to the lives of a foetus and the woman carrying it. The result was a two-thirds majority: 66.4% yes to 33.6% no.

By voting yes in unexpectedly large numbers to abolish the eighth amendment to the Irish constitution, the country has enabled the government in Dublin to introduce abortion in Ireland's health service up to 12 weeks into pregnancy.

Saturday's triumph for abortion reformers occurred only months before a papal visit to the country – the first since John Paul II's tour of Ireland in 1979. After Pope Francis leaves Ireland in August, the Irish minority government, with the backing of opposition parties, will within weeks start the process of drawing up legislation to allow for abortion, which was once an unthinkable political project in Ireland.

Welcoming the massive endorsement in favour of reform, Ireland's prime minister, Leo Varadkar, promised to introduce legal terminations by the end of this year.

Describing the vote as "the culmination of a quiet revolution in Ireland", the taoiseach said voters had given his Fine Gael-led government "a clear mandate" to bring in legislation that will legalise abortion up to 12 weeks.

Orla O'Connor, the co-director of the Together for Yes campaign, said it was "a monumental day for women in Ireland", calling the result "a rejection of an Ireland that treats women as second-class

citizens”.

The counting of votes reflected the findings of two exit polls released on Friday night that showed support for yes running at 68% to 69%.

Support for abolishing the amendment and paving the way for legalising abortion was widespread across the country.

Ireland’s foreign minister, Simon Coveney, stressed that the outcome proved this was “not Dublin versus the rest ... not a rural-urban division”.

One of the first constituencies to declare a result – Dublin Central – had nearly 77% voting yes. Yet even in traditionally conservative Roscommon/East Galway the first tallies from the count showed 57% for yes and 43% for no. Other rural constituencies such as Carlow/Kilkenny also voted 63.5% in favour of change.

In the last major referendum, the vote to legalise same-sex marriage three years ago, Roscommon was the only area to vote no.

This time, the only constituency to return a majority of no votes was Donegal, where 51.87% opposed repeal, while 48.13% backed it.

The overall turnout of Friday’s abortion referendum, at 64.51%, exceeded the 60.5% that voted in the 2015 marriage plebiscite.

As early as 10.30am on Saturday, prominent anti-abortion campaigners had acknowledged they had lost.

In a Facebook post, Save the Eighth activist John McGuirk said he was “broken-hearted” over the result. Addressing fellow no campaigners, he said: “Today will be a hard and difficult day, but hold your heads high. It is never wrong to speak up for what you believe in. It is wrong to stay silent, and especially wrong to stay silent when the crowd is totally against you.”

Victory for the yes side means that the only part of the United Kingdom and Ireland where abortion remains banned in almost all circumstances is Northern Ireland.

On Saturday afternoon, both Amnesty International and the Liberal Democrat leader, Vince Cable, called for the region’s near-total ban on abortion to be lifted.

Amnesty’s Grainne Teggart said women in Northern Ireland were “still prosecuted by a Victoria-era abortion ban”.

Teggart said the British government could no longer turn a blind eye to the plight of Northern Irish women who were forced to travel across the Irish Sea for abortions.

Henry McDonald and Emma Graham-Harrison in Dublin, and **Lisa O’Carroll** in Roscommon

* “Ireland votes by landslide to legalise abortion”. The Guardian, Sat 26 May 2018 18.16 BST Last modified on Sun 27 May 2018 09.50 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/26/ireland-votes-by-landslide-to-legalise-abortion>

Now give us the right to abortion in Northern Ireland

Victorian-era laws still apply on the UK side of the Irish border. When will it be our turn?

They did it. they really did it. I'm still having to pinch myself as a reminder that the yes vote actually happened; that Ireland has marked a new beginning for itself as a country that trusts and values women.

And lots of us in Northern Ireland, who didn't have a vote, joined the campaigning, doing all we could to hold the hands of our friends over the border in their pursuit for freedom and equality. The weeks in the run-up to the vote were a complete blur. So many doors knocked on, so many houses leafleted, and so many desperate conversations had.

Many women in Northern Ireland were also as anxious about the result as women in Ireland. Because a vote for yes in Ireland, is a vote for hope in Northern Ireland. Hope that it will now be our turn. Hope that those in power at Westminster will see how hypocritical they are to deny Northern Irish women the same rights as every other woman on the island of Ireland and in the rest of the UK. Hope that we will no longer be forgotten and left behind.

Because while we celebrate that more than 2 million women in Ireland have just gained control over their own bodies, we have to remember that around 1 million women in Northern Ireland are still subject to some of the most restrictive abortion laws in the world - laws which carry the harshest criminal penalties in the whole of Europe.

The law in Northern Ireland dates back to 1861 [\[1\]](#). It's literally from the Victorian-era. It makes abortion illegal in almost every circumstance - even in cases of rape or fatal foetal abnormalities. It forces hundreds to travel every year to other parts of the UK for vital abortion services, and many others go online to buy abortion pills, risking prosecution for doing so.

It's hypocritical, degrading and insulting that the UK government allows us women in Northern Ireland to travel to receive vital healthcare services, but will not give us this same access at home.

With legislation soon to follow Saturday's result, which will enable access to abortion services in the Republic of Ireland, we may soon see women in Northern Ireland catching trains over the border rather than planes over the sea for this healthcare. But we'll still be forced on those lonely and difficult journeys.

The UK government cannot continue to turn a blind eye to this absurd situation. Westminster has the power and responsibility to bring Northern Ireland abortion law in to line with human rights standards, but is choosing instead to be complicit in our harm and suffering and is continuing to deny us equality.

For the past 16 months, Northern Ireland has been without devolved government. But this is no excuse - having a Stormont government in place would not relieve the UK government of its responsibility to ensure that women's right to abortion is upheld. Devolution is no justification for the denial of women's rights.

A free abortion service in England is a helpful form of remedy, but it's not the solution. In parallel with this, we must also see a process to bring about long overdue law reform in Northern Ireland.

It is important to remember that it's the most vulnerable and marginalised women who are unable to travel and left most at risk by the current laws. We're talking about women who have experienced domestic violence, women without confirmed immigration status, young girls who can't fly without an adult, and those with health complications.

The UK's supreme court is expected to make its ruling on a case considering whether Northern Ireland abortion law breaches women's rights in the next couple of months. It's shameful that the courts have been asked to intervene. But if the court rules that the laws do violate women's rights, then the UK will be forced to do something about it.

It's been exhausting trying to gain our equality and rights. It still is exhausting.

One of the trending hashtags for the campaign to repeal the 8th Amendment was #ItsTime. Well now it's our time. It's the women of Northern Ireland's time. It has to be.

You can sign Amnesty's petition and tell the secretary of state for Northern Ireland that abortion is a human rights issue for women here.

Grainne Teggart

Grainne Teggart is Northern Ireland campaigns manager for Amnesty UK

* The Guardian, Sat 26 May 2018 17.42 BST Last modified on Sat 26 May 2018 17.48 BSTT:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/26/now-give-us-the-right-to-abortion-in-northern-ireland>

Abortion referendum likely to put pressure on Northern Ireland politicians

Irish vote puts spotlight on restrictive laws but Ian Paisley says region 'won't be bullied into abortion on demand'.

The landslide in favour of liberalising Ireland's abortion regime will put pressure on politicians in Northern Ireland to review its highly restrictive laws, though one insisted the region would not be "bullied into accepting abortion on demand".

Repeal of the eighth amendment, to be followed by legislation to permit abortion on request up to the 12th week of pregnancy, means Northern Ireland will be the only place in the UK and Ireland - and most of Europe - where terminations are outlawed apart from in the most exceptional circumstances.

UK politicians acknowledged that Northern Ireland would come under the spotlight.

The Labour MP Stella Creasy said she would be asking colleagues in Westminster "to back legislation to bring the UK's abortion laws into the 21st century and to make sure all our citizens are given equal access to their reproductive rights".

She added: "We cannot let Northern Irish women be left behind."

Penny Mordaunt, the international development secretary who also holds the equality brief, tweeted:

PennyMordaunt

Based on the exit poll, a historic & great day for Ireland, & a hopeful one for Northern Ireland. That hope must be met. #HomeToVote stories are a powerful and moving testimony as to why this had to happen and that understanding & empathy exists between generations. #trustwomen

1:06 AM - May 26, 2018

Owen Smith, the former shadow Northern Ireland secretary, tweeted:

Owen Smith

Wonderful news, if true. And a powerful message to Northern Ireland. We need change across the whole island of Ireland. <https://twitter.com/dmccaffreysky/status/1000121125945344002> ...

11:44 PM - May 25, 2018

Naomi Long, leader of Northern Ireland's Alliance party, tweeted:

Naomi Long MLA

@naomi_long

If exit polls are right this is an incredible result for #together4yes #repealthe8th

Eyes will now turn to us: yet again a place apart. Behind GB. Behind Ireland.

Thoughts with @MrsEtoB & others still waiting change here.

#trustNIwomentoohttps://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/irish-times-exit-poll-projects-ireland-has-voted-by-landslide-to-repeal-eighth-amendment-1.3508861?mode=amp&__twitter_impression=true ...

...
11:46 PM - May 25, 2018

But the Democratic Unionist MP Ian Paisley insisted that Northern Ireland "should not be bullied into accepting abortion on demand".

Pointing out there was no constitutional lock on abortion in Northern Ireland, he tweeted: "The settled will of the people has been to afford protections to the unborn life and protect the life of the mother."

Referring to what he called the "foaming at the mouth idiocy" of some commentators, he added: "On Abortion NI has had a settled cross-party view on this for decades. Nothing suggests it has changed."

The outcome of Ireland's referendum also raises the prospect of Northern Irish women needing an abortion making a considerably easier journey south for the procedure.

In 2016 more than 700 women from Northern Ireland crossed the Irish Sea to clinics in Britain to terminate pregnancies.

Earlier this year, Marie Stopes clinics said they had conducted 363 terminations for Northern Irish women in England between 30 June 2017 and 28 February this year [2], while the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) carried out 190.

Colm O'Gorman, of Amnesty International Ireland, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "Almost

three-quarters of people in Northern Ireland want to see significantly expanded access to abortion. It's entirely unacceptable that women and girls still have to travel ... for abortions."

Clare Murphy of BPAS said: "For decades, Irish women have been forced to travel hundreds of miles to our clinics in England, often alone, at a huge personal and emotional cost.

"The result, once confirmed, means that the Irish government can bring an end to this suffering, and legislate to provide the care women need at home. Now more than ever it is time for the UK government to show the same respect for the women of Northern Ireland."

The 1967 Abortion Act was never extended to Northern Ireland, and abortion remains illegal unless the life or mental health of the mother is at risk. Northern Ireland has the harshest criminal penalty for abortion anywhere in Europe [3]; in theory, life imprisonment can be handed down to a woman undergoing an unlawful abortion [4].

Most politicians in Northern Ireland do not favour reform on abortion. The issue crosses traditional divides, with support for the current highly restrictive regime among both Catholic and Protestant politicians.

In February, the UN said the UK was violating the rights of women in Northern Ireland by restricting their access to abortion, exposing them to "horrific situations" [5].

Its committee on the elimination of discrimination against women said thousands of women and girls faced "systematic violations of rights through being compelled to either travel outside Northern Ireland to procure a legal abortion or to carry their pregnancy to term".

Last month, Belfast city council passed a motion condemning the arrest and attempted prosecution of women in Northern Ireland who procure abortion pills online [6].

The motion denounced cases such as the one involving a mother who obtained abortion pills for her 15-year-old daughter after her child was raped. The mother is facing prosecution.

Northern Ireland is also the only place in the UK and Ireland that has not legislated to allow same-sex marriages. Campaigners for LGBT and gender rights are expected to step up campaigns for change in the coming months.

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* The Guardian, Sat 26 May 2018 17.39 BST First published on Sat 26 May 2018 09.29 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/26/abortion-referendum-likely-to-put-pressure-on-northern-ireland-politicians>

Ireland has changed utterly: the cruel eighth amendment is history

An end to our 35-year struggle for safe, legal abortion is at last in sight, writes senator and campaigner Ivana Bacik.

Ireland has spoken – and we have made history. The clause inserted into our constitution in 1983 that bestowed on the “unborn” a right to life equal to that of a pregnant woman can at last be removed. Exit polls project and official results are expected to confirm later on Saturday that the referendum to repeal the eighth amendment has been passed by a resounding majority.

After 35 years, we will now be able to reform our abortion laws and provide women in Ireland with access to the reproductive healthcare we need. We will end what has been described as “an English solution to an Irish problem”. Our women will no longer need to travel abroad to access abortions, and we will no longer need to import abortion pills illegally and without access to medical care or support.

How did we succeed in achieving such a result? Over the many weeks of this long campaign, I have been out canvassing extensively for a yes, in Dublin and elsewhere. The growing public awareness of the immense harm and hardship caused by the eighth amendment became increasingly apparent to me over the campaign. That awareness explains the immensely significant referendum vote in support of reform on Friday.

‘A monumental day for women in Ireland’, says Orla O’Connor – video

In truth, many people in Ireland had already recognised the reality that the eighth amendment represented an absolute bar to any lifting of the prohibition on abortion – even in cases of rape, risk to women’s health or fatal foetal abnormality. The constitutional clause had generated or been implicated in a series of tragic cases. These included the 1992 X case, where a pregnant 14-year-old rape victim was denied the right to travel to the UK to terminate her pregnancy. This case led to a ruling by the supreme court which said that where pregnancy posed a real and substantial risk to a woman’s life, in the case of X the risk that she would take her own life, abortion should be allowed.

A more recent, and utterly tragic, case was the death in 2012 of Savita Halappanavar. Here was a young woman whose request for a termination of pregnancy when she presented while miscarrying at Galway University hospital was denied on grounds that the risk was only to her health and not to her life – until it was too late. She died of sepsis as a result.

Over the years, public opinion had thus shifted towards supporting repeal of the constitutional ban and for legal abortion to take place in Ireland. This change was also influenced by a number of international law cases in which the Irish state was found to have breached women’s human rights by forcing them to carry pregnancies to term even in cases where they knew their babies would not be born alive.

The political momentum for change led to the establishment in 2017 of two processes to review the amendment: a citizens’ assembly and a cross-party parliamentary committee. Both recommended repeal and called for the Irish parliament to bring in legislation enabling doctors to offer compassion and care to women in crisis pregnancies.

As a result, the referendum was announced, and the government also proposed a framework for legislation based on the findings of the committee. This legislation would provide for legal abortion up to 12 weeks without restriction as to reasons; and for abortion to be legally available after that point only on grounds of risk to life, serious risk to health or fatal foetal abnormality. The introduction of such a law was vociferously opposed by no campaigners, who argued that it would lead to “abortion on demand” and asserted that it would be dangerous to leave the job of making law to elected legislators, on the basis that “politicians can’t be trusted” – a profoundly populist and anti-democratic argument.

The resounding yes vote we appear to have now achieved shows that the majority of Irish citizens

simply rejected the scaremongering tactics of the no side. It shows that as a society we recognise the need for our democratically elected legislators to introduce an appropriate legal framework for the regulation of lawful termination of pregnancy. We can now proceed to legislate.

As a student campaigner in the 1980s I was taken to court and threatened with prison for distributing information to Irish women on where to access abortion. I am very grateful to my fellow Irish citizens who appear to have voted so overwhelmingly for a more democratic, equal and progressive Ireland.

Ivana Bacik

Ivana Bacik is an Irish Labour party senator and campaigner for abortion rights

* The Guardian, Sat 26 May 2018 10.59 BST Last modified on Sat 26 May 2018 17.26 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/26/ireland-has-changed-utterly-the-cruel-eighth-amendment-is-history>

Ireland made up its mind on abortion years ago, say campaigners

Exit poll in referendum shows 75% of voters had not changed mind on issue in past five years.

Ireland has profoundly changed its attitudes towards women, campaigners have said after a behavioural survey showed most voters made up their minds to repeal abortion laws years ago.

The details of an exit poll by the broadcaster RTE, released in full on Saturday morning, confounded all expectations with no urban-rural divide, little gender difference in voting and only one in 10 saying they had been influenced by posters or religion. The only age group to vote no were the over-65s.

Colm O’Gorman, the head of Amnesty International in Ireland, which campaigned for the yes vote, said, while the expectations had been that Saturday’s count would be close, attitude surveys it had conducted in 2015 had shown deep changes in thinking on abortion.

This was borne out by the RTE poll, which predicts a vote of 69.4% in favour of reform, with 30.6% against.

More than 75% said they had not changed their mind on abortion in the past five years, suggesting their support for reform far predated the announcement of a referendum two months ago.

Some 82% said they had not changed their mind on how they were going to vote during the campaign.

More than three-quarters said they were influenced by personal stories they heard in the media or by people they knew. Only 10% said they were influenced by the poster campaigns and only one in 10 cited religion as a motivating factor.

Some 8% said they were influenced by the death of Savita Halappanavar during complications in her

pregnancy in Galway in 2015.

Predictions of a major urban-rural divide failed to materialise, with 63.1% of those in rural areas projected to have voted yes compared with 70% in Dublin.

Farmers, who were also expected to vote no, came out in favour, with 52.15% voting yes, according to the RTE exit poll.

Those who are projected to vote yes are:

Women - 72.1%

Men - 65.9%

Dublin - 70%

Rural - 63.1%

Farmers - 52.15%

The motivation for voting choice was also revealing:

Already knew how I would vote - 75%

Stories in the media - 43%

Campaign posters - 10%

Direct contact with campaigners - 7%

Over-65s - 41.3%

18- to 24-year-olds - 87.6%

35- to 49-year-olds - 72.%

50- to 64-year-olds - 63.75

Voters who had backed the no campaign were motivated largely by the desire to protect the life of the unborn (76%).

Ivana Bacik, a prominent campaigner for abortion reform in Ireland, told RTE: "I'm overwhelmed by the exit poll. For those of us who have campaigned for many years on this issue, it's an incredible day to see people have voted in support of women's rights.

"What changed people's opinions is that, for many years, we've all become aware of the immense harm the eighth amendment has caused over the years."

Lisa O'Carroll in Roscommon

@lisaocarroll

* The Guardian, Sat 26 May 2018 09.57 BST Last modified on Sat 26 May 2018 11.50 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/26/ireland-made-up-its-mind-on-abortion-years-ago-say-campaigners>

Traditionally conservative Roscommon votes for Irish abortion reform

It was the only constituency to vote against same-sex marriage - but a 57% vote for yes was one of a wave of surprises.

Nearly everyone expected Roscommon to vote no. Instead, the traditionally conservative county, the only constituency in Ireland that voted against same-sex marriage in 2015, confounded predictions with a resounding yes to abortion reform.

Roscommon – blighted by generations of emigration and written off, by some, as a rural backwater – proved on Saturday it was in step with the rest of the country, voting to overturn a 35-year-old constitutional ban on abortion.

“Without doubt it’s probably one of the most difficult areas to get the yes vote out, but we’ve done it and we’ve shown that Roscommon is living in the modern world, and we’re delighted about that,” said MEP Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan, from Castelrea in north Roscommon, at the Hyde Park count centre.

Roscommon’s 57% verdict in favour of reform was one of a wave of surprises in the midlands that proved the much anticipated urban-rural divide had failed to materialise.

Even the tiny rural village of Dysart, a place of dry stone walls and even stonier fields, voted yes. “My own [ballot] box, a very rural older population – wow,” said Tom Nolan as he tallied up 203 to the yes side and 123 to no.

A breakdown of the exit poll carried out by broadcaster RTÉ suggested that 63% of voters in rural areas voted to repeal the eighth amendment, compared with the confirmed result of 76.5% in Dublin Central. RTÉ also projected that 52.5% of farmers had backed abortion reform.

According to the forecast, all age groups except the over-65s backed repeal, and there was a majority among both men and women.

Roscommon county, with a voter register of just 63,000, was considered the bellwether for the no campaign as the only constituency in Ireland that voted against legalising same-sex marriage in the referendum of 2015.

The brief notoriety offended those who had voted in favour of marriage equality. But they had to wait three years to shake off the unwelcome sobriquet as the most conservative country in Ireland. It meant tears of joy when the results started to flood in.

Mother and daughter Georgina and Natalie Barrow, who had canvassed door to door for repeal, hugged and sobbed as a ballot box in their polling station, Strokestown, produced a 90-66 yes vote.

“I am actually shaking,” said Georgina. “I can’t believe it: we hoped for this and we got really good feedback on the doors but you just never know when people go into the booth just what they will do.”

She put the result down to the “shy voter” who did not want to share their opinion in public in a small country town for fear of recrimination, but voted with their conscience in the privacy of the polling booth.

Campaigning for yes in Roscommon county had not been easy, said artist Jacinta Lynch. “The investment of the no campaign was really overwhelming, and it felt there was a really dark situation here. But a landslide? We couldn’t ask for anything more.”

Some yes campaigners had been subjected to abuse, she said. Posters for the yes side had also “literally disappeared overnight” while the no posters remained. In the village of Knockcroghery, yes posters were turned to face the wall.

As well as tears, Nollaig Molloy was on the verge of exhaustion after months of campaigning. “I just feel like going away to sit somewhere by myself; it’s been intense,” she said.

While taoiseach Leo Varadkar said the result was the “culmination of a quiet revolution”, not everyone agreed.

Research by RTE showed most people had formed a view on abortion five years ago and were unswayed by any campaigning. Some said it showed politicians were long out of step with the public.

But there was also anger in some quarters that the referendum was bound up with specific proposals for legislation to introduce unrestricted abortion up to 12 weeks.

“I’m extremely disappointed. We still don’t realise the onslaught and death toll that is going to come from this. We’ve literally handed away the rights of the unborn to our government,” said no campaigner Darragh Bailey, 22.

In Roscommon town, no voter Claire Feeley, 38, said she was “very disappointed and quite shocked” with the result.

“I had difficulties with this pregnancy,” she said pointing to her baby; now, other children like hers may not be protected, she said.

Across the road, Caitlin McConn, who runs Harlows pub, disagreed: “It’s a great result. My mum, dad, sister, brother-in-law, all voted yes. I was blown away by my parents. They felt it wasn’t their choice to make choices for others who might find themselves in difficulty,” she said.

Local TD Eugene Murphy, who voted no, said the result was “the will of the people” but that he hoped respect would be shown to his side of the divide.

“It is very important that people who voted no are not isolated or feel isolated, and the legislation reflects their genuine concerns,” he said.

Lisa O’Carroll in Roscommon
@lisaocarroll

* The Guardian, Sat 26 May 2018 17.03 BST Last modified on Sat 26 May 2018 21.13 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/26/traditionally-conservative-roscommon-votes-for-irish-abortion-reform>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/24-25/100/crossheading/attempts-to-procure-abortion/enacted>

[2] <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/big-rise-in-northern-ireland-women-travelling-to-get-free-abortions-in-england-36685106.html>

[3] ESSF (article 44523), [Northern Ireland - Abortion punishable by life imprisonment - ‘It was the scariest thing I’ve ever done’: the Irish women forced to travel for abortions.](#)

- [4] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/02/northern-ireland-draconian-abortion-laws/>
- [5] <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/feb/23/northern-ireland-abortion-law-violates-womens-rights-says-un-committee>
- [6] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/09/belfast-council-to-debate-abortion-pills-motion-northern-ireland>