

Northern Ireland

Women in Northern Ireland pay the same taxes and national insurance as women across the UK. They have health care provided by the NHS but, unlike women in England, Scotland and Wales, they are denied access to legal abortions apart from very exceptional circumstances.

The 1967 Abortion Act was never extended to Northern Ireland. Instead women in Northern Ireland still live under legislation, some of which dates back to 1861, which can sentence a woman to life imprisonment if she has an abortion.

The 1967 Act did not legalise all abortions but allowed exceptions to the 1861 Offences against the Person Act under which the obtaining or performing an abortion would be legal.

But in Northern Ireland abortion in Northern Ireland is only legal to preserve the life of the woman or if continuing the pregnancy would make her “a physical or mental wreck”

Thousands of women have travelled to other parts of the UK to obtain an abortion since 1967, but they have to find the money both to pay for the journey and for the termination itself in a private clinic. Women from Northern Ireland cannot access a free abortion on the NHS.

A recent Amnesty International survey find that 60% of people think the law in Northern Ireland should make access to abortion available where the foetus has a fatal abnormality and that 69% of people think the law in Northern Ireland should make access to abortion available where the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest.

In a recent case in November 2015 Judge Horner sitting in Belfast’s high court held that the current law was in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights because it did not even allow for abortion when there was fatal foetal abnormality or where the pregnancy was the result of sexual crime.

He argued that the law as it stands “smacks of one law for the rich and one law for the poor” because women who cannot afford to travel to obtain a legal abortion elsewhere in the UK are disproportionately affected.

Abortion Rights supports the call for the end to the criminalisation of women for attempting to control their fertility. Women in Northern Ireland should have the same rights as other women across Britain, and these rights and access to abortion services should be extended not further limited.

Abortion Rights supports the Alliance for Choice's campaign to fight for abortion rights for all women in Northern Ireland.