

NI women will be able to access abortions in Ireland, minister says

Posted: Wed, 8th Aug 2018

Women from Northern Ireland will be able to access abortion services in the Republic of Ireland when the law changes there, an Irish minister has said.

On Tuesday night Ireland's minister for health Simon Harris [told](#) an event in Belfast he intended to ensure access was possible while Northern Ireland retained its current restrictions on abortion.

He added his view that Northern Ireland's laws should be liberalised in the near future.

"Whilst I respect the issue of abortion laws in Northern Ireland is a matter for public representatives in Northern Ireland, I really hope this is addressed in the near future.

"In the meantime, I intend to ensure women from Northern Ireland can access such services in the Republic, just like they can access other health services here."

Abortion is illegal in Northern Ireland including in the cases of rape, incest or fatal foetal abnormalities. It is only allowed when "necessary to preserve the life of the woman, or there is a risk of real and serious adverse effect on her physical or mental health, which is either long term or permanent".

The Irish government is preparing to introduce legislation to allow abortions into parliament in the autumn. In May a sizable majority of Irish voters chose to repeal the eighth amendment, which banned abortion in almost all circumstances, in a referendum.

A National Secular Society spokesperson said Harris's words were "another reminder that religion cannot be allowed to dictate women's reproductive rights in Northern Ireland".

The NSS [campaigns](#) to ensure there are no religious restrictions on reproductive rights and has repeatedly [called](#) for reform of Northern Ireland's abortion laws.

Last year the NSS told the UN's Human Rights Council that Northern Ireland's restrictions on abortion were out of touch with international human rights norms. The society said decisions on upholding human rights should not be devolved.

Religion is a [key reason](#) why Northern Ireland retains stringent controls on abortion and was also a major reason why the Republic of Ireland had the eighth amendment.

Earlier this year a UN committee [accused](#) the UK of violating women's human rights by restricting abortions in Northern Ireland. The committee added that the UK should repeal the 19th-century law which criminalises abortion.

An official [report](#) for Northern Ireland's Departments of Health and Justice also [recommended](#) allowing abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormalities in Northern Ireland.

The UK's Supreme Court is currently [considering](#) whether abortion laws in Northern Ireland are incompatible with international human rights requirements.

In 2016 Stormont assembly members [voted](#) against a proposal to allow terminations in cases of fatal foetal abnormality and sexual crime.

Image: Portrait of Simon Harris, © Oireachtas, via Wikipedia [\[CC BY 4.0\]](#)

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The Secular Charter outlines 10 principles that guide us as we campaign for a secular democracy which safeguards all citizens' rights to freedom of and from religion.

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