

# Citizens' Assembly chairwoman concerned at increasing use of abortion pills



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[Judge Mary Laffoy chaired the Citizens' Assembly](#)

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The chairwoman of the Citizens' Assembly which recommended liberalising rules on the termination of pregnancy has urged politicians to examine the increasing use of abortion pills.

Mrs Justice Mary Laffoy said she was concerned that it was a growing phenomenon, with fewer women travelling to the UK and Netherlands for the procedure .

In May health chiefs said the number of women giving Irish addresses at clinics and hospitals in England and Wales in 2015 was down by 200 on the previous year.

At the same time they said one internet supplier of abortion pills reported 1,438 contacts from women in 2015.

Another study published this week in the journal *Contraception* revealed 519 women in England, Scotland and Wales shunned traditional routes such as the NHS in favour of online help with Women on Web between November last year and March this year.

Judge Laffoy urged the newly-created Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, which will compile the wording for a referendum on reform of the law around abortion next year, to consider the issue alongside other questions on the liberalisation of abortion.

"I was slightly concerned after the final hearing, after we prepared our final report that the Health Service Executive Crisis Pregnancy Agency put online up-to-date statistics and what emerges from that is the number of women going to the UK and indeed going to the Netherlands for terminations has reduced," the judge said.

Judge Laffoy noted the research pointed out the increasing number of women in Ireland making contact with online pill providers.

"I think that's a factor you should look at," the judge said.

The Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution is examining the work of the Citizens' Assembly and its recommendations.

Based on votes by the 99 members, the assembly called for article 40.3.3 to be removed from the Constitution.

It said it should be replaced by a provision which placed the onus on TDs and Senators to pass laws on termination of pregnancy, rights of the unborn and pregnant women's rights.

The assembly voted by majority in favour of recommending that abortion without restriction should be lawful. They also voted on various gestational limits.

The members also said a distinction should not be drawn between the physical and mental health of the woman when it came to access to abortion.

Judge Laffoy said she was aware that some of the results of the assembly caused surprise but insisted they were not reached by chance or accident.

She called on the 21 cross-party politicians who sit on the committee to give the recommendations respect and consideration.

"I am aware that the results caused surprise across some sections of society but I truly believe they were reached not by chance or accident but following a thorough and rational thought process each member undertook as they stepped up to the ballot box," she said.

Judge Laffoy urged the committee members to read the transcripts of the hearings over the weekend that the votes took place and to read the expert evidence given to the assembly.

"I know it's a big task you have, I would urge you to remember that the material is there," she said.

The assembly heard from 25 professionals over 80 hours, personal stories of six women impacted by the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution which gives equal right to life to the unborn, advocates from 17 groups on both sides of the debate and the members undertook hours of preparatory work reading papers and submissions.

Judge Laffoy urged the Oireachtas to act.

"I do want to emphasise one point: the assembly is an exercise in deliberative democracy, which places ordinary citizens into consideration of the important legal and policy issues facing Irish society today," she said.

"However, the recommendations which the assembly has made are just that - recommendations.

"The assembly does not, cannot and should not usurp the role of elected members of Dail and Seanad Eireann. As chair of the assembly I do not underestimate the difficult task facing you as politicians in considering this topic further."

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