

Abortion ban is 'an insult to women' says trade union group as it launches campaign

Figures from across Ireland's largest trade unions have called for members to support calls for a new referendum on abortion

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Pregnant woman

A group of trade unionists have branded Ireland's abortion ban an insult to women and called on members of their organisations to join a campaign to repeal it.

Public servants, shop and general workers, teachers, nurses, students and journalists are among those being asked to throw their weight behind renewed opposition to the eighth amendment to the Constitution.

One of the key speakers at the campaign launch, TUI member Helen Mahony, said trade union leaders rightly opposed the ban in 1983 and they should lead a new campaign to have it abolished.

"It was an insult to women, anti-democratic and an attempt to hold back progress in Ireland on social issues," she said.

"The consequences of the amendment, which have included the X case and the death of Savita Halappanavar have been worse than we could have imagined in 1983."

Figures from Impact, Unite, the Teachers' Union of Ireland, the Union of Students in Ireland, the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation, the Retired Teachers' Association, the National Union of Journalists, the Dublin Council of Trade Unions and the African women's network Akidwa have called for members to support calls for a new referendum on abortion.

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In a statement on the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment representatives described the ban as archaic, sectarian, an affront to the equal rights of women and a major source of discrimination.

They claimed more than 150,000 women and girls have travelled out of Ireland for abortions since 1983 and 12 more make similar journeys every day to the UK.

"It is a duty of all trade unions to secure its removal," the union members said in a statement.

"From Miss X in 1992 to the death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012 and the recent obscenity of Ms Y's treatment by the State, Irish history is littered with tragic individual cases directly caused by a Constitution that equates a woman's life with that of a foetus."



Ms O'Mahony said: "The 8th amendment is a testament to repression and hypocrisy. It was and is bad law and it is time for it to go.

"We are calling on the trade union movement to play a leading role in demanding that this repressive anti-woman hypocritical section be removed entirely from the Constitution."

The campaign launch follows a public protest by pro-choice campaigners who travelled to Belfast by train last week to collect abortion pills before returning to Dublin and ingesting them. The idea was to revive the images of the 1971 contraceptive train when women campaigners went to the north to buy condoms.

USI President Laura Harmon said: "The Union of Students in Ireland has long-standing policy which supports the need to repeal the eighth amendment.

"One quarter of those who avail of abortion services in the UK are young people aged under 25. This is very much an issue that affects students and our members and we are proud to be part of the Coalition to Repeal the 8th Amendment."

Taryn Trainor, equalities officer and regional organiser with Unite,

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said: "This is a human rights issue which affects trade union members and their families. Women trade union members want the movement to support this campaign."

The campaign said women being forced to travel for abortion are facing incalculable emotion and financial costs.

They estimated the journey costs at least 1,500 euro, while using the internet to buy pills for an abortion could result in up to 14 years in jail.

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