



Women's rights groups in Germany will be delivering abortion pills to Poland - by drone

Women's rights groups are planning to fly the drone from Frankfurt to the Polish border town Slubice on Saturday.



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On Saturday, one drone will be making a very unusual journey over the border between Poland and Germany.

It won't be providing officials with birds-eye view images for surveillance purposes – and it's got nothing to do with the military.

No – instead women's rights groups will be using the drone to fly World Health Organisation-approved abortion pills to women in Poland to help them terminate unwanted pregnancies safely.



(Women on Waves)

The "abortion drone" will make the short journey from Frankfurt an der Oder in Germany, where abortion is legal, to the border town of Slubice in Poland where there is much stricter abortion legislation.

The pills – mifepristone and misoprostol – will then be collected by women who have expressed interest in having access to the drugs.

The situation in Poland

It's a controversial move. Since 1993, women in Poland have only been able to have an abortion legally if their life or health is endangered, the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest, or if there is significant damage to foetus.

Other European countries where abortion is criminalised or illegal unless strict conditions are met include Malta and Ireland.

In Poland, while women themselves are not criminalised for having abortions, physicians who perform the procedure could face up to two years in jail.



(Women on Waves)

Women on Waves, one of the organisations behind the drone delivery, says on its website: "Every year since 1993 between 80.000 and 200.000 women seek illegal abortion services within Poland and many are forced to travel abroad to obtain abortions.

"Since 60% of the women in Poland live below the poverty line, many women can neither afford the option of travelling abroad nor are they in a position to pay the high fees of an illegal abortion."

Pro-life campaigners in the majority Roman Catholic country are not expected to respond well to Saturday's delivery.

Dr Rebecca Gomperts, Women on Waves founder, said: "They plan to shoot down the drone, but we're not worried. We'll have to see what happens.

"We're always looking for new ways and new technology to make a statement and help women."



Dr Rebecca Gomperts, founder of Woman on Waves, speaks to the media in front of The Aurora, the Dutch medical ship docked in Sir John Rogerson's Quay on Dublin's River Liffey (Chris Bacon/PA)

"The drone will leave Frankfurt at 11.00am and when it arrives in Slubice the women will get the pills from the drone themselves. That's very important, because it's illegal in Poland to aid women in getting an abortion."

The creative uses drones are being put to

Drones are increasingly being used for all kinds of purposes outside of the military. Last month budget airline Easyjet showed how they are using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to perform safety checks on aircraft exteriors, and recently drones were used to find survivors and deliver aid to those suffering the effects of the devastating Nepal earthquakes.

Drones are even being used for purposes as varied as finding lost livestock in the rural countryside.



An unmanned drone that measures harmful gas concentrations in the air is presented in Dortmund, Germany (Volker Wiciok/AP)

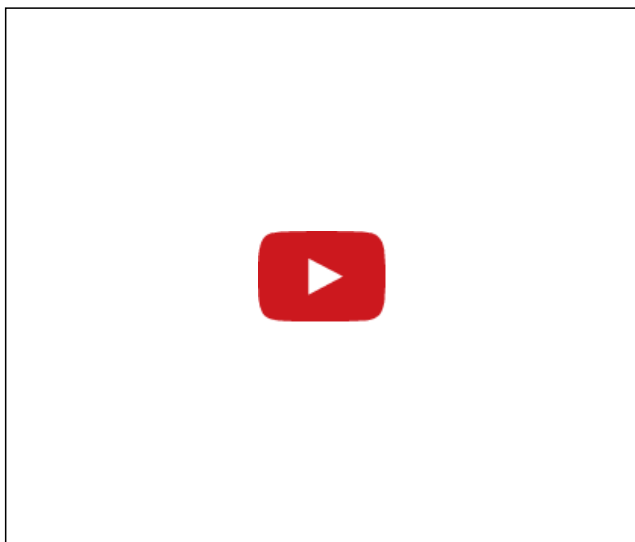
But this will be the first time a drone has been used to transport abortion supplies.

The organisers behind the idea say that, as the abortion drone weighs less than 5kg, is not used for any commercial purposes, will stay within the sight of the person flying it and does not fly in controlled airspace, no authorisation is required under Polish or German law.

Women on Waves has repeatedly made use of legal loopholes to promote abortion rights across Europe.

In 2003 the organisation set sail for Poland on their mobile abortion clinic ship, which provided on-board abortions to women that took place in international waters.

When the boat docked they were met by pro-life protesters objecting to the vessel, and the clash brought abortion rights to the top of Poland's news agenda.



A similarly frosty reception is expected on Saturday, but no doubt pro-choice campaigners will welcome the chance for the question of abortion to dominate the news once more.

