

Alliance for Choice believes everyone who needs an abortion should have free, safe and legal access in their own country, without stigma.

Abortion
Rights
NI
#Abortion



Alliance for Choice

What we did in 2017-2018

UK Westminster lobbying

The lack of a working Assembly in Northern Ireland presented us with an exceptional opportunity to lobby for abortion laws which were, at a minimum, equal to the rest of the UK.

We have continued to work with political representatives and lobby groups at Westminster to bring about amendments to the Domestic Violence Bill due to be heard in the next session of Parliament. This will involve repealing sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861, which make it a criminal offence, punishable by up to life imprisonment, for a woman to procure her own abortion. UK advocacy groups and Irish groups in London are working together to try to make this happen and have been bolstered by the recent policy change in Scotland that women be allowed to take the second stage medication of a medical abortion treatment at home. We have attended Westminster on a number of occasions to directly lobby MPs on the situation as it exists here in NI. Many are very supportive. We wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister, Theresa May and had it published nationally as a result. We have also worked closely with Stella Creasy MP to engage nearly 200 other parliamentarians in asking the PM to consider the role of Westminster in the complicity of the criminalisation of those seeking abortions in NI.

The Repeal the 8th Referendum

We are privileged to have worked for a long time with the Abortion Rights Campaign and the Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment in Ireland, so we became a member of Together for Yes, the campaign umbrella group to achieve the Repeal of the 8th Amendment. We may have separate laws but we have similar history and culture and many consider the six counties to still be part of the 'north' of Ireland despite it being legally part of the UK. We fundraised, we amplified the campaign, we relayed the messaging each week, we canvassed in: Drogheda, Dundalk, Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan and more. We responded to social media, traditional media and researchers on the issue, we trained up volunteers, we marched, we rallied, and we lobbied. When the result came through in May, we celebrated but we also felt the enormity of being left behind. However, the amazing solidarity that has been shown by our siblings in the Republic of Ireland has given us momentum for our own campaign, now focused on Westminster.



“The Offences Against the Persons Act 1861, was enacted the same year the lightbulb was invented.”

All Party Group on Abortion Law Reform in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Although we were unable to establish an APG in Stormont due to the collapse of the NI Assembly and Executive, recent developments, including Sinn Féin party policy support for decriminalisation and the SDLP policy change to a conscience vote on the issue, has meant that a wider group of political parties in Northern Ireland are now showing an interest in reform. We hope to establish a cross-party group in the coming months to reflect the wider political support.

Coalition of Civil Society Organisations

We have an informal coalition for our Westminster lobbying with: BPAS, Stella Creasy, Doughty St Chambers, NUPAS, MSI, Abortion Support Network, FPA, Amnesty and UK Humanists. Due to the Irish Referendum Campaign, all our partners in the Civil Society Coalition in NI, focused their energies on helping and supporting the Together for Yes campaign, something which we helped to co-ordinate and maintain throughout the referendum. We will be reviving the coalition and encourage members to turn their attention to NI and what will happen post-decriminalisation.

Media Engagement

Media engagement has been outstanding in the last year. We trained many of our members and made press, TV and radio appearances. We are the go-to organisation for local, regional, national and international media outlets.

Website and social media engagement for campaigning

Our campaign website (www.alliance4choice.com) is regularly updated to enable sharing of content including; campaign messages, women's stories, links to our petition, fact files on abortion, information about public meetings and ways in which members of the public can support our campaign.

Activist Recruitment and Training

This year we have greatly expanded the number of volunteers. We have given interested people the opportunity to receive; training on abortion stigma, workshops on canvassing, media training, lobbying opportunities, fundraising experience, public outreach experience, ally-building, social media and communications experience, as well as a chance to be a part of the Repeal the 8th Referendum Campaign.

“Over 50% of NI women accessing abortion in England in 2018 are already mothers.”

Advocacy and awards

We continue to run workshops to help raise awareness of the impact of the current law on women's lives for newcomers to the issue, as well as a series on how to talk about abortion for people who want to step up their involvement in the campaign. We marked the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Abortion Act by participating in numerous events across the UK including events in the Houses of Parliament sponsored by BPAS and Abortion Rights UK. We worked with locally elected councillors through Northern Ireland to bring forward motions to local councils condemning the behaviour on anti-choice groups outside Marie Stopes and the FPA as well as calling for buffer zones and the decriminalisation of abortion itself. To support the Belfast City Council Motion we wrote letters to every councillor explaining the reasons for supporting decriminalisation, one of the responses from a DUP councillor was to call our organisation “disgusting”, upon which we released his response, garnering a huge public response and raising over £1500 in one night from hundreds of supporters and ensuring he faced disciplinary action for behaviour not suited to public service.

The launch of a research report entitled ‘Abortion is a workplace issue’ by the Ulster University would not have been possible without the ground being laid by Alliance for Choice and their engagement with the Trade Union movement across the island of Ireland. The study was funded by 6 Trade Unions and the Ulster University. The report has been launched in Ireland and will be launched in Northern Ireland in September 2018. The main findings of the report are that over 84% of Northern Irish respondents support the removal of criminal penalties for abortion. A groundbreaking part of the research placed people anonymously together in a private monitored forum, one unexpected result was

that some people who expressed extremely anti-choice positions were moved by others experiences so much that they became supportive of a woman's right to choose. The research was nominated for a Research Impact Award by Ulster University.

We were honoured to share a Human Rights Award from Liberty in recognition of our campaigning. We continue to invite support and solidarity by speaking at public engagements which have included; platforms with high profile Human Rights Organisations, Political Parties in Westminster and Stormont, leading social movement organisations, LGTBT groups, arts and drama productions, International SRHR NGOs, the student movement across UK and Ireland, medical professionals and Trade Unions.

Legal intervention in JR76 Judicial Review

In January 2017 the mother of a young woman who was being prosecuted for acquiring abortion pills for her daughter got leave to challenge the decision to prosecute her through judicial review. In April, Alliance for Choice intervened in the case and provided the Court with information of the direct experience of young girls and women seeking abortions. The case was delayed as the judge wanted to take into consideration the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission case that was appealed to the Supreme Court. That has now been heard and although the NIHRC lost on their argument to take the case on behalf of the Justices of the Supreme Court have criticised the inconsistency of the law across the UK and urged parliament to rectify this. JR76 will now be heard in September 2018.

“66% of NI women choose surgical over EMA because of the high chances of miscarrying on the way home, compared with only 35% of English and Welsh women.”

CEDAW Inquiry Report Published

We made a submission to the UN Optional Protocols Committee and CEDAW. The latter conducted an inquiry into abortion access in NI and published the report of their inquiry in February 2018. In its report, the Committee concludes that a restriction affecting only women from exercising reproductive choice, and resulting in women being forced to carry any pregnancy to full term against their will, involves mental and physical suffering constituting violence against women.

The Committee finds that the State party is responsible for: (a) Grave violations of rights under the Convention considering that the State party's criminal law compels women in cases of severe foetal impairment, including FFA, and victims of rape or incest to carry pregnancies to full term, thereby subjecting them to severe physical and mental anguish, constituting gender-based violence against women; and (b) Systematic violations of rights under the Convention considering that the State party deliberately criminalises abortion and pursues a highly restrictive policy on accessing abortion, thereby compelling women to: (i) Carry pregnancies to full term; (ii) Travel outside NI to undergo legal abortion; or (iii) Self-administer abortifacients.

The CEDAW Inquiry also found that this potentially amounts to torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, in violation of several articles of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Denial of abortion and criminalisation of abortion amounts to discrimination against women because it is a denial of a service that only women need. And it puts women in horrific situations," said Halperin-Kaddari, a law professor specializing in international women's rights. Women's mental anguish was exacerbated when they were forced to carry to term a non-viable foetus (in cases of fatal foetal abnormality) or where the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest, she continued, adding that forcing a woman to continue with her pregnancy in such a situation amounted to unjustifiable State-sanctioned violence.

CEDAW has made 13 recommendations for action, including the establishment of a mechanism to advance women's rights, including through monitoring authorities' compliance with international standards concerning access to sexual and reproductive health including access to safe abortions.

The full CEDAW Inquiry Report from Feb 2018 is available online:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/GBR/INT_CEDAW_ITB_GBR_8637_E.pdf

my body
my life

My abortion story...

I have had 2 abortions. One at 26 a couple of months after I had met a guy, and the other at 42 after I had had 2 children. I did not feel any guilt on either occasion and neither were difficult decisions. However, having a scan for the second one was very emotional. I have not had many people show these abortions. I hope we can challenge some of the stigma.

my body
my life

My abortion story...

By writing your story here you are consenting to the use of your story in the exhibition. Your story may be featured on social media as part of our publicity campaign. You will receive a copy of your story and a certificate of participation.

“Over 28 women a week have travelled to England for abortions in the last twelve weeks, including one 12 year old girl.”

My Body My Life Exhibition

Ulster University researchers teamed up with peers at the Open University, Oxford University, Edinburgh University, University College London and University of Glasgow to create an innovative exhibition that will challenge abortion stigma through clothing and stimulate conversation around access to abortion. In collaboration with the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), The Family Planning Association, and Alliance for Choice, they have produced a new research-based exhibition, *My Body My Life* that challenges abortion stigma through clothing. The exhibition ran at The Unique Art and Design Shop, Ulster University, Belfast Campus, December 2017.

Borrowing the form of a fashion boutique, the exhibition uses clothing to bring a range of abortion experiences to life, representing just some of the nearly 200,000 abortions that take place in the UK every year. The travelling exhibition is based around research on women and pregnant people's experiences of abortion throughout the UK and features a series of supporting public engagement activities. The programme of events has been designed to stimulate conversation and give context and nuance to the event.

In 2017/18 the exhibition was shown at Edinburgh, Belfast, Oxford, London and Croatia. Elements of the project now form part of community education projects that AFC are currently piloting around NI.

International Women's Day

AFC sit on the organising committee for IWD in Belfast and therefore had a range of reproductive justice events in the programme, including a book launch, a market for choice, the rally itself with a speaker and a recruitment event for activists. This year for International Women's Day Alliance for Choice hosted "Cheers for Choice" as part of the fortnight long International Women's Day Events Programme. This was to celebrate the successes of the campaigning to date whilst planning for the future. We talked about how to get involved with social media, outreach, lobbying and protest. We had merchandise available, including; badges, totes, t-shirts, sweatshirts and the remaining few enamel pins. We demonstrated that we have plenty of opportunities for activists to get involved.

IWD in Belfast is now the largest rally and event programme in the UK and Ireland.

14 June 2017

Judgement handed down on A & B case, stating that the NHS in England is not obliged to cover the costs of abortion care for NI residents

20 June 2017

DUP and Conservative Party agree a confidence and supply deal which allows a minority Conservative government to take power

29 June 2017

Labour MP Stella Creasy proposes an amendment to the Queen's Speech which allows women from Northern Ireland to access abortion care on the NHS in England for free

4 July 2017

Both Scotland and Wales NHS commit to offering free abortion care to NI residents

“80% of NI women requesting abortion pills from Women on Web are less than seven weeks pregnant.”

Website

We have made a concerted effort to publish articles on our website regularly by a number of different contributors, both as an outreach tool, but also to build a resource for ourselves and for the public. Both the website and our social media channels saw a huge surge in interest over the summer, due to the kickback from the Irish Referendum. On all of these we are reaching our demographic even more than before, but we are also expanding our reach to those in the USA, UK and to more men than ever before.

www.alliance4choice.com

Facebook

We continue to use our well-established Facebook & Twitter social media accounts to engage in a strategic way, posting links and images in order to reach the widest possible audience. Using this medium also to maintain networks of solidarity by connecting with like-minded groups on Facebook, including international organisations, service providers, political parties, trade unions, feminist groups and news sites.

facebook.com/Alliance4Choice

Twitter

Our current follower audience size is over 8,000. We've gained around 3.5K followers in the last 3 months.

We have taken part in a number of Twitter-only events, such as Twitter Abortion Rights World Cup and some Twitter takeovers.

[@All4Choice](https://twitter.com/All4Choice)

Instagram

We are still new to this platform and growing followers slowly but will be developing the use of the top trumps format to boost engagement for under 25s.

[@all4choice](https://www.instagram.com/all4choice)

Merchandise and promotion

We have created a range of ethical “Trust Women” Merchandise for fundraising and awareness raising, which is very popular. We now sell merchandise directly from the website. We run a Market for Choice three times a year to raise funds and to raise the profile of abortion rights activism. We do this on May Day, International Women’s Day and Christmas. We also offer merchandise in-person at political conferences, Late Night Art, academic conferences and more.

24 - 26 October 2017

The High Court hears the case from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission arguing that the law in Northern Ireland violates the human rights of pregnant people

26 October 2017

The 50th anniversary of the 1967 Abortion Act, which was never extended to Northern Ireland

6 November 2017

Scottish Government confirms its scheme to allow free abortion care for patients from Northern Ireland

23 February 2018

CEDAW - UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women - publishes its report which states that abortion law in Northern Ireland violates the human rights of pregnant people. It recommends that the government acts to right this wrong by decriminalising abortion





“Access to abortion in Northern Ireland is highly restricted, resulting in less than 20 abortions carried out in the last reported year.”

Mailing List

We send updates to our mailing list regularly, which has grown substantially over the last 2.5 years to nearly 4,500 subscribers. It includes upcoming events, ways to participate including social media campaigns and volunteering, calls to action and calls for attendance, support and donations. We maintain good opening rates on our mailings and continue to grow our press and political contacts through our regular updates.

Many of the Westminster coalition press releases are co-ordinated, written and edited by us and have been instrumental in gaining press coverage locally, nationally and internationally. We aim to have a few every month depending on how busy we are or how many events we need volunteers for and each mailing is tailored for our different audiences."

Fundraising

We have begun to develop a stronger fundraising strategy. Our 'Local giving' page has raised £12,000 in the last year, meaning we can pay to produce merchandise, pay for attendance at academic and activist conferences, and pay for travel expenses for activist volunteers. We have also received some donations from Trade Union branches which is dependent on what we require but is usually £250-300 at significant times of the year, such as the March for Choice. We also received funding from the Open University to run adult education sessions on the *My Body My Life* booklets of real women's stories, Community Foundation Northern Ireland to engage with churches and faith leaders and are planning to approach other funders internationally to help with our de-stigmatisation work and some more core funding. We have found that international funders have low levels of understanding of the state of Northern Ireland and have been refused due to "already funding an abortion project in Ireland" so we are trying to build relationships to educate funders on that problem. Our biggest funder to date has been the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust who have supported us since 2012 from very small one-off project grants to core support.

6 March 2018

The Central Booking System goes live, allowing a path for women me pregnant people from NI to access free abortion care in GB

25 April 2018

The working group report on abortion in the case of fatal foetal abnormalities is published, recommending a change in the law in such cases

26 April 2018

The citizens of the Republic of Ireland vote to repeal the 8th Amendment from the Constitution which effectively banned abortion in all circumstances, new laws will follow later this year

5 June 2018

Emergency debate in Westminster on abortion; Stella Creasy proposes to repeal sections 58 and 59 from the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 which would decriminalise abortion across the UK including Northern Ireland

“100% of abortion seekers from NI deserve free, safe and legal access in their own country.”

Weekly stall

Every Saturday we have volunteers at an outreach stall in Belfast's City Centre. This has been successful for engagement, public education and for creating support and conversation with ordinary people. In the last 3 months a weekly stall has been established in Omagh, Co.Tyrone. This is a real development for us as we have found it quite difficult to take our message outside of Belfast and Derry due to silence and stigma in rural areas. We hope to continue to build on this success and will continue to build the confidence of activists in rural areas to bring this message to the public at large who will then be confident enough to bring it to their political representatives. We have also had stalls at the Queen's Students union Freshers Bazaar, Irish National Teachers Organisation (Catholic teacher trade union) and the Irish Congress of Trade Union's Women's conference.

Civil Rights Theatre Project

This project explored NI 50 years on from the Civil Rights Movement and looked at what the civil rights demands were in 2017. Abortion was one of those issues looked at and AFC activists developed dialogue for a play that will focus on abortion as one of the issues. The play is ready and has been performed on radio. Funding is being sought by the producers to have it performed on stage at the Lyric Theatre on Belfast later this year.

7 June 2018

The Supreme Court hands down judgement on a case brought by the NIHRC in October 17. It dismisses the case on the grounds that the NIHRC does not have rights to bring the case, but the majority of justices speak strongly of the right to abortion access and the injustices visited in pregnant people in NI

16 June 2018

Sinn Féin hold a special Ard Fheis at which they decide on a new abortion policy supporting decriminalisation of abortion and an approach broadly in line with Irish Government proposals for post-Repeal legislation

Creative Interruptions

An exhibition piece is currently being shown in the Linen Hall library in Belfast, featuring AFC and their political analysis of abortion as a civil rights issue 50 years on.

Rallies and Marches

Every year in Belfast we attend:

Pride
May Day
Reclaim the Night
Anti-Fascist Protests

We helped organize:

International Women's Day
The Rugby Rape Trail Protests
The Abortion Rights Bloc at Processions Belfast
Rape Clause/2 child cap protests
Rally for Choice
March for Life counter protests
Solidarity with Poland/IOM/Argentina actions

Other locations:

Dublin March for Choice

Find us here:
alliancechoice4@gmail.com
www.alliance4choice.com
[@All4Choice](https://www.instagram.com/All4Choice)
[facebook.com/Alliance4Choice](https://www.facebook.com/Alliance4Choice)
[localgiving.org/charity/alliance4choice/](https://www.localgiving.org/charity/alliance4choice/)

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