



Summary

- **Outright Repeal of the 8th Amendment.**
- **Referendum to be held during April/May to facilitate student voting.**
- **Choice in pregnancy and child birth**
- **Legislation for free, safe, and legal abortion on both sides of the border.**
- **Reproductive services, including contraception and infertility treatment provided free through the health service.**
- **Full counselling on contraceptive options.**
- **Full support for transgender people during pregnancy.**
- **Accessible state-funded childcare facilities in communities and workplaces.**
- **All schools, regardless of ethos, mandated to deliver age-appropriate, fully comprehensive sex education at both primary and secondary level.**
- **Increase in Parental Leave from 6 to 12 months, to be shared between the parents as they choose.**
- **All information provided on education, contraception and abortion should be evidenced based rather than based on religious ethos or practices**
- **Improvement in Maternity Services.**
- **Economic and social equality-close the gender pay gap; social welfare payments to be restored to their pre-austerity levels; adequate provision for lone parents and their families, for people with disabilities and for children with special needs.**
- **Full reproductive rights for people with disabilities.**
- **Full separation of church and state, particularly in healthcare and education.**

Political Context

People Before Profit supports a woman's right to choose. Bodily autonomy is essential for women's liberation, making the struggle for abortion rights extremely important in Ireland today. This struggle has been ongoing for well over 30 years. Members of PBP fought the conservatives in the 1980's and we continue to oppose them today. This means building a radical campaign for abortion rights on both sides of the Irish border.

Thankfully, people power is having an effect. The tragic death of Savita Halappanavar in October 2012 brought thousands of protestors onto the streets. This was the catalyst for Ireland revisiting its archaic abortion laws and the eventual concession of a referendum on the 8th Amendment. Popular pressure against the Church's ownership of St Vincent's National Maternity hospital in 2017 is another example of people power pushing back conservative Ireland.

But we can't trust conservative law makers. In March 2017, People Before Profit presented a private members' bill in the Dail to amend the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act



(2013). Our aim was to remove the 14-year prison sentence from the bill to end the disgraceful criminalisation of women that this entails. Unfortunately, this bill was voted down by most of the other political parties, proving the need for mass mobilisation and grassroots participation in the struggle for abortion rights.

What is the 8th Amendment?

The 8th Amendment was inserted into the Constitution in 1983. The Amendment equates the life of a pregnant woman with that of an embryo or foetus. It states that:

'The state acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right'.

It led directly to death of at least one woman, Savita Halappanavar, because doctors refused to break the law and give her an emergency abortion to save her life. It has also made it difficult for doctors to act to save women's lives more generally.

What is the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act (2013)?

The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act was enacted in 2013. Its stated aim was to ensure abortion access in cases in which pregnancy endangers the pregnant person's life.

However, as Amnesty International noted:

'Neither the Act nor related guidance published in September 2014 provided sufficient assistance to medical professionals in assessing when a pregnancy posed such a risk to life, or adequately protected the rights of the pregnant woman or girl'.

Under the Act, abortion in cases in which the pregnant person's life is not considered by a specialist doctor to be at risk is criminalised, with up to a 14-year prison sentence.

In June 2017, the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled for the second time that Ireland's abortion laws violate the human rights of women and subject them to 'cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment'.

Repeal of the 8th Amendment

Since Savita Halappanavar's death there has been a significant shift in attitudes around abortion in Ireland. Polls now indicate that roughly 80% of the population are in favour of Repealing the 8th Amendment. Polls have also shown widespread support for women being able to access abortions in Ireland up to 12 weeks of a pregnancy.



The fact that the Citizens Assembly recommended that the 8th amendment not be retained in its current form and that abortion be allowed without restrictions up to 12 weeks and for socio economic reasons up to 22 weeks showed that when people are presented with the facts they agree with abortion being much more available. This is borne out by a Red C Poll in October 2017 which showed 60% support for a woman's right to choose.

The mainstream parties are now out of step with what the majority of women in Ireland want. Fianna Fail voted at its 2017 Ard Fheis against repealing the 8th Amendment.

Fine Gael may have individual members who support liberalisation, but the party still remains conservative on this issue. Labour and Sinn Fein only support abortion in limited circumstances putting abortion into good abortions vs. bad abortions and not trusting pregnant people to make their own choices.

To give us the best chance of repealing the 8th we want wording that is straightforward and not confusing. For example "do you want the 8th amendment removed from the constitution?" YES / NO. We also want it repealed and not replaced. Finally, we want an early referendum in April or May before colleges close so that young people travelling for jobs are not disenfranchised.

Free Safe and Legal Abortion Rights

Repeal of the 8th is an important first step, but we need to go further. People Before Profit is committed to the fight for women's full bodily autonomy, including the right to free, safe, and legal abortion.

- We believe that access to abortion is a fundamental human right for women, and crucial to women's economic and social independence.
- We believe abortion should be available country-wide and provided free through the health service, along with full care and support. To make this a reality we would train an adequate number of staff to perform abortions and/or administer the abortion pill in all major hospitals. We would also ensure funding is provided to set up abortion clinics country-wide.
- We seek an end to the regime of secrecy and shame in which 12 women a day are forced to travel abroad to access abortion.
- We want full decriminalisation of women accessing abortion
- We also seek the full legalisation of abortion pills and proper counselling and support around their use.
- We support the rights of men and women who experience disability to the special information and supports they may need to enjoy their sexual and reproductive lives.



Improvement in the Maternity Services

People Before Profit are aware that the 8th amendment affects all areas of pregnancy and birth. Due to the wording of the 8th (*see above*) informed consent is not required from a pregnant person causing major problems for women's health. For example, the HSE national consent policy states "because of the Constitutional provisions on the right to life of the unborn [Article 40.3.3] there is significant legal uncertainty regarding a pregnant woman's right to [consent]".

This policy restricts informed consent and informed refusal of treatment to pregnant women. At no other time in a woman's life is she unable to deny consent to medical procedures performed on her other than during pregnancy. This consent policy has led to women being summoned to the high court at 40 weeks pregnant for refusing treatment they do not consent to, whether these are in line with international best practice or not.

- PBP want maternity care in Ireland to be women centred and based on international best medical practice and not the active management of labour
- This includes ultra-sound scans as a right at 20 weeks. The National Maternity Strategy recommends that all women have access to the scans, which can identify major and in some cases life-threatening problems with the development of a baby's organs as well as fatal foetal abnormalities. The procedure is only available in 12 of the country's 19 maternity hospitals. PBP would immediately ensure this scan is available in all of Irish maternity hospitals

Full Social and Political Equality for Women

People Before Profit also recognise the importance of economic and social equality for women and the significance of this for full reproductive choice. For those who wish to have children, their choice should be facilitated by economic and social supports. We will therefore continue to campaign for proper supports and equality for families and children.

- The years of austerity have widened the gender pay gap: on average, Irish women today are paid 14 per cent less than men.
- We call for all social welfare payments to be restored to their pre-austerity levels; for adequate provision for lone parents and their families, for people with disabilities and for children with special needs.
- We will campaign for an end to child poverty (almost 10% of children in Ireland live in consistent poverty, with 20% of children at risk of poverty), and for the provision of high quality childminding and child care services for all who need them.
- We will continue to campaign for fully equal social, economic, legal and political rights for women.



People Before Profit are affiliated to the Coalition to Repeal the 8th Amendment. This means:

- We are actively involved at building for repeal at a national and local level.
- We have been instrumental in setting up active local groups to campaign on a broad basis for repeal.
- We stand for a simple repeal option and will support legislation in the Dail to provide free and safe abortion in Ireland.
- This will involve repealing the Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act 2013 which criminalises abortion except in the most restrictive of cases.