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Ireland

Women's experience at heart of Yes campaign

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On 25 May, the long-awaited and campaigned-for referendum on changing Ireland's very restrictive abortion law – encapsulated in the 8th amendment to the constitution – will finally be held. The very broad-based Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th launched a tabloid campaign newspaper on 1 May. You can see the publication [Yes Repeal](#) [here](#).

Below we reprint one of the articles by Orla O'Connor and Ailbhe Smyth are co-directors of the national repeal campaign, Together for Yes on why women's experiences are central to the campaign. We published an earlier piece on what horrors the current situation leads to [here](#).

Together For Yes is the national civil society campaign to remove the 8th Amendment from the constitution. We are the broadest platform ever assembled to create a more compassionate Ireland that cares for its women by providing abortion services to those who need them. From day one, this movement has been built on the work and dedication of volunteers, and winning this referendum will be no different. It will be a broad, welcoming, inclusive, and fact-based campaign, always respectful of people's positions and views.

The campaign is co-led by the National Women's Council of Ireland, the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, and the Abortion Rights Campaign. Together, with dozens of organisations, including the Irish Family Planning Association, Rape Crisis Network Ireland, Women's Aid, Parents for Choice, the Union of Students of Ireland, One Family, Doctors for Choice, trade unions and many more, we are focused on achieving laws and services that respond to women's needs and best medical practice. We have support in every village and town in Ireland, and this is indicative of the fact that the overwhelming majority of Irish people want to change our abortion laws because they are too restrictive, and they harm women. At the heart of our campaign are the experiences of women and their families.

Extensive evidence given at the Citizens' Assembly and the Joint Oireachtas Committee was unequivocal: the 8th Amendment harms women and their access to healthcare. On rare occasions, it has caused death, as evidenced by the tragic case of Savita Halappanavar in 2012. Together For Yes represents people who believe that Ireland is a compassionate and contemporary country, and that our laws should support, respect and protect women in their time of greatest need. Removing the 8th Amendment will mean victims of rape who are pregnant, women who learn their pregnancy involves a fatal foetal abnormality, or women whose health is at risk due to their pregnancy will have the choice to access abortion services in their home country. We want to enable women who need abortions to receive compassionate care in appropriate healthcare settings with proper regulation and guidance and without shame, secrecy or stigma. Furthermore, it is important that doctors are able to provide the best care and support possible to women, without fear of prosecution.

We understand that this is a complex and sensitive issue, and we know that talking about abortion can be a tough challenge, that a lot of people still have worries and fears. But we also know, from talking with our own families, friends and neighbours, as well as from the research, that people want to put an end to the suffering and distress. They want to end the lonely journeys women have to make to England, and the bleakness of women taking unregulated abortion pills on their own, without medical supervision, because they can't get the care they need here in Ireland. People want to put an end to the harm and cruelty of the 8th Amendment, and to ensure that women have the compassionate care and support they need, including regulated access to abortion, here at home in Ireland.

This referendum matters to all of us, men and women. We want a fairer, kinder Ireland, a place where women's lives and health are truly respected and protected; an Ireland which is a country where we are proud to live, and a good

place to raise our children and our grandchildren.

Sometimes a personal and private matter needs public support. Life is not black and white, it is much more complex, and we believe that the constitution is not the place to address the complexities of a crisis pregnancy. We believe this decision is a personal, private one that a woman should be allowed to make under the care and support of her doctor, and her family. We can, and must, respond with compassion to the reality of women's lives. Abortions happen here – that is a fact, and we must put laws and services in place to respond compassionately to women's real-life needs.

This referendum is a critical juncture for Ireland and we invite everyone who wishes to create a compassionate environment for women who need abortions in Ireland to join with us in this campaign. Together we can make a real difference to women's lives, by removing the 8th Amendment we can bring an end to the pain and distress of women shut out by their own country.