

Guiding notes for submitting evidence to the Women and Equalities Select Committee's inquiry into the abortion law in Northern Ireland

Why is this inquiry being held?

The [full terms of reference](#) for the inquiry state that the Women and Equalities Select Committee has launched this investigation into the abortion law in Northern Ireland in the light of two key developments:

- The [report](#) earlier this year by the UN Committee on the Eradication of Violence against Women (CEDAW), which states that the law in Northern Ireland violates women's rights, and that it is the responsibility of the UK Government to address this.
- In July 2018, a majority of the judges in the [Supreme Court](#) stated their view that the law is incompatible with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) – on respect for private and family life – in cases of fatal foetal abnormality, rape, and incest.

Who do the Committee want to hear from?

The Committee wants to hear the experiences of people who have been affected by the abortion law in Northern Ireland. This includes women who have sought to have an abortion, the views of the public in Northern Ireland, as well as medical and legal professionals.

What should I include in my response?

This inquiry is primarily focused on the personal experiences of those affected by the abortion restrictions in Northern Ireland. You do not have to answer all of the questions, just those that are relevant to your experiences.

The first question is:

What are the views of the general public, women and medical and legal professionals in Northern Ireland about the law on abortion and whether it should be reformed? How have those views changed over time?

You might want to include:

- Recent polling data, such as those produced by [Amnesty International](#), showing support for abortion reform growing in Northern Ireland.
- As a woman, have your views or the views of women you know about the abortion law in Northern Ireland changed?
- Are you a member of a political party in Northern Ireland? Has the policy of your party changed?
- Are you a doctor or have you discussed abortion law with your doctor or local medical body? Do they support reform?

The second question is:

What are the experiences of women in Northern Ireland who have been affected by the law on abortion?

This question is about your experiences, so you should include information relevant to how you were personally affected by the abortion law. You might want to include some of the following:

- Have you had an abortion or tried to have an abortion in Northern Ireland? What barriers did you face?
- Did you feel able to discuss your options with your doctor or others?
- Did you have to travel to the rest of the UK to access an abortion? How did this make you feel?
- What medical and emotional advice was available to you before and after the abortion?

Please note: If you do not wish your submission to be published, you must clearly say so and explain your reasons for not wishing its disclosure. The Committee will take this into account in deciding whether to publish. If you wish to include private or confidential information in your submission to the Committee, please contact the clerk of the Committee to discuss this.

The third question is:

What are the responsibilities of the UK Government under its international obligations for taking action to reform abortion law in Northern Ireland? How should these be reconciled to the UK's devolution settlement?

You might want to include:

- Abortion is a human right and human rights are a matter for the UK Government
- The [report](#) of the UN CEDAW into abortion law in Northern Ireland
- The right to access healthcare enshrined in UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- Previous rulings at the United Nations Human Rights Council that being forced to travel abroad for abortion access constitutes cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment
- The Supreme Court's recent [findings](#) in relation to fatal foetal abnormality, rape, and incest.

How to submit evidence to a select committee

Select Committees publish [full guidelines](#) regarding how to write and submit evidence to a select committee. However the key rules to follow are:

- It must not be more than 3,000 words long
- It must be a single document
- Do not include logos or pictures, just text
- It must be a word format document
- You must state who the submission is from and whether you are responding in a personal capacity or as part of an organisation
- You must include a summary of the points you want to make at the start
- You must number your paragraphs.

You can submit your written evidence using [the inquiry's online portal](#).