

Final Report of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth  
Amendment – December 2019



Respect and Protect Women's Lives,  
Health and Choices

***‘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.’***

Article 40.3.3 Bunreacht na hÉireann

Article 40.3.3, usually referred to as the Eighth Amendment, was inserted into the Irish Constitution following a referendum in 1983. It effectively equated the life of a pregnant woman<sup>1</sup> with that of an embryo or foetus; thereby creating an unworkable and dangerous distinction between the life of a pregnant woman and her health. In 2014, the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment (hereafter ‘the Coalition’) was launched. The Coalition was an alliance of what became over 100 organisations working together to remove the Eighth Amendment from the Irish Constitution in order to respect and protect the lives, health and choices of women and girls in Ireland. Through their work and the work of countless other organisations and groups in Ireland, the Eighth Amendment was finally repealed in 2018.

---

<sup>1</sup> While the term ‘woman’ is used throughout this report, the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment recognises that not everyone who needs an abortion is a woman and supports access to abortion for everyone who needs it be they cis, trans, non-binary or gender fluid.

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>0</b>
Historical and Present Context .....	0
The Coalition .....	2
The Role of the Coalition .....	3
Coalition Partners .....	4
Coalition Members and Supporters .....	6
Fundraising .....	8
<b>Phase 1: 2014 - 2016 – Setting the Agenda</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>2014 – 2015</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Strategy.....	10
Phase 1 .....	11
Phase 2.....	11
Phase 3.....	11
Governance.....	13
Coalition Building and Mobilisation .....	19
Media and Communications .....	21
Developing Legal and Regulatory Frameworks .....	23
Political Context and Activities .....	24
<b>2016</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Coalition Building and Mobilisation .....	25
Media, Communications and Awareness Raising.....	27
Legal and Regulatory.....	28
Political Context and Activities .....	31
<b>Phase 2: 2017 – Defining and Framing the Issue</b> .....	<b>33</b>
Strategy.....	33
Coalition Building and Mobilisation .....	33
Regional Development .....	35
Communications, Messaging and Awareness Raising.....	36
Public Education Campaigns .....	37
Political and Legal .....	38
<b>Phase 3: January – May 2018 – Referendum Campaign</b> .....	<b>42</b>
Governance.....	42

Communications and Messaging .....	42
Fundraising .....	43
Training, Education and Regional Development .....	44
<b>Post Repeal and the Future of the Coalition .....</b>	<b>46</b>
Legal and Regulatory Coalition Activities .....	46
The North of Ireland .....	47
Conference 2019 .....	47



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

## Introduction

### Historical and Present Context

Historically, Irish abortion law has been among the most stringently prohibitive in the world. In 1861, the Offences Against the Person Act was passed. This act criminalised women who procured an abortion. The Act also made it a crime to assist a woman to procure an abortion and the punishment in both cases was life imprisonment. In addition, the Act criminalised anyone who knowingly supplied the means to procure an abortion. Subsequent amendments to the Constitution and court cases further interpreted the dimensions of abortion in Ireland, however, the 1861 Act remained the basis of criminal law until repealed under the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013<sup>2</sup>.

In 1983, the Referendum on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution (Article 40.3.3) passed after a bitterly contested campaign. 53% of the electorate voted with 67% in favour and 33% against.

Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution was inserted into the Constitution to read:

---

*“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.”*

---

In 1992, the Supreme Court ruled in *Attorney General v. X* that a 14 year old girl, known as X, pregnant as a result of rape, faced a real and substantial risk to her life due to threat of suicide and this threat could only be averted by the termination of her pregnancy. Therefore, X was entitled to an abortion in Ireland under the provision of Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution that required the State to have "due regard to the equal right to life of the mother".

As a result of the X case judgment and challenges made relating to freedom to travel to obtain an abortion or freedom to distribute information on abortion, the Government put forward three possible amendments to the Constitution in a 1992 referendum.

---

<sup>2</sup> Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013 - <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2013/act/35/enacted/en/print.html>



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

The three amendments included:

- The freedom to travel outside the State for an abortion. Passed
- The freedom to obtain or make available information on abortion services outside the State, subject to conditions. Passed
- To roll back the X Case judgment in order to remove suicide as grounds for abortion in Ireland. Rejected

Twenty years later, in 2002, Irish voters rejected the Twenty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution (Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy) Bill, 2002 which again sought to remove the threat of suicide as grounds for abortion and increase the penalties for helping a woman have an abortion. Twice the government had given the citizens of Ireland the opportunity to enact stricter regulations on abortion in Ireland, and twice they had rejected such an opportunity.

In July 2013 the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act was signed into law. The Act was intended to implement the 1992 judgment of the Supreme Court in the X case and the 2010 European Court of Human Rights in the case of A, B and C v Ireland, and to provide for lawful access to abortion where a pregnant woman's life is at risk. However, the new legislation prohibited abortion in cases of rape, incest, inevitable miscarriage and fatal foetal abnormality and the terms under which a person was deemed eligible for abortion on the basis of risk of suicide were highly contested and deemed inaccessible and impractical in the reality of the Irish healthcare system.

Over the past three decades, numerous women's, human rights, student and youth, trade unions, medical, legal, and health care organisations have fought for women's right to legal abortion in Ireland. Among the most prominent organisations are: National Women's Council of Ireland, Abortion Rights Campaign, Action for Choice, ROSA, Cork Pro-Choice, Amnesty International Ireland, Irish Council for Civil Liberties, Union of Students in Ireland, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, UNITE the Union, Irish Family Planning Association, Dublin Well Woman Centre, Doctors for Choice, Terminations for Medical Reasons, Midwives for Choice, Lawyers for Choice, and Artists for Repeal, among others. Their work on the issue has included:

- Awareness-raising, public education and information dissemination
- Research and policy development
- Public opinion measurement
- Political advocacy
- International legal and human rights advocacy



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

- Regional and National organising and mobilisation
- Fundraising

Following the introduction of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act in 2013, the movement to delete the prohibitive 40.3.3 clause in the Constitution, and for women's right to choose grew rapidly. It triggered the coming together of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment and finally, in 2018, the Irish government called a referendum on the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution leading to its repeal by the citizens of Ireland.

### **The Coalition**

On the 7th of October 2013, the 30th Anniversary of signing the Eighth Amendment into the Irish constitution, 12 women's and civil society organisations released a joint statement highlighting the detrimental impact that the Eighth Amendment, also known as Article 40.3.3, had on women in Ireland and announced a national campaign for its repeal. The joint statement was signed and endorsed by National Women's Council of Ireland, Doctors for Choice, Action on X, Irish Council for Civil Liberties, Abortion Rights Campaign, Socialist Party, Akidwa, Cork Women Right to Choose Group, Dublin Wellwoman Centre, Termination for Medical Reasons Ireland, Unite and the Union of Students in Ireland and marked the joining together of what would come to be known as The Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment.

The Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment was an alliance of organisations set up early in 2014, shortly after the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013 was signed into law. With 12 founding members, it came to reach over 100 members, representing over 1.5 million people in Ireland and making it the largest ever civil society grouping in Ireland working for social and constitutional change on the issue of abortion rights. Its members included human rights, feminist and pro-choice organisations; trade unions; medical and health provider organisations; student and youth organisations; NGOs, and community organisations.

**Vision** An Ireland where human rights to bodily autonomy and equal health care are fully recognised and respected in law and practice.

**Mission** To achieve repeal of the Eight Amendment to the Constitution as an essential step towards ensuring access to abortion services in Ireland as part of reproductive health care.



## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### Values

- ✓ The human right to make our own decisions about our bodies, regardless of gender, is fundamental and should be fully respected.
- ✓ Women must have the right to make reproductive healthcare decisions that they determine to be in their best interests and those of their families.
- ✓ It is time for Ireland to acknowledge the realities of women's reproductive lives and to legislate accordingly.
- ✓ The right to informed consent is fundamental and should be respected without question throughout our health care services.
- ✓ All women, without distinction or discrimination, have an equal right to access safe, legal and free reproductive health care services, including abortion, in Ireland.
- ✓ Appropriate information, structures, and services must be provided to ensure that women can access abortion in Ireland when that is their choice.

### The Role of the Coalition

The Coalition's strategic objective was to overcome movement fragmentation and issue dilution by bringing together the extensive but disparate range of organisations in the field to work collectively with the tightly focussed common aim of achieving repeal of the Eighth Amendment. Within the Coalition each member organisation maintained its own distinctive identity and ethos, while at the same time actively contributing to a collective and collaborative project to bring about fundamental change for women.

The unique value of the Coalition lay firstly in its strength as a platform of over 100 organisations, representing 1.5 million people in Ireland. This was a very significant civil society force which legislators could not ignore. No less importantly, it represented massive mobilising power with the capacity to lead an eventual referendum campaign.

The distinctive role of the Coalition lay in its synergistic function as a cohesive alliance to tackle the issue of abortion. Within the space of two years, the Coalition succeeded in assembling the largest and broadest ever platform to advocate for abortion rights and access in Ireland, with an effective organisational and operational structure and a clear agreed mission and strategic goals.

The Coalition facilitated and promoted:

- The expression of a collectively held vision
- Collaborative and consensual strategic goal setting
- Dialogue between diverse civil society and political sectors





### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

- Cooperative partnerships between organisations
- Structures for formulating an agreed set of central campaign messages and their disciplined dissemination
- Issue recognition and visibility via collective 'branding'
- A common reference point and resource for regional and local mobilisation and capacity-building
- Information sharing and resource pooling
- Financial and other resource economies through cooperation and sharing

The Coalition promoted and fostered the clear understanding that no one sector or organisation alone can lead a winning referendum campaign on what was a very contentious issue, and that working together was crucial to achieving repeal of the Eighth Amendment. By working together, the Coalition and its member organisations succeeded in positioning abortion as an urgent women's and human rights issue on the political agenda and in popular opinion, and in creating a vital, determined and focussed movement leading to repeal of the Eighth Amendment.

### **Coalition Partners**

The Coalition worked cooperatively with their members providing practical support, technical assistance, and networking, as well as a platform for developing ideas, strategies, actions and projects. All member groups and organizations contributed to the cause and supported the Coalition in achieving repeal of the Eighth Amendment. The Coalition held close continuous working relationships with Irish Council of Civil Liberties, ICCL, and National Women's Council of Ireland, NWCI, both founding members of the Coalition.

The ICCL supported the Coalition generously through direct financial gifts particularly in the start-up phase and continued to do so through significant 'in-kind' contributions. Coalition office space was provided by the ICCL and the Coalition drew gratefully on their administrative and technical infrastructure. The ICCL provided the Coalition with guidance and support on governance and fiscal matters, and also provided expertise and oversight of the Coalition's financial management. The Coalition's on-going dialogue with ICCL on strategic and policy issues enabled the Coalition to ground their advocacy in international human rights best practice and to plan common projects with the ICCL in this field.



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

The Coalition worked closely with the NWCI on public and political advocacy, in particular in seeking to achieve maximum issue awareness in the parliamentary context. This proved very productive. In preparation for the 2016 general election, the Coalition successfully collaborated with NWCI to obtain pro-repeal pledge and manifesto signatures from candidates. At this time, they also made a joint approach to seek commitments of support for repeal from the major political parties by attending the parties' annual conferences together and holding joint information meetings. The Coalition Convenor and NWCI CEO held regular strategy meetings, and their media and social media teams collaborated and planned continuously. The NWCI also made their meeting space facilities available to the Coalition for monthly Steering Group meetings, and for seminars and workshops.



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

## Coalition Members and Supporters

Action for Choice	MERJ Ireland
AIMSI (Association for Improvements in Maternity Services Ireland)	Midwives for Choice
Akidwa	National Traveller Women's Forum
Alliance for Choice	NCCWN (National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks)
Amnesty International	Need Abortion Ireland
Anti-Racism Network	Nurses For Choice
ARC (Abortion Rights Campaign)	NWCI (National Women's Council of Ireland)
ARC Clare	NXF (National LGBT Federation)
ASLEF the Union	One Family
Atheist Ireland	Outhouse
BeLong To	Parents for Choice
Bi+ Ireland	People Before Profit Alliance
Bray and District Trade Council	Pro Choice Wexford
Celbridge 4 Repeal	Psychologists For Choice
Centre for Gender, Feminisms and Sexualities, UCD	Rape Crisis Network Ireland
Choice Ireland	Rathdown Repeal
CWI (Community Work Ireland)	Re(al)Productive Health
CWU (Communications Workers Union)	Rebels 4 Choice (Cork)
DCU FemSoc	Repeal 8 Forum Dublin SC
Doctors for Choice	Repeal Dublin 16/18
Dublin Bay North North Repeal the 8 <sup>th</sup>	Repeal LK
Dublin Central Repeal 8	Repeal Project
Dublin NW Repeal	Repeal the 8th Dublin Mid West
Dublin South Central Repeal the 8 <sup>th</sup>	Repeal the 8th Global
Dublin SW Pro Choice	Reproductive Rights are Disability Rights
Dublin Well Woman Centre	ROSA
Dublin West Pro Choice	Scottish-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign
Dun Laoghaire Repeal the 8 <sup>th</sup>	Sligo Repeal the Eighth



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

Dziewuchy Dziewuchom	Social Democrats
Eight Stories	Social Workers For Choice
Equality & Rights Alliance (ERA)	Socialist Party
Everyday Stories	Socialist Workers Party
Galway Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment	Solidarity
Galway Pro-Choice Group	South East Coalition for Repeal
Grandparents For Repeal	Strike4Repeal
Green Party of Ireland	SWAI (Sex Workers Alliance Ireland)
Humanist Association Ireland	TCD Students' Union
HUN Real Issues	TEEU (Technical Electrical Engineering Union)
ICTU (Irish Congress of Trades Unions)	TENI (Transgender Equality Network Ireland)
ICTU Youth	TFMR Ireland (Terminations for Medical Reasons)
ICCL (Irish Council for Civil Liberties)	The Workers' Party Ireland
IFPA (Irish Family Planning Association)	Tipp For Choice
IMPACT Trade Union	Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8 <sup>th</sup>
Kerry for Choice	TUC (UK)
Labour Equality	UCD Students' Union
Labour Party	UL Medical Students for Choice
Labour Women	UNITE the Union
Labour Youth	ULA (United Left Alliance)
Lawyers for Choice	Unison (The Public Service Union UK)
LGBT+ For Choice	USI (Union of Students in Ireland)
Limerick Feminist Network	Voices For Choice
LINC	Waterford Trade Council
London-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign	Wicklow For Choice
Mandate Trade Union	X-ile Project
Meath for Choice	YCHRE (Youth Council for Human Rights & Equality)
Medical Students for Choice	Young Greens Ireland



## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### Fundraising

The broad-based nature of the Coalition provided both challenges and opportunities in terms of fundraising. Without a single strategy across all member groups and organizations, the Coalition ran the risk of sending an ineffective message to supporters by making too many requests for donations, potentially targeting the same people but missing others and having inconsistent messaging and donation targets. The Coalition worked to mitigate these challenges by creating a single coordinated strategy which facilitated cohesive, cross-Coalition fundraising activities and awareness.

The Coalition identified seven main sources of funding: General donations, typically donated via social media, street collections, major donors of €200+, overseas donors, typically Irish citizens living abroad, donations from corporate supporters, philanthropic donations, and crowd funding donations. A different approach was required for each donation source regarding how to identify different sources, how to contact and engage with them, when to contact them, and the average donation. Social media and email were key methods of engaging with existing and potential donors. The Coalition ran successful fundraising campaigns which were strongly supported by social media including the #Give8Repeal8 campaign.

A significant portion of the Coalition's overall funding came from small-scale fundraising by activists around the country thanks to the Coalition's strong grassroots base. The Coalition acted as an enabler for crowd funding across the country by providing activists with the tools to easily organize and deliver successful crowd funding events. Support tools included providing archetypes for events, online collection tools, and simple systems for passing on all money collected, and helping activists to identify crowd funding events which were most successful at raising significant amounts for the level of effort required.

Strong fundraising supported the Coalition in achieving the following outcomes:

- A strong, broad-based fully functioning Coalition working cohesively throughout the country
- A soundly governed, fully compliant Coalition
- A funded Coalition, with excellent financial management and donor liaison, and with ample resources to work effectively countrywide to achieve a referendum

Organisational resources to enable the Coalition to achieve their goal:

- Focused, experienced campaign management team
- Distinctive campaign identity / 'brand'



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

- Effective messages and message delivery mechanisms
- Strong, clear arguments and rebuttals
- Sound campaign data-capture systems
- Well-trained media spokespeople nationally and regionally
- Smart social media and networking structures
- Well-equipped activists throughout the country
- Effective communication with members, allies and supporters
- Broad-based political support across the Dáil (parliament)
- A healthy community of energetic supporters, allies and champions throughout the country
- Strong, effective strategy



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

## Phase 1: 2014 - 2016 – Setting the Agenda

The road to repeal can be broken into 3 strategic campaign phases. Phase 1 roughly accounts for 2014-2016. This period was focused on setting the agenda and building a platform from which the Coalition could work towards achieving repeal. Phase 2 accounts for 2017 and focused on defining and framing the issue of repeal. Lastly, Phase 3 accounts for January – May 2018, the lead up to the referendum.

2014 was an ‘establishment’ period, during which the Coalition agreed upon governance, membership, and organisational structures; and drew up the Coalition Constitution. Much of 2014 and early 2015 focused on building and strengthening the Coalition as they worked to increase membership and broaden their reach throughout the country. By the end of 2015, the Coalition had grown to a broad-based alliance of over 45 member groups and organisations.

2015 found the Coalition focusing on strategy development, political lobbying, continuing to expand membership and raising the profile of the coalition and the issue of repeal. 2015 was a year of rapidly growing coalition membership and increased visibility of the issue of abortion in politics and the media. As the Coalition began to grow in numbers, they began to focus increasingly on strategy development, lobbying and public awareness raising. To support this, resources were centred on research and messaging development, development of an in-depth communications strategy and political lobbying as a general election approached in 2016.

The upcoming general election created points of potential change, and an appropriate time to target politicians. Considerable resources were focused on ensuring repeal was on the election manifestos of all political parties for the 2016 general election. However, meeting with TDs or political representatives did not exclude the Coalition from organising and participating in other forms of action including protests and marches. The Coalition agreed upon the need to act in multiple directions. The campaign needed to be multi-faceted and multi-scalar, working at both a political, governmental level and on a public level, connecting to the people. It was also important that the issue of abortion and repeal of the Eighth Amendment remain a key issue in the news. Not only a key issue, but one which was highlighted in a positive manner.

## 2014 – 2015

### Strategy

When founded in 2014, the Coalition aimed to develop a strategic framework with a 3 to 5 year timeframe. It sought the participation or support of as many different groups and organisations as



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

possible, including trade unions, civil society and community organisations, as well as women's organisations, groups and networks. The founding members grew from five members to approximately 20 by the end of 2014 and totalling over 100 by the end of the campaign.

When drawing up a strategy, the Coalition took certain considerations into account. The Coalition recognised the need for a broadly supported, multifaceted, all-Ireland encompassing campaign which focused not on the voices of the experts but on the voices of the people. Similarly, the repeal campaign was not just about abortion. The Coalition sought to address not only the illegality of abortion under the Eighth Amendment, but the dangers to women's' health that this amendment posed. Reproductive rights are multi-faceted and encompass parenting support, maternity rights, birthing choices and other issues. In light of this, the campaign highlighted the lived experience of reproductive rights in Ireland. It was also important to create a campaign which included all voices including the experiences of trans individuals and non-binary gender identities. This was reflected in the Coalition governing principles and in membership of groups such as Transgender Equality Network Ireland.

The Coalition were aware from the start of the need to take not only a parliamentary approach in their strategy, but also a campaigning focus to engage with the wider public to bring them to a pro-choice perspective. With this in mind, the Coalition engaged with the government and political representatives but also recognised the need to connect at a grassroots level, build regional support networks and connect with the public. It was important that the campaign not become Dublin-centred but accommodated and represented groups and organisations across the country in order to mobilise the broadest possible support for the coalition.

In drawing up their strategic plan, the Coalition approached it both temporally and thematically.

A timeframe was developed encompassing three strategic phases:

- Phase 1** ✓ Setting the Agenda (2014 – 2016)
  - ✓ Political Frame – General Election (March 2016)
- Phase 2** ✓ Defining and Framing the issue (2017)
  - ✓ Political Frame – Citizens' Assembly (Jan – Apr 2017, Joint Oireachtas Committee (June / Sept – Dec 2017)
- Phase 3** ✓ Referendum Campaign (Jan - May 2018)
  - ✓ Political Frame – Oireachtas Debate, Referendum Proposition, Legislative Proposals





### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

The Coalition's strategy covered the following strategic themes:

- Coalition Building
- Fundraising
- Communications
- Political
- Research and Messaging
- Mobilisation
- Public Awareness-raising
- Operations / Admin
- Finance / Governance

The following provides an outline of the Coalition's 2015 strategy. The Coalition continued to develop and focus their strategy in order to successfully achieve the aims of Phase 1 and to prepare for Phase 2 and Phase 3 - a national referendum campaign.

#### **Strategic Outline Phase 1:**

- Build a national campaign, working closely with Coalition members throughout the country
- Maintain current activist momentum, in the wake of the successful Marriage Equality referendum campaign, by seeking to expand membership and raise profile through a diverse range of activities including:
  - Holding local meetings and street stalls
  - Participation in civil society and trade union events
- Developing a strong social media strategy
- Lobby political parties to include repeal of the Eighth Amendment in election manifestos for the forthcoming general election;
- Brief members of the Oireachtas on Coalition aims and strategy;
- Develop information materials to widen and strengthen public awareness of the issue;
- Working with medical professionals and service providers, lawyers, and grass roots activists, develop, debate and draft, as needed, alternative regulatory and/or legislative measures;
- Undertake a probing 'Messaging' exercise to explore appropriate language and messages for a referendum campaign;
- Identify and achieve funding for our activities, and eventually for a full-scale referendum campaign;



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

- Ensure best practice in governance and full compliance of Coalition with NGO and campaigning regulations.

## Governance

A Coalition Governance Structure and Coalition and Member Guidelines were essential requirements in building a strong framework on which to go forth and fight for repeal. Both the Guidelines for the Coalition and its Members, and Coalition Governance Structure are included in the following pages.

A subgroup was formed in October 2014 to develop a clear governance structure for the Coalition. The Committee's proposals were presented and discussed at the December 2014 steering group meeting and later amended in July 2015. The agreed upon governance structure included Coalition aims, principles, and objectives; details regarding membership, finance, and dissolution; and working guidelines of the Steering Group, Sub-Groups and Committees, National Assembly and Annual General Meeting. When formulating the aims and objectives of the coalition, it was agreed that a formulation was needed which was broad enough to accommodate the different aims and objectives of all the members of the Coalition yet at the same time, explicit enough that the aims and objectives of the coalition were clear.

Guidelines were drafted both for the Coalition and its Members, with the Coalition being defined as its member groups and organisations. They were finalised in September 2015 and provided a practical and ethical framework for decision making and instilled a sense of responsibility and accountability among the Coalition and its members.

With a wonderfully broad and growing membership, a cohesive Coalition which nurtured an open and collaborative ethos and a spirit of organisational complementarity was promoted by:

- Information sharing
- Resource sharing and pooling
- Participatory strategy planning working groups
- Partnerships between member organisations
- National and regional networking
- Shared fundraising initiatives

As the Coalition found its feet and developed a strong framework regarding the desired outcome of the Coalition, it was important to achieve a clear understanding of what working in a Coalition meant. The work of the Coalition did not replace or overshadow the work of individual member groups and



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

organisations but sought to offer added value and support in achieving the shared aim of repealing the eighth amendment. Finding an effective and flexible working structure and ethos was a key component of 2014 as member groups and organisations learned how best to work together in coalition to achieve their common aim.



## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### Coalition Governance Structure

#### Aims

The aim of the Coalition is to achieve repeal the Eight Amendment to the Constitution so as to respect and protect women's lives, health and choices.

*While we have used the term 'woman' in formulating our aim, the Coalition recognises that not everyone who may need an abortion is a woman. We support access to abortion for everyone, be they cis, trans or gender-fluid.*

#### Principles

The governing, organisational and membership structures of the Coalition will be rooted in principles of openness, inclusivity, accessibility and accountability. Best practice in governance and financial management will be strictly observed.

#### Objectives

The objectives and activities of the Coalition are:

- ✓ to meet regularly to develop strategic thinking for achieving repeal of the Eighth Amendment
- ✓ to gather the information and expertise necessary to achieve the Coalition's aim
- ✓ to agree and implement a programme of activities relevant to the Coalition's aim
- ✓ to devise educational and awareness-raising activities relevant to achieving repeal of the Eighth Amendment
- ✓ to hold public meetings, conferences and other events relevant to the aim of the Coalition
- ✓ to publish and circulate materials relevant to the aim of the Coalition
- ✓ to engage with the media in order to advance the Coalition's aim.

#### Membership

- ✓ Membership of the Coalition will be open to all groups and organisations in agreement with the aims of the Coalition.
- ✓ Individuals will be welcome to become supporters of the Coalition.
- ✓ Overseas affiliations to the Coalition will be welcome.

#### Steering Group

*The principle functions of the Steering Group will be to:*

- ✓ develop and activate policy and strategic direction as agreed by National Assembly
- ✓ liaise with member organisations and regions to ensure strategy activation and open communication
- ✓ ensure good governance and financial management

*The composition of the Steering Group will be as follows:*

- ✓ Each member group or organisation may send up to two representatives to attend Steering Group meetings
- ✓ The Convenor, Secretary, and Treasurer will be nominated and elected by the Steering Group annually.



## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### *Steering Group Meetings*

- ✓ The Steering Group will meet approximately every 4 – 6 weeks

### *The decision-making process will be as follows:*

- ✓ Decision-making on the Steering Group will normally be by consensus. In the event of a vote being required, each member group or organisation will have one vote.

Non-Steering Group members will be welcome to attend Steering Group meetings with adequate prior notice (for reasons of space).

### Sub-groups and committees

Sub-groups or committees will meet as required and will report back to the Steering Group. Sub-group members will be nominated by the Steering Group.

### National Assembly

#### *Function*

- ✓ To discuss and agree Coalition policy and strategic direction

#### *Decision-making*

- ✓ Decision-making will normally be by consensus. In the event of a vote being required, voting will be by members only, with one vote per group or organisation.

#### *Participation*

- ✓ As well as member groups or organisations, National Assembly meetings will be open to the public. Only Coalition members will be entitled to vote.

#### *National Assembly Meetings*

National Assembly normally meets twice a year, and must meet at least once a year.

### Annual General Meeting

The AGM will normally be held in October. The AGM will:

- ✓ Approve the annual verified accounts, or statement of income and expenditure
- ✓ Appoint an accounts auditor or verifier as required
- ✓ Approve the signatories for the bank account
- ✓ Empower the Steering Group to nominate or elect at its next meeting a Chair (Convenor), Secretary, and Treasurer for the year. The roles of Secretary and Treasurer may be established as a single office.
- ✓ The AGM may, on the recommendation of the Steering group, set membership fees, if any, for the year, on receiving the report of the year's activities.
- ✓ Decide any other business.
- ✓ All members are entitled to attend AGM. The AGM will only go ahead if there is a quorum, i.e. one-quarter of the members. Decisions will be made by simple majority of those attending on the basis of one vote per member organisation. In the event of a tie the Chair shall have the casting vote.

### Finance

- ✓ The Coalition may raise funds as necessary to fulfil its aims.
- ✓ The Coalition shall open a bank account in the name of Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment
- ✓ The Coalition shall decide at the establishment of the Coalition and



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

thereafter at the annual meeting who shall be the approved signatories. A minimum of two approved signatures shall be required for any withdrawal.

**Dissolution**

The Coalition will be dissolved if a simple majority of the members agree to do so. Any surplus of funds at the time of dissolution shall be distributed to other properly constituted groups or organisations with similar aims.



## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### Guidelines for the Coalition and its Members

The member groups and organisations **ARE** the Coalition.

*The Coalition will strive to:*

- Follow democratic principles in all its activities.
- Respect the diverse nature of the organisations within it, with regard to type and sector, aims, size, structure and capacity.
- Expand and strengthen the Coalition by developing membership and growing resources and capacity.
- Keep member organisations and groups informed and engaged through regular and effective communication.
- Address organisational and resource needs within the Coalition.
- Keep agreed strategic directions under review and revise as needed.
- Revise and implement action plans and keep activities and projects moving ahead.
- Identify and measure short- and long-term outcomes; assess challenges, changes and successes; move on to new goals and strategies as needed.
- Keep minutes of meetings and appropriate records of activities.
- Follow best practice in managing the finances of the Coalition.
- Ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.
- Acknowledge the benefits and work with the challenges of collaboration.
- Acknowledge the contributions and expectations of Coalition members.

*Coalition Members will:*

- Share the aims of the Coalition, and will commit to being as engaged in Coalition activities as their resources and capacity allow.
- Play an active role in building and strengthening the Coalition so as to achieve its strategic activities.
- Respect the need for regulatory compliance, sound financial management, and good governance.
- Acknowledge the benefits and work with the challenges of collaboration.
- Acknowledge the contributions and expectations of other Coalition members.



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

## Coalition Building and Mobilisation Membership

In 2014 and 2015, the Coalition worked to maintain the momentum created by the official launch of the Coalition at their 2014 conference. They continued to expand membership and raise the profile of the Coalition through a diverse range of actions and activities. Membership of the Coalition was open to all groups and organisations in agreement with the aims of the Coalition. Individuals were welcome to become supporters of the Coalition and overseas affiliations to the Coalition were also welcome. Membership fees were introduced in March 2015. These fees were based on a sliding scale, dependent on the size and financial health of individual organisations.

In January 2015, there were approximately 20 member organisations and groups in the Coalition, including pro-choice groups, NGOs, and trade unions. This was a time of rapid growth in membership for the Coalition, with numbers reaching 45 member groups and organisations by the end of the year. In 2015, members came to include Amnesty Ireland, BeLong To, One Family Ireland, and X-ile Project, joining a wide range of other NGOs, political groups and trade unions. Endorsement of the Coalition by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions provided an important signal that the trade union movement recognised Repeal of the Eighth as a key workplace issue, further underlining its relevance across society strata. The relevance of Repeal of the Eighth across societal layers and groups is perhaps most apparent in its varied spectrum of member groups and organisations.

## Regional Development and Training

In broadening and strengthening the coalition, it was important that all regions in the country be represented. Like many campaigning organisations in Ireland the Coalition's membership was concentrated in Dublin, so in 2015 the Coalition worked on strengthening and developing closer links with regional organisations outside of Dublin. This was a key part in the process of mobilising and structuring grassroots campaign activities. The Coalition strongly encouraged and supported the formation of local 'Repeal the Eighth' campaign groups and came to see more localised Coalitions forming later in the campaign including The Cork Coalition and the North-West Coalition. A national 'Repeal Mobilisation' meeting in February 2016 brought together existing pro-choice and repeal groups from across Ireland providing the opportunity for members to connect and support each other in their campaign activities. The Coalition also benefited greatly from the experience of Coalition member organisations with strong regional membership and networks, such as the National Women's Council of Ireland, Akidwa, and the Abortion Rights Campaign.

With great differences amongst the size and background of member organisations and groups, it soon became apparent that education and training was required to provide members with the opportunity to





### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

expand their knowledge on the matter of Repeal the Eighth and to access mobilization and campaign training. Workshops began in 2015, with the first focused on 'Learning from the Marriage Equality Campaign' and led by the campaign co-Director and key campaign team members. This provided an excellent opportunity to support and learn from a previously successful referendum campaign. A second workshop was held in February 2016 on social media management and this was followed by monthly training workshops through-out the year on campaign skills-building.

### Events

In 2015, the Coalition were invited to contribute to a wide range of meetings and events including the National Women's Council 'FemFest' for Young Women; UN Beijing + 20, Dublin; Medical Students for Choice annual conference; launch meeting of TCD Student Union for Repeal of the Eighth; Abortion Papers launch; and the ILGA Seminar in Brussels. The Coalition participated in activist events around the country, including the Abortion Pill Bus, organized by member organization ROSA, and the annual March for Choice organized by the Abortion Rights Campaign, a founding member of the Coalition. International Women's Day in March provided a perfect opportunity to showcase the range and diversity of the coalition with all member groups encouraged to organise a "Repeal the Eighth Amendment" themed event around International Women's Day / Week.

### Conference 2014 – Building a Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment

The first National Coalition Conference was held in September 2014 and attended by over 300 people. This conference provided an opportunity to officially launch the campaign. The theme was policy and politics and the focus was on building a Coalition to repeal the Eighth Amendment. The aim of the 2014 Coalition Conference was to discuss how to build a broad-based campaign to repeal the eighth amendment to make abortion available in Ireland to protect and safeguard women's lives, health and choices. Sessions included "Abortion in Ireland: The Current Situation", "Human Rights, Equality and the Law", and "Campaign Strategies and Tactics". Speakers included Therese Caherty, Mara Clarke, Pauline Conroy, Niall Behan and Clare Daly. A range of groups and organisations participated in the concluding panel including ARC, Choice Ireland, Cork Women's Right to Choose, and National Women's Council of Ireland.

### Conference 2015 – What Women Need

With such a wide-reaching membership and increasing numbers, the Conferences held by the Coalition offered an opportunity to bring member groups and organisations together to connect under a shared mission, celebrate achievements and support each other in the fight for repeal.



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

The 2015 Coalition Conference was held in September 2015. This conference focused on why Ireland needed to repeal the Eighth Amendment through the lens of what women need. The conference also had a strategic campaigning and activism focus so as to continue to strengthen the strategic development of the coalition. There were sessions which focused on Information, Services, and Access; and Justice, Law, and Human Rights, with a third session which looked at Strategy and Action. Speakers included Doris Abuchi-Ogbonda, Ann Furedi, Dr. Ursula Barry, and Mairead Enright. Coalition member groups and organisations also offered contributions on strategy and member organisations were invited to set up stalls with information about joining organisations, upcoming events and activities and ways to get involved.

### **Funding and Resources**

As of January 2015, the Coalition had no regular source of funding, although donations were given by some member organisations to cover the cost of the September 2014 conference. It was realised early on in the campaign that fundraising needed to be a central focus if the Coalition were to achieve repeal. In light of this, a subgroup was set up in Summer 2015 to focus on fundraising. Up until that point, the actions of the coalition had been funded by generous donations from member groups and organisations, including Catholics for Choice and Unite the Union.

Expansion of the Coalition in 2015 was largely due to the generosity and goodwill of members and volunteers. Desk-space, and support in the areas of communications, policy and administration were provided by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties while Coalition members worked voluntarily and extensively on political, media and fundraising strategies. In 2015, the Coalition Steering Group met every month in the offices of the National Women's Council to oversee governance, strategic action and the Coalition work programme.

### **Media and Communications**

With the passing of 2015, pressure for repeal of the Eighth Amendment grew. As such, the presence and visibility of the issue increased in both traditional and social media. The Coalition worked to maintain this presence through public events, conferences and rallies, and through major publications such as the Amnesty International research report *She's Not a Criminal*, the ICCL-led *Your Rights, Right Now* UPR report, the IFPA Annual Report, and the essay collection *The Abortion Papers Ireland: Volume 2*, edited by Aideen Quilty, Sinéad Kennedy, and Catherine Conlon.

By this point, the Coalition had a Facebook page and Twitter account which were both updated on a regular basis, and it was agreed that online and social media should be considered to be part of a



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

general media approach. The domain repealeight.ie was purchased and development of a user-friendly website began. Social media was identified as a valuable communication and relationship building resource. With this in mind, the Coalition significantly increased its activity on Facebook and Twitter and attracted high volumes of traffic on both.

The Coalition's relationship with the media began to take a practical and structured form in 2015. The Coalition issued regular press releases on key issues, held and participated in press conferences, and contributed to radio and tv current affairs programmes. An extensive press pack was distributed to journalists and broadcasters, helping to structure and drive the development of the Coalition's media relationship and build media contacts across the board. As communication activities increased greatly during 2015, the Coalition realized the need to develop a more sharply focused and comprehensive communications strategy. This process began during 2015 with the support of the ICCL Communications team and the communications strategy was released in 2016 in collaboration with Alice PR, the Coalition's Communications and PR support.

### **'Heads up' Communications Strategy**

Cohesive and strategic communications played a key role in the Coalition. Not only in their approach to communication via social media, traditional media and with the public, but amongst the Coalition itself. This was an enormous coming together of groups and organisations who held nuanced views on the matter of abortion, and were doing immense work separate to the Coalition to support repeal of the Eighth Amendment.

A 'Heads up' media and communications strategy was introduced early on to support this. This strategy aimed to address the risk of duplication, or of like-minded groups acting at cross purposes or cancelling each other's efforts out. The Coalition also wanted to ensure that in its own media work, it did not interfere with the media engagements and other activities undertaken by groups in the Coalition.

With this in mind, the Coalition suggested that as and when coalition members had planned or booked media engagements (interviews, press conferences, etc) that a 'heads up' be given to the Coalition. This was with a view to ensuring the Coalition and other members did not do anything that might clash with such engagements, or so they could carry on their own activities with other engagements in mind. By the same note, the Coalition ensured that member organisations were given a 'heads up' on any media engagements that arose.

Steps such as these, enabled coalition members to support each other in the delivery of a cohesive and strategic communications plan.



## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### **Developing Legal and Regulatory Frameworks**

Opinion polls in 2015 showed a consistent majority in favour of Repeal, demonstrating not a need for change within Irish society but the need for change within Irish legislation so as to reflect the needs, wants and values of modern Irish society. In 2015, discussions began regarding what legal, woman-centred abortion provision might look like post-repeal. Irish Council for Civil Liberties, Doctors for Choice, and Lawyers for Choice, played key roles in the discussion of this framework. It was agreed to establish a working group to begin discussing possible options post-repeal. The Coalition solicited opinions from a wide range of perspectives including medical, legal, human rights, legislative, parliamentary, trade union, political and activist. Member groups were encouraged to hold their own discussions on what comes after Repeal of the Eighth and to feed those discussions into the Coalition Steering Group.

The second Annual Conference of the Coalition took place in September 2015, and centred on the question What Do Women Need? Taking a woman-centred approach, this conference provided an opportunity for in-depth discussion of regulatory and legislative approaches to abortion and issues of service provision and access. Plenary speakers included lawyers, medical professionals, and service providers and plenary sessions were followed up by workshops which addressed legal and regulatory issues alongside a wide range of strategy, activist and advocacy issues.

In late autumn of 2015, a series of Position Papers were commissioned from individuals and organisations to both facilitate discussion of the broad and nuanced range of issues associated with the case for repeal of the Eighth Amendment, and to reflect the diversity of positions within the Coalition. Titles included 'International Human Rights standards, 'Contextualising the Canadian model', and 'Definition of 'Unborn' in Law'. Exploration of regulation and legislation in the area of abortion was also supported by a two-day residential seminar in October 2015, organised by the Irish Family Planning Association, the Centre for Reproductive Rights, and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties.

The Coalition made a number of presentations and submissions to international human rights bodies and also expressed their support for events and publications on human rights and abortion by member organisations during 2015. Submissions were made to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the UN Human Rights Committee, and the UN Committee on the elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) highlighting the lack of human rights centred abortion legislation in Ireland at the time.



## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### **Political Context and Activities**

A key focus of the Coalition's aims for 2015 was to ensure that repeal of the Eighth Amendment was firmly on the Election Manifestos of all the political parties for the upcoming General Election in 2016. The Coalition also sought the commitment that repeal of the Eighth Amendment would be a red line issue for participation in government. The election created a key opportunity to develop political lines of communication and significant resources were dedicated to supporting these actions in 2015. The Coalition focused on writing to general secretaries of political parties to arrange meetings with the Coalition, meeting with individual TDs and ministers, as well as securing meetings with non-governmental TDs and senators.

In July 2015, the Coalition held an information briefing in Leinster House to which all TDs and Senators were invited. The range of speakers at the briefing included the National Women's Council of Ireland, Trade Unions for Repeal of the Eighth, the Irish Council of Civil Liberties, Doctors for Choice, and the Coalition, demonstrating the broad base of support held by the Coalition. The information briefing provided an opportunity for constructive and informative discussion, opening the lines of communication and opportunity for representatives to contact the Coalition for further information and discussion. Representatives received copies of the Coalition brochure followed by the dissemination of detailed information packs in the autumn, outlining the work of Coalition and the case for repeal of the Eighth Amendment. Communication was maintained through email information updates and by personal invitation to political party leaders, ministers, TDs and senators to meet with the Coalition for further discussion, of which over 30 meetings took place. In December 2015, all declared General Election candidates were personally invited to publicly pledge to the holding of a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment and by January 2016, there were over 100 responses to the pledge.

In 2015, the Coalition began to lobby not only TDs and Senators, but also recognised the importance of developing and strengthening international links and raising the international profile of the Coalition. In light of this, the Coalition made submissions to MEPs, and to the UN CESCR, the UN HRC and UN CEDAW. The Coalition also supported the passage through the Dáil of bills calling for repeal of the Eighth Amendment, showing their support through rallies, media, and writing to TDs who had expressed support for TFMR. All Coalition groups were also strongly encouraged to contact the TDs on behalf of their own organisation.



## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### 2016

By January 2016, the Coalition were gaining momentum and made the decision to offer a part time administrative position to assist in the running of the Coalition. In March 2016, Sandra Lewis was appointed co-ordinator of the Coalition following an open competition and interview process.

Repeal the Eighth became an issue of significant public concern through the work of the Coalition in 2016. It became a topic not only for discussion but for action, placing it firmly on the public and political agenda with the announcement of a Citizens' Assembly to take place that year to discuss a number of issues including repeal of the Eighth Amendment.

Phase 1 of the Coalition's strategy was centred on setting an agenda and building a platform to work towards repeal of the Eighth Amendment. With this in mind, training and capacity building sessions began in 2015 and continued into 2016. The Coalition recognised the importance of a multi-scalar approach which addressed politics and media on a macro scale but also addressed the issue at a local scale by facilitating and supporting grassroots operations. Training and capacity building sessions played an important role in this, as did supporting rallies and other public events.

### Coalition Building and Mobilisation Recruitment

Coalition membership grew substantially in 2016 with 30 new member organisations bringing total membership to 75 organisations. With this growth in membership, the Coalition now represented over 1.5 million people in Ireland, making it the largest civil society coalition to work together for constitutional change. Having such a broad membership base, brought much valued expertise and resources to the Coalition. In 2016, the Coalition continued to focus on building its membership nationally and member organisations with a wide regional reach such as Abortion Rights Campaign, Akidwa, and the National Women's Council of Ireland continued to be of support in this area.

### Training and Regional Group Development

In 2016, while continuing to work on recruitment and conduct good governance, the Coalition began to focus more on the training and education it could offer member groups and organisations. Such training included social media and communications trainings. Training was also generously offered by other members of the Coalition including Abortion Rights Campaign and Catholics for Choice.

Training events held during the year included a workshop on "Arguing the Case for Abortion", led by Ann Furedi from the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, and a values training workshop held by



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

Catholics for Choice. Craig Dyer, of Marriage Equality, ran a social media training session in February 2016 for members of the Coalition. The National Women's Council of Ireland also volunteered to help with social media training over the course of the year and Abortion Rights Campaign ran a series of "Talk to your TD" training sessions in the run-up to the election which they made available to the Coalition.

Over 2016 and 2017, the Coalition engaged in a mapping exercise of local groups around the country with a view to improving regional engagement and mobilisation. This activity was undertaken by Ben Fraser and allowed the Coalition to gain a greater understanding of its forces nationally and better support regional engagement and mobilisation. The Coalition also ran various workshops, training and networking events for regional groups focusing on developing and supporting regional campaigning groups.

### Events

A range of member events were held in 2016 including a major 'Think-In', a regional networking day, several training and capacity building workshops, as mentioned above, as well as regular planning meetings with the Steering Group. Rallies, public meetings and a series of public conversations on the theme 'It's Time to Talk about Abortion' were also held in 2016

The Coalition hosted a series of public conversations, 'It's Time to Talk About Abortion', beginning in October 2016. This public meeting series entitled 'It's Time to Talk About Abortion' was built around key issues on the Eighth Amendment and abortion rights in Ireland. The aim of these discussions was to advance the debate away from the narrow focus of a restriction-based abortion model. Following their popularity, the decision was made to extend the series into 2017. Conversation topics included "The Politics of Motherhood", "Abortion and the Law" and "Everything you wanted to know about Abortion but were afraid to ask".

A Milestones event, held in October 2016, provided an opportunity to outline to the media the Coalition's programme of activities for the following months and to highlight their reach and regional spread. The Women Rising #Black4Repeal Rally was held in November 2016 and the Coalition joined with women across the world demanding change from their governments on urgent issues regarding women. In Ireland, rallies were held in Dublin and Cork, calling for an immediate referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment to respect and protect women's lives, health and choices. This day of protest also marked the first weekend the Citizens' Assembly would discuss the Eighth Amendment.





## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### **Media, Communications and Awareness Raising**

Visibility, public awareness and media coverage increased significantly in 2016, bringing the Eighth Amendment and abortion access to the forefront in public discourse and consciousness. A comprehensive communications strategy, developed in 2015 and early 2016, and addressing traditional and social media coverage, played an important role in the creation of a cohesive message and communications approach and increasing public awareness.

To further develop and support their communications strategy, messaging research and training took place in 2016 in collaboration with Coalition member organisations. This research and training sought to:

- ✓ develop strong, clear and evidence-based messages through polling, message framing, and message testing;
- ✓ identify and frame targeted audience-specific messages
- ✓ achieve member engagement, cohesion and message discipline by providing values and message framing training;
- ✓ ensure ongoing messaging review
- ✓ provide media / PR training for spokespeople, and for member groups nationally and regionally.

By humanising the experience of abortion and the effects of the Eighth Amendment within their communications, the Coalition supported the transformation of abortion from a hidden, stigmatized act within Irish society, into one of which experiences have become widely shared and normalized.

### **Media Guidelines**

As the topic of abortion and a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment became increasingly discussed in the media, the Coalition drew up media guidelines to assist journalists. A meeting between communications officers from some of the larger member organisations and Thalia Zepatos, an expert in campaign messaging, led to the drafting of a media guidelines document on the use of appropriate and inappropriate language by the media. These guidelines were not to in any way impede their work as journalists but to highlight the need for informative, non-sensational and unbiased information and the importance of reporting on abortion sensitively and factually. The guidelines included an overview of abortion in Ireland, guidelines for sensitive reporting, a glossary of appropriate language and imagery, a fact sheet, further reading and polling information.





## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### Website and Online Presence

In early 2016, work had begun on the Coalition's website, with Adam May from Language. The website was launched in August 2016, expanding the Coalition's reach and facilitating the public's access to information regarding abortion issues and the Eighth Amendment. The Coalition also worked to raise their social media following and presence thus improving the public's awareness of the abortion issue in Ireland and of what was involved in repealing the Eighth Amendment. Social media was an effective means of targeting potential pro-choice voters. It was also an effective way to reach supporters, encourage them to get involved and provided crowd-funding opportunities.

### Messaging

In summer 2016, the Coalition worked with five key member organisations to engage in the process of designing the Coalition's messaging around repeal. With the participation of Amnesty International Ireland, Abortion Rights Campaign, Irish Family Planning Association, Irish Council for Civil Liberties, and the National Women's Council of Ireland, the Coalition devised, tendered for and commissioned professional qualitative research on repeal of the Eighth Amendment. This research explored the views, beliefs, concerns and hopes of a cross-section of voters through nation-wide focus groups. The findings of this research were intended to guide the Coalition in framing messages and to act as a foundation for further polling in 2017.

Campaign consultant, Thalia Zepatos, also visited Ireland in April 2016 and agreed to do some work with the Coalition around values which would feed into their messaging and lay the groundwork for moving into Phase 2 of the Coalition's strategy – defining and framing the issue.

### Legal and Regulatory

The Coalition was of the view that Article 40.3.3 needed to be removed completely from the Constitution. Its members agreed that there was no rationale for including the regulation of abortion in the Constitution.

The Coalition proposed the following legislative steps be taken by the State in the event of repeal of the Eighth Amendment:

- Decriminalise abortion by repealing sections 22 and 23 of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013.
- Repeal the 1995 Abortion Information Act.
- Introduce a human rights-compliant framework for the legal provision of abortion in Ireland.



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

In January 2016 the Coalition agreed to draw up a set of principles that they collectively felt should underpin any legislation or post-repeal regime. The Coalition was of the belief that the ability of all women and girls to access free, safe and legal abortion services was a fundamental human rights issue. They argued that the Irish State, by criminalising abortion in almost all circumstances, violated the fundamental rights of women to health, to live in dignity, to self-determination, and to access these rights without discrimination.

With the help of the post repeal working group established in 2015, the Coalition drew up the following set of foundational and underpinning principles for human-rights compliant abortion legislation or regulatory frameworks following the removal of the Eighth Amendment from the Irish Constitution. These principles are consistent with the key human rights standard of proportionality, which requires that laws and policies applied to regulate access to abortion cannot excessively interfere with women's human rights – including the rights to life, health, privacy, freedom from cruel and inhumane treatment, and non-discrimination. The Coalition agreed that the use of criminal and constitutional laws on abortion in Ireland, disproportionately prioritised the “unborn” (defined in Ireland as a pregnancy implanted in the womb of a woman) in virtually all circumstances and offered little or no consideration or protection for women's human rights.

In drafting a human-rights compliant regulatory framework, the Coalition also recommended the State look to other jurisdictions, such as Canada, for examples of how other countries provide for the full range of women's reproductive health needs, including abortion.



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

Five Coalition Principles for Future Abortion Legislation or Regulation Frameworks

Equality

A society which espouses the principle of gender equality will value the importance of women's dignity, to the individual and to our collective community. Access to abortion is fundamental to the achievement of women's equality. This includes ensuring women's rights to life, health, privacy, and freedom from cruel and inhumane treatment are respected.

Autonomy

Human rights as defined by European and International bodies recognise the rights of women living in Ireland to bodily and psychological integrity. This must include the right to make decisions concerning health, sexuality, and reproduction. This involves ensuring that women have the right to know and access the evidence-based information that is required for the exercise and protection of these rights.

Health Service

Every woman living in Ireland has the right to access to healthcare services and education including reproductive healthcare and education. This must include access to evidence-based information services regarding health, sex and sexuality, fertility management and to reproductive healthcare services including abortion. These services must be free, accessible and delivered in a manner that respects women's right to dignity and autonomy.

Responsibility

Access to abortion services is predominantly a healthcare matter for a woman. Access to abortion services is a recognised medical necessity in order to ensure the full right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health for women. A woman chooses health services on her volition and abortion services should be no different. The wishes and best interests of the woman concerned must be paramount. To deliver the right to the highest attainable standard of health for women, the State must provide clear and accessible law which must include the protection of women's physical and mental health.

Decriminalisation

Abortion services are medical procedures which are only required by women. The imposition of penal sanctions against women who wish to access reproductive health services is discriminatory and leads to greater numbers of health or life-threatening clandestine procedures. It is appropriate that access to abortion services is regulated within the health care service and not as part of the criminal justice system.



## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### **Political Context and Activities**

In 2016, the Coalition continued to advocate and lobby for a referendum to be held. The government commitment to set up a Citizens' Assembly which would commence towards the end of 2016 delayed the holding of a referendum but with the passing of the year, there was little doubt that both the political and public consensus was that a referendum was inevitable.

In early 2016, the Coalition asked Seanad candidates to pledge their support before the upcoming General Election for a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment. The Coalition continued to meet with TDs one-to-one to discuss their support on the issue of repeal and liaised with political representatives across the party spectrum, and with other influential groups and individuals.

In summer 2016, a cross-party interest group around repeal of the Eighth Amendment and abortion was set up following a cross-party meeting of pro-repeal TDs and Senators. The Irish Family Planning Association worked with the group and assisted with the initial set-up. Activities of the group included building up an information base for TDs and a briefing from the World Health Organization to inform TDs on what is best practice internationally on abortion and what human rights compliant abortion legislation looks like.

Ireland's long-standing denial of women's rights to bodily autonomy, to equality and to freedom from discrimination was challenged twice by international human rights bodies in 2016 when it was found to be in breach of international human rights obligations. In May 2016, Ireland's abortion law and record on reproductive rights were strongly criticised by 18 countries in the UN Universal Periodic Review<sup>3</sup>. Concerning the case of *Mellet v. Ireland* in June 2016<sup>4</sup>, the UN Human Rights Committee found Ireland to be in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and directed Ireland to reform its abortion law in a landmark ruling. The Committee found the abortion ban was discriminatory for women carrying a foetus with fatal foetal anomaly and subjects them to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Ireland was ordered to compensate Ms Amanda Mellet and to prevent similar violations occurring in the future. In November, the Government offered Ms Mellet €30,000, and access to counselling, because she was forced to travel abroad for an abortion. Ireland would see a similar in ruling in June 2017, when The UN Human Rights Committee ruled for the second time that Ireland violated a woman's fundamental rights in the case of *Whelan v. Ireland*<sup>5</sup>. Again, the UNHCR instructed Ireland to amend its laws relating to the provision of abortion in Ireland.

---

<sup>3</sup> Universal Periodic Review, Ireland - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/IEIndex.aspx> [Accessed 4 December 2019]

<sup>4</sup> *Mellet v Ireland* - <https://static.rasset.ie/documents/news/un-human-rights-committee-report.pdf> [Accessed 4 Dec 2019]



## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### Citizens' Assembly

In May 2016, the government proposed a Citizens' Assembly to address a number of issues including the Eighth Amendment. The Assembly's brief was to make a recommendation to Government on whether or not a referendum to repeal should be held. The deadline for submissions from the public was in December 2016 and meetings in January, February, March and April 2017 focused on repeal of the Eighth Amendment. The Assembly were required to report back to the Dáil on repeal of the eighth amendment by June 2017.

An Expert Advisory Group was established to assist the Assembly in the preparation of information and advice. It was comprised of academics and practitioners across a number of specific fields of interest including Political and Social Science, Constitutional Law and Theory, Medical Law and Ethics, Medicine and Obstetrics. Assembly session topics included "Foetal Abnormalities – Medical Issues", "Legal Issues", "Ethical Perspectives" and days were structured to allow time for presentations from experts, roundtable discussions, Q&A and feedback from roundtable discussions, and reflective exercises.

The Coalition wrote a submission to the Citizens' Assembly providing an evidence-based analysis of the impact the Eighth Amendment had on women and girls and how its presence in the constitution no longer reflected public opinion. The Coalition also encouraged as many member groups and individuals as possible to make submissions, stressing the importance of a broad range of submissions in order to give voice to the difference aspects of and broad support for repeal. A wide range of the Coalition's members made carefully researched and considered submissions to the Assembly including Abortion Rights Campaign, Doctors for Choice, Catholics for Choice, and Irish Council for Civil Liberties. These submissions were a hugely valuable contribution to breaking down the stigma surrounding abortion, and to creating a wider understanding of the issue and of the Dáily distresses and difficulties faced by women throughout the country because of the ban. The Coalition concluded their own submission to the Citizens' Assembly with their proposed set of principles they believed essential to a human rights-compliant abortion regime, arguing that the foundational and underpinning basis for any future legislation or regulation of abortion was Equality; Autonomy; Health Service; Responsibility and Decriminalisation.

---

<sup>5</sup> Whelan v Ireland - [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/IRL/CCPR\\_C\\_119\\_D\\_2425\\_2014\\_25970\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/IRL/CCPR_C_119_D_2425_2014_25970_E.pdf) [Accessed 4 Dec 2019]



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

## Phase 2: 2017 – Defining and Framing the Issue

### Strategy

In 2017, the campaign moved into Phase 2 of the Coalition's strategy. Phase 1 had centred on setting the agenda and building a platform for the campaign. The Coalition were now in a position to focus the lens on defining and framing the issue of abortion and repeal in Ireland. Campaigning, communications and messaging became the focus as the Coalition concentrated on reaching, listening to and talking with the electorate. The Citizens' Assembly and Special Oireachtas Committee also took place this year making it a pivotal point in gaining commitment to holding a referendum.

To enable the Coalition to achieve its mission to repeal the Eighth Amendment, the following strategic goals were identified for 2017:

- Maintain and strengthen the Coalition as a cohesive and effective national alliance to achieve repeal of the Eighth Amendment.
- Enhance and expand their public awareness and education programme to focus on the wider public, in particular the 'undecided', to increase their understanding of the need for repeal of the Eighth Amendment so as to respect and protect women's lives, health and choices.
- Maintain direct engagement with public representatives and other opinion-makers and influencers, including legal, medical and health care professionals and the media
- Mobilise national, regional and local engagement to build numbers, skills and capacity to achieve repeal of the Eighth Amendment.
- Ensure effective management, adequate funding and human resources, and sound governance to enable the Coalition to realise its mission.

### Coalition Building and Mobilisation Growing and Strengthening the Coalition

In September 2017, the Coalition membership passed 100 organisations. During this year, the Coalition continued to grow the alliance by focussing on sectors where they believed increased member numbers could add weight, expertise and wider credibility. These included in particular:

- Trade Unions
- Migrant rights organisations
- Youth organisations
- Disability and mental health organisations



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

## Events

The Coalition continued to host and support a broad range of events in 2017 including trainings and workshops, panel discussions, public meetings, rallies, and a regional networking event.

The Coalition hosted a round table conversation entitled “1983-2017 – Trapped in Time? From the 1983 Anti-Amendment Campaign to Repeal the Eighth” in October to mark the 34th anniversary of the Eighth Amendment being signed into law. The evening brought together 1983 Anti-Amendment campaigners and present day Repeal the Eighth campaigners to share insights, experiences, stories and strategies, to help build a powerful campaign for outright repeal of the Eighth Amendment from the Constitution. Speakers included: Ursula Barry, Head of Women’s Studies at UCD, Pauline Conroy, social policy analyst and lecturer, and Grainne Healy, social activist and co-director of the 2015 Yes Equality campaign.

The annual March for Choice, which was held by the Abortion Rights Campaign, a member of the Coalition, brought together pro-choice supporters across the country. In 2017, Abortion Rights Campaign asked members to upload videos on social media on why they were marching. Pre-march events in 2017 included poster making sessions, Chats for Choice with Ailbhe Smyth, convenor of the Coalition, and Anna Cosgrave, founder of the Repeal Project, and a Speakout at Filmbase. Coalition members were welcome to march under the Coalition’s banners, and member organisations with their own banners were encouraged to march near the Coalition. The march provided an opportunity for Coalition members to connect with groups and supporters from across Ireland.

## Conference 2017

The 2017 National Conference took place in July 2017. That year, the focus was on “Building for a Referendum”. The Conference was run as a working conference with a focus on developing the strategic and organisational work that the Coalition needed to do for the upcoming Referendum campaign. The conference looked at “Why Abortion Access is Essential to Women’s Reproductive Healthcare”, offered workshops focused on the building, funding, and messaging of a campaign among other topics, and a discussion on strategic framework. Speakers included Ann Furedi, Chief Executive of BPAS, and Dr. Ciara Kelly, GP, Broadcaster and Journalist. Ahead of the conference, member groups and organisations were asked to submit strategy documents contributing to the Coalition’s strategic framework. A strategy feedback report was also compiled following the conference, offering a summary of the key points that emerged from the conference workshops and final open session on strategy. This feedback was structured around several key areas including “How



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

do we make the Repeal campaign more inclusive?”, “How do we build a National Campaign across all 26 counties?” “Action Focused Campaigning”, and “Fundraising Ideas”.

## Regional Development

As the Coalition drew close to the time of a referendum campaign, they increased and focussed mobilisation and ground activities to ensure the widest possible regional, local and national reach. To do so, they concentrated on

- Mapping regional and local engagement to identify gaps and weaknesses
- Ensuring repeal groups were active in all constituencies
- Providing support to meet needs of local and regional groups
- Supporting repeal groups to become financially more self-sufficient through fundraising activities
- Providing skills training in local and regional areas
- Tracking numbers of engaged supporters around the country

Member organisations continued to mobilise and work collectively in different areas of the country. By the November 2017, the Cork Coalition (and NW coalition) had 18 member organisations and the Northwest Coalition was launched by the end of the year.

The Regional Mapping Project by Ben Fraser was completed in early 2017. A map locating all the local repeal groups across the country was published on the website as well as information encouraging people to get involved and a “Start your own Group” guide. The Coalition also held Regional Networking Meetings with the aim of connecting regional groups and facilitating the sharing of ideas and support. With the Regional Mapping Project complete, the Coalition focused on local and regional group work and developing a support structure necessary to achieve this. In order to facilitate the establishment of local groups in particular the Coalition liaised with the Abortion Rights Campaign who had excellent resources to help advise people on how to set up a group, and with other organisations such as NWCI, Amnesty, and USI.

A key element of building regional strength and mobilization was skills and capacity-building. The Coalition appointed Annie Hoey as Training and Education Officer in July 2017. A key aspect of her role was working with regional and local groups, developing training, and co-ordination. On 21st October 2017 the Coalition hosted a Regional Training Day. This included training in areas such as canvassing, messaging, media and lobbying, along with providing resources and support to groups





### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

in rolling out the campaign regionally and how to run a successful campaign on a low budget. It provided an opportunity for members to meet and network with campaigners from all over the country and allowed the Coalition to identify areas where further training and resources were required.

### **Communications, Messaging and Awareness Raising**

From the outset, the Coalition saw the value of stories and real people's experiences when it came to humanising the issue of abortion. For many, abortion was a deeply personal issue and one which people struggled to talk about. Coalition members undertook various approaches to spark these difficult conversations. To mention a few, positive values-based communication trainings, such as those run by Catholics for Choice, provided people with the knowledge and skills to talk about abortion effectively and meaningfully; Amnesty International partnered with the Minister for Health Simon Harris to ask members to pledge to have conversations with those around them on [itstime.ie](http://itstime.ie); and Abortion Rights Campaign used badges which read "Talk to me about Repeal" to spark conversations.

### **Messaging**

By March 2017, phase one of the messaging research was complete. The Coalition, working with Language Communication and supported by NWCI, ARC, AI and IFPA, had identified a process for putting out clear messages that communicated what the Coalition stood for. Language Communications continued to develop this work in phase two of the research. This second phase of messaging research commissioned by the Coalition in collaboration with NWCI, ARC, AI and IFPA, was completed in October 2017. Outputs from the research included a more fully developed communications strategy, a canvassing guide, interview / debate training and a communications risk register.

The canvassing guide provided support for activists and supporters working on stalls and canvassing areas. It was important for canvassers to be able to communicate clearly, calmly and kindly with the public. With this in mind, the canvassing guide included information and FAQs on the campaign and eighth amendment, and also provided canvassers with supportive communication techniques when speaking with the public. Similarly, interview / debate training supported campaign spokespeople as they communicated with the media and in the political sphere. The communications risk register facilitated greater awareness of existing and potential communications risks, placing the coalition in a position to strategize and mitigate against their effects on the campaign.

### **Expanding Public Awareness**



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

A key aim for the Coalition as they worked towards a referendum was to raise public awareness and to empower people with fact-based information as well as stories of personal experiences. In particular, the Coalition reached out to the undecided or 'middle ground' of the electorate. To do this, they:

- Developed their communications strategy to achieve wider reach through regional print and broadcast media, as well as social media networking. The Coalition targeted an increase in frequency and breadth of regional, local and national media coverage by broadsheet, radio and TV. National and local spokespeople were also trained to communicate effectively on what was an often emotive and highly personal subject.
- Produced and disseminated tested messages, backed by qualitative research. These messages were tracked through renewed focus group research in Spring '17 and attitude change was tracked through polling in Spring and Autumn '17.
- Reviewed and developed comprehensive data-capture systems
- Increased production and dissemination of online and print information materials and messages. Leaflets and website materials were regularly updated, and their circulation increased. Arguments, rebuttals and FAQs were also circulated online and to local and regional repeal groups.
- Promoted sharing of stories and experiences (through public meetings and video) to expand people's capacity to have 'soft conversations'
- Scheduled a programme of informational and educational events to stimulate debate.

## Public Education Campaigns Campaigns

The Coalition and its members ran several public education campaigns during the referendum targeting the registration of voters, encouraging people to talk to TDs and write letters to media outlets, and supporting fundraising needs. 2017 was a strong time for these campaigns as the topic of repeal was gaining momentum and the Coalition prepared for the calling of a referendum in the coming months.

### Register to Vote Campaign

The Register to Vote campaign was led by USI who ran a voting campaign directed towards students in September 2017. The Coalition partnered with USI to broaden the impact of the campaign to reach new citizens, and those not in third-level education. A National Voter Registration Day was held on



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

Eighth November and the hashtag #GetRegd was used as part of a social media campaign to encourage voter registration. The Coalition circulated a digital Voter Registration Resource Pack with information on which forms to use, contact details for city and county councils, and a guide to filling out the forms to support and guide those completing the registration process.

#### Email and Talk to Your TD Campaigns

The Coalition's 'Email your TDs' campaign was launched in May 2017 on the Coalition's website. All member organisations were asked to push the campaign through their various networks and social media accounts. The Coalition also introduced a 'Talk to your TDs' campaign in November 2017, encouraging members to talk to their TDs directly. By communicating with their TDs, member organisations and individuals aimed to bring the topic of repeal to the forefront of TDs' minds and make them aware of the electorate's desire for them to address the issue and show leadership and active participation in finding a solution. A 'Talk to Your TDs Guide' was compiled to support communications and the Coalition tracked feedback from TDs to support future strategy.

#### Letter Writing Campaign

Letters to the Editor were another important technique in bringing increased awareness to the issue of abortion in Ireland and the growing need to address repeal of the Eighth Amendment. All members were asked to proactively encourage their members to write letters to both national and regional papers.

### Political and Legal

With the passing of 2017, Ireland continued to see the inadequacies of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013 with cases including a denial of access to abortion to at least two women despite multiple suicide attempts. This year also saw a second ruling made by the UNHCR of 'cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment' in the case of Siobhan Whelan who sought an abortion after a fatal foetal abnormality diagnosis.

Alongside their work surrounding the Citizens' Assembly and the Joint Committee in 2017, the Coalition continued their programme of meeting with public representatives to raise awareness of the need for a referendum and provision of abortion services in Ireland. They continued to lobby political parties and individual politicians more broadly in an effort to build majority support for outright repeal. They focussed on gaining meetings with Government ministers or their advisors, and with members of the parties least open to significant change, as well as tracking the cross-party group on Repeal. The Coalition also conducted extensive work in terms of communicating with and assisting the Pro-Repeal members of the Oireachtas. The 'Email and Talk to your TDs' campaigns were also



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

set up in Winter 2017 and the Coalition provided support and guidelines for local and regional groups on this.

Through strategic engagement, the Coalition advocated for the following political, legal and regulatory outcomes:

- Positive recommendation to Government from the Citizens' Assembly that a referendum be held proposing repeal of the Eighth Amendment from the Constitution.
- Recommendation to Government from the Joint Oireachtas (parliamentary) Committee tasked with considering the Citizens' Assembly recommendations, that a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment be held without further delay.

Following on these deliberative processes, an unequivocal undertaking by Government to:

- hold a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment from the Constitution, with no replacement clause
- decriminalise abortion by repealing sections 22 and 23 of the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013
- repeal the 1995 Abortion Information Act.
- draft and implement a human rights compliant framework for abortion in law.

### **Citizens' Assembly**

Between November 2016 and April 2017, the Citizens' Assembly met to consider the first topic set out in the Resolution of the Houses of the Oireachtas approving the establishment of the Assembly—the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. Over five weekends, members of the Assembly heard from twenty-five experts and took part in over eighty hours' worth of listening, discussion and deliberation. All of the public proceedings were livestreamed on the Assembly's website and all papers and presentations made to the Assembly were also available to view on the website.

The Assembly began by considering the history and development of the Eighth Amendment in Ireland and hearing first-hand from medical practitioners about how the current legislation, the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013 (the Act of 2013), operates in practice in the Irish healthcare system. Subsequent weekends provided Members with fact based and expert testimony on a range of area relating to the Eighth Amendment in Ireland including medical, legal and ethical perspectives. Advocacy groups were also given the opportunity to present to the Members of the Assembly.



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

The report and recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly in relation to the Eighth Amendment was released in June 2017<sup>6</sup>. The recommendations of the Assembly were the result of a ballot vote which took place on the final weekend of the Citizens' Assembly. The Members of the Citizens' Assembly voted in support of repeal of the Eighth Amendment and for its replacement with a constitutional provision authorising the Oireachtas to legislate on the issue of abortion. The Assembly also made recommendations as to what should be included in that legislation, specifically in relation to gestational limits and reasons which should apply to lawful termination of pregnancy. The Members of the Assembly also provided the following ancillary recommendations:

1. Improvements should be made in sexual health and relationship education, including the areas of contraception and consent, in primary and post-primary schools, colleges, youth clubs and other organisations involved in education and interactions with young people.
2. Improved access to reproductive healthcare services should be available to all women – to include family planning services, contraception, perinatal hospice care and termination of pregnancy, if required.
3. All women should have access to the same standard of obstetrical care, including early scanning and testing. Services should be available to all women throughout the country irrespective of geographic location or socio-economic circumstances.
4. Improvements should be made to counselling and support facilities for pregnant women both during pregnancy and, if necessary, following a termination of pregnancy, throughout the country.
5. Further consideration should be given as to who will fund and carry out termination of pregnancy in Ireland.

Following the recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly, the Coalition focused on meeting with members of the Joint Oireachtas Committee and on providing them and other public representatives with relevant information. It was also agreed that the Coalition, working with other groups, would organise major mobilisations in Dublin and around the country on Saturday 17th June 2017. The purpose of these mobilisations was to keep the pressure on the government, calling them to act immediately to hold a referendum and implement the findings of the Citizens' Assembly.

---

<sup>6</sup> First Report and Recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly, The Eighth Amendment of the Constitution - <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/The-Eighth-Amendment-of-the-Constitution/Final-Report-on-the-Eighth-Amendment-of-the-Constitution/Final-Report-incl-Appendix-A-D.pdf> [Accessed 4 Dec2019]



## *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

### Joint Oireachtas Committee

In March 2017, the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution was formed to consider the Citizens' Assembly report and recommendations on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution. The Committee would then report to both Houses of the Oireachtas in light of their considerations. The Coalition made a number of recommendations to the Committee, including that there be a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment entirely from the Constitution; to examine legislation in jurisdictions beyond the UK, engage the expertise of the World Health Organisation and consult their technical and policy guidelines in this area; and to hold the experiences and needs of women central to all Committee deliberations.

During the Joint Committee process, the Coalition closely monitored the progress of the Committee and provided information to facilitate and support their decision. A Coalition information pack was circulated to all members of the Special Oireachtas Committee and the Coalition encouraged members to get in touch with the Coalition for further information or to discuss the issue in more detail.

The Coalition did not support the replacement wording of the Eighth Amendment proposed by the Citizens' Assembly. As such, the Coalition information pack clarified this position and the key legal reasons for this position. Following several Committee sessions, the Joint Committee voted on its recommendations on 13th December 2017 and the final report of the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution was published on 20th December 2017.

The Citizens' Assembly had rejected simple repeal in favour of replacing the eighth amendment with a constitutional provision giving exclusive authority to the Oireachtas to legislate on the issue of abortion. While the Joint Committee agreed with the substantive basis for this recommendation, it did not support the inclusion of such a provision, instead recommending that the eighth amendment be repealed *simpliciter*.



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

## Phase 3: January – May 2018 – Referendum Campaign

In 2018, the Coalition moved into Phase 3 of their strategy: Winning a Referendum. An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, confirmed in January that a referendum would be held on Repeal of the Eighth Amendment and its replacement with an enabling clause which would be inserted into the Constitution allowing the Oireachtas to legislate for the termination of pregnancy.

Dáil and Seanad debates in early 2018 seemed encouraging, as were polls, but over 30 TDs had still not declared their position on the issue. The Coalition encouraged its members to continue emailing and visiting their TDs and the Coalition continued to lobby and communicate with political representatives.

As the Dáil and Seanad prepared to enter into debate in January 2018 on the Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment, the Coalition urged the government to support the findings of the Committee which were the result of extensive engagement with expert legal and healthcare advice and supported public opinion on the issue of abortion in Ireland. The Coalition welcomed the government's announcement on 29 January 2018 of a Referendum on Repeal of the Eighth Amendment and its replacement with an enabling clause which would be inserted into the Constitution allowing the Oireachtas to legislate for the termination of pregnancy. With confirmation of a referendum to be held in May 2018, the Coalition focused their efforts on building a nationwide campaign, constituency mobilisation and fundraising activities.

### Governance

In December 2017, the Coalition began thinking about working in coordination with other groups through a joint or unified referendum campaign. In February 2018, it was agreed that the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, the National Women's Council of Ireland, and the Abortion Rights Campaign would join forces to lead a coordinated 'Together For Yes Campaign'. Together For Yes was a national civil society campaign made up of over 70 organisations, groups and communities who shared the unified aim of securing a yes vote in the May Referendum to remove the Eighth Amendment from the constitution.

### Communications and Messaging

The extensive messaging research process, which took place primarily in 2016 and 2017 with researcher Karen Hand; Language, the company that worked on the Coalition's identity and branding; and Alice PR, the Coalition's Communications and PR support, provided an excellent framework and



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

strategy for communications during Phase 3 of the Coalition's strategic campaign. Based on this research, a comprehensive 'Messaging Guide' was distributed to local and regional groups towards the end of 2017, providing member groups and organizations with guidance and support in the area of messaging and communications during the referendum campaign.

Another central aspect of the Coalition's communications and messaging strategy was the role of stories and storytellers. The Coalition recognized the importance of stories and storytellers as a way of humanising abortion and connecting it to human experience. The previous few years had seen an increase in the number of women and couples who bravely shared their abortion experiences. Sharing these stories helped to remove the stigma and hidden nature of abortion, humanising those who have experienced it and tackling the shame associated with it. By these brave citizens sharing their experiences, it enabled others to speak more directly, honestly and openly about the reality of abortion for women in Ireland. It brought the conversation into people's everyday lives and greatly increased the public awareness and visibility of the issue of abortion in the media.

These stories were critical in the run up to the referendum. The Coalition gathered a pool of stories which could be circulated with permission to the media in response to the high number of such requests that they were receiving from journalists. Several Coalition member organisations facilitated the sharing of such stories including X-ile project, which created an online gallery of women who had accessed abortion services outside of Ireland. Everyday Stories was a storytelling and illustration project which allowed women to share their stories of abortion and their experiences of the Eighth Amendment on their lives. Such activities helped to demonstrate that those who access abortion services are responsible, ordinary people and create a compassionate forum to discuss the realities of pregnancy, abortion and the Eighth Amendment in Ireland.

### **Fundraising**

To build a winning campaign, fundraising was critical for the Coalition. Funds were necessary to pay for key elements for the campaign including training activists to ensure a high-quality canvassing operation, sending information leaflets to households countrywide, and persuading undecided voters through targeted ads on social media.

A strong regional network, grassroots activities, and the #Give8Repeal8 campaign provided a significant source of funding to the Coalition. In late 2017, the Coalition had launched the #Give8Repeal8 Campaign which continued in 2018. This was a social media driven campaign, using email, organic social media sharing, which was primed and boosted by key Repeal champions, and





### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

paid social media promotions to inspire people to commit to €8 monthly gifts until the eighth amendment was repealed. The fundraising target was linked to the number of women travelling to the UK for abortions, for example, a monthly gift to be made for every woman who would travel to the UK for an abortion that year. Social media champions were asked to post / tweet about the campaign during the campaign and an email was sent in their name to supporters asking them to the #Give8Repeal8 campaign.

### **Training, Education and Regional Development**

Local and regional mobilisation and training remained a top priority of the Coalition in 2018. The Coalition Training and Education Officer, Annie Hoey, continued to work with member groups and organisations that had a regional spread to look at co-ordination of training and mobilisation programmes and to support Coalition member groups and organisations in working together effectively. The Coalition provided extensive support in the area of messaging, canvassing and regional mobilisation for member groups and organisations during this time.

### **Canvassing**

Canvassing was an integral part of a successful repeal campaign. In support of an efficient nationwide campaign and constituency coordination, the Coalition collected and coordinated feedback from canvassers across the country to ensure optimal message coordination and balanced regional and local spread of canvassing activities.

The Coalition provided support regarding canvassing strategy and Catholics for Choice also provided significant support to Coalition members through numerous workshops on values-based communication skills. The Coalition organised canvassing training across the country and resources for member groups and organisations including a Coalition Canvassing Handbook. As expressed in the Coalition's Canvassing Handbook, "Cool heads win wars and referendums". This was a highly contentious referendum on an issue people felt very strongly about. As such, it was critical that canvassers remained calm, polite, reasonable and kind with every potential voter. Values-based communication training provided canvassers with the knowledge and skills to talk about abortion effectively, meaningfully and compassionately. Canvassing also provided an opportunity for local groups to connect with each other, exchange tips and strategy, and offer support during the referendum campaign.

### **Events**

Coalition events and those of its member groups and organisations provided opportunities to come together collectively and share knowledge and experiences. As was the case in previous years, a wide



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

range of events were held in 2018 including public meetings, coffee mornings, poetry and music events, and information evenings.

The Coalition partnered with the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the Eighth (TUCR8A) to hold a public meeting highlighting the issue of Abortion in the Workplace in January 2018. This event focused on the Eighth Amendment as a workplace, class, equality and human rights issue. Speakers included Dr Fiona Bloomer of Abortion as a Workplace Issue: A Trade Union Survey North and South of Ireland, Maggie Ryan of TUCR8A, and community and reproductive rights activist Cathleen O'Neill.

The Coalition organised a March on International Women's Day in 2018. The year marked the centenary of women gaining the right to vote in Ireland. A key priority for the Coalition at large events such as this was to sign people up to get involved in local Repeal groups.



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

## Post Repeal and the Future of the Coalition

The Referendum to Repeal the Eighth Amendment took place on 25 May 2018 and saw the amendment repealed by a 66.4% majority. 64.5% of the electorate voted, making it one of the highest ever electorate turnouts in Ireland. While the Coalition had achieved the first part of its aim in that the Eighth Amendment had been repealed, there remained the second part of their aim which was to protect women's lives, health and choices. The Coalition agreed to continue to exist for a short period to complete the inaction of this part of their aim. A small programme of events was planned, and the Coalition reviewed their staff and budget needs as they prepared to come to the end of Coalition activities. The completion of these activities was marked by a final Coalition Conference which was held in April 2019.

### Legal and Regulatory Coalition Activities

After the 2018 Referendum, the Coalition focused its activities on ensuring that the best possible, women-centred abortion legislation was enacted. A General Scheme of a Bill to Regulate Termination of Pregnancy was published by the Department of Health in March 2018 prior to the Referendum. An updated General Scheme was published in July and the final text of the bill was agreed in September. The Coalition submitted a document to the Department of Health as a contribution to what a women-centred and human rights compliant abortion regime should look like following the removal of the Eighth Amendment from the Irish Constitution. This document was based on the Coalition's Five Principles for Future Abortion Legislation or Regulation Frameworks and contained comments on the General Scheme published by the Department of Health.

While the Coalition agreed that the terms outlined in the General Scheme of a Bill to Regulate Termination of Pregnancy would bring Ireland's abortion laws broadly into line with best practice in other European countries, they advised on the need for its strengthening and clarifying in certain areas. The Coalition's submission commented on several aspects of the General Scheme including definitions used, conscientious objection, and a proposed mandatory waiting period of three days. The submission also addressed the removal of all criminal sanctions applying to those who access abortion services, the provision of safety zones to protect those seeking or providing abortion services from intimidation or harassment by protestors, and addressed issues relating to cost of and barriers to abortion services. The final text of the bill did not address all of these comments but it was agreed that the legislation would be reviewed after three years, as opposed to five, which allows time for Coalition supporters to continue to advocate for the strengthening and clarifying of legislation in the future.



### *Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

One year to the day on which the Joint Oireachtas Committee delivered their report on the issue of abortion in Ireland, President Michael D. Higgins signed the Termination of Pregnancy Bill<sup>7</sup> into law on 20 December 2018. This bill entitled the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 to provide for and regulate termination of pregnancy. The Health Act 2018 had been introduced into the Dáil in September 2018 by the Minister for Health Simon Harris. Following over two months of consideration by the Oireachtas, it passed final stage in the Dáil on 5 December and passed final stage in the Seanad on 13 December 2018. Following the signing of the Bill into Irish law, it came into force on 1 January 2019.

The Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 defines the circumstances and processes in which abortion may be legally performed in Ireland. The legislation permits terminations to be carried out up to 12 weeks of pregnancy and later where there is a risk to the life, or of serious harm to the health, of the pregnant woman; or where there is a risk to the life, or of serious harm to the health, of the pregnant woman in an emergency; or where there is a condition present which is likely to lead to the death of the foetus either before or within 28 days of birth.

### **The North of Ireland**

While the focus was on repeal of the Eighth Amendment in the Republic of Ireland, the Coalition was an all-Ireland encompassing organization. It regularly supported work in relation to abortion rights in Northern Ireland through the Repeal Campaign. In 2017, a series of events was held by the Coalition to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 UK Abortion Act. The Coalition worked with groups in Britain and Northern Ireland and hosted meetings in Dublin, Belfast and London to mark the anniversary and highlight the unequal access to abortion services in Northern Ireland. The Coalition continued to support abortion rights in Northern Ireland following the referendum and in October 2019, abortion was decriminalised.

### **Conference 2019**

The Coalition held a final conference in April 2019, asking “Post-Repeal Ireland: What’s Next?”. The conference included panels titled “What’s Next? Law and Access”, “What’s Next? The North”, and “International Perspectives”. There was time also for working groups under the topics of Learning from the Past, Reviewing the Law on Abortion, Provision of Services, Ensuring Equal Access, ‘The

---

<sup>7</sup> Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 - <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/105/> [Accessed 4 Dec 2019]



*Respect and Protect Women's Lives, Health and Choices*

North is Next', Dealing with the 'backlash', International Solidarity, and Networking /Alliance-building.

The Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment brought together over 100 diverse organisations across Ireland in support of a shared goal – repeal of the Eighth Amendment. For the Coalition, the 2019 conference marked the end of what was a culmination of decades of tireless campaigning by supporters of abortion rights in Ireland. Whilst repeal of the Eighth Amendment marks a huge achievement in the fight for women's rights in Ireland, the legislation is lacking in several areas, as addressed in the Coalitions' submission to the Department of Health, including the three-day waiting period, safe access zones and full decriminalisation of abortion to resolve problems with late diagnoses of foetal abnormalities. Abortion rights campaigners will continue to campaign for abortion legislation in Ireland which is fully compliant with human-rights legislation and which respects and protects women's lives, health and choices.