



## Abortion Support Network

13<sup>th</sup> June 2011

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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#### **ABC case – will the Irish Government take action on abortion?**

Every year, over 4,000 women are forced to travel to England from Ireland to access a safe and legal abortion (this does not include those coming over from Northern Ireland - i.e. 1,101 in 2010). But now pressure is mounting on Ireland to legislate on abortion following last December's European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling on the ABC case. The Government has until June 16<sup>th</sup> to submit an action plan to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe setting out the measures Ireland will take to implement the judgment. This could effectively put an end to the misery many women unnecessarily face when needing an abortion.

*'Abortion Support Network is very much a front line organisation. We provide financial assistance, accommodation and confidential, non-judgemental information to women forced to travel to England to access an abortion. We speak to women directly and hear first-hand of the difficulties and distress they are forced to endure because they cannot access a safe legal abortion in their own country.'*

*Although recent Department of Health figures showed a slight drop over the last year in the number of women travelling to England from Ireland (by 0.5 per cent), the number of women who are contacting Abortion Support Network because they are unable to afford the cost of an abortion, plus travel and other costs such as childcare, has more than doubled. Ireland's severe abortion restrictions affect poor women the most, an ordeal which is further exacerbated by the current economic crisis.*

*The sooner the Irish government rectifies this long-standing injustice, the sooner women will be able to make their own decisions about abortion and make choices that are right for them. Until then, Abortion Support Network will be there for them.'* **said Mara Clarke, Abortion Support Network Director**

The cost of an abortion varies greatly depending on gestation, ranging from £350 to £1,775. Women who travel from Ireland bear the total financial cost of the procedure, which is available to women in Britain on the NHS, plus the additional costs of an often last minute plane ticket, child care and other associated costs. This is especially problematic for women without the necessary funds, or a passport or driver's license, because they experience further delays and are forced to access a later abortion at higher financial costs.

### **Case studies**

These are some examples of the women who have called us:

*A 24 year old woman who was 6 weeks pregnant. She was a single parent with a young baby and found out she was pregnant whilst still on maternity leave from her part-time job. The father was not aware of the pregnancy. She couldn't afford flights to England and called Abortion Support Network. We were able to pay for her flights.*

*A woman who was 19 weeks pregnant with 3 children, including one under the age of one. Initially she looked into trying to self-abort as she could not afford to pay for a termination. She was in a desperate state when she called Abortion Support Network. She knew she was pregnant at 10 weeks but could not book an abortion because she had no funds. After saving for 8 weeks, she managed to put aside 600 Euros. She was worried about her own health but 'terrified' to go near a hospital in case they would force her to have the baby. Abortion Support Network agreed to pay for her flights and the remainder of her clinic fee.*

*A 32 year old woman who already had a 9 month old baby and didn't realise she was pregnant until she was 20 weeks gone. She had been able to manage a 1,000 Euro loan from her sister for the procedure but could not afford flights and accommodation. Abortion Support Network helped her with both.*

*End*

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**For more information about our work, visit:** <http://www.abortionsupport.org.uk/about/fags/>

**To arrange an interview, please call Anne Quesney Abortion Support Network spokesperson on 07909 974 101.**

### **Notes for the editor**

#### **1. Abortion Law in the Republic of Ireland - some background facts:**

- In 1861 abortion was criminalised under all circumstances
- In 1992, the Supreme Court of Ireland ruled in the 'X' case that abortion was legal if the life of the woman is at risk
- In April 2008, the Council of Europe called on its members, which includes Ireland, to decriminalise abortion<sup>1</sup>

- In December 2010, the European Court of Human Rights delivered its verdict in the case of ABC v Ireland, which involved three women from the Irish Republic who were forced to travel abroad to access an abortion. The judges ruled unanimously that Ireland's failure to implement the existing constitutional right to a lawful abortion in Ireland when a woman's life is at risk violates Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court unanimously found that Ireland's abortion law violates women's human rights and that Ireland must make life-saving abortion services available<sup>ii</sup>.

## 2. **Abortion statistics**

Data from the Department of Health (England and Wales) on the number of abortions performed for women resident in the Republic of Ireland.<sup>iii</sup>

	2008	2009	2010
<b>Republic of Ireland</b>	4600	4422	4402

The above figures indicate 0.5% decrease between 2009 and 2010 in the number of abortions performed for women resident in Ireland but the actual number of women having abortions abroad is likely to be higher, with additional women giving a false address or travelling to Belgium or The Netherlands to access the procedure.

3. **Abortion Support Network** is an entirely volunteer-run organisation that was established in October 2009 to provide accommodation and financial assistance to women forced to travel from Ireland and Northern Ireland in order to have a safe legal abortion.

4. **Abortion Support Network** is an all-volunteer organisation that provides information, accommodation and financial assistance to women who are forced to travel to England to access a safe and legal abortion. The information and support we offer is strictly confidential and non-judgemental. Our volunteers provide a meal and a safe place to sleep for women travelling to London for abortions. We also fundraise to provide grants to help towards the cost of having the procedure at a clinic in England. We are the only organisation known to be providing practical support of this kind. For more information or to support our work visit [www.abortionsupport.org.uk](http://www.abortionsupport.org.uk)

5. In Ireland, abortion is illegal except under extremely limited circumstances and it is virtually impossible for women to access the procedure legally. However, women can legally travel abroad for an abortion. Further information about abortion law in Ireland is available from:

- Irish Family Planning Association: <http://www.ifpa.ie/eng/Hot-Topics/Abortion>
- Bpas Ireland website: <http://www.abortion.ie/index.php?view=category&ID=3271>

6. Women who travel from Ireland to England for an abortion have to pay for their travel and commonly that of a partner, friend or family member accompanying them (last minute air fares and

travel to and from the clinic), often pay for accommodation to stay overnight, and must pay for the procedure as a private patient. The cost of the procedure alone ranges between £350 to £1,775, depending on the stage of their pregnancy. Some women must also pay the costs of childcare for children back home, and take time off work.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc08/EDOC11537.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.ifpa.ie/eng/Hot-Topics/Abortion/ABC-v-Ireland>

<sup>iii</sup> [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsStatistics/DH\\_126769](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsStatistics/DH_126769)