

N Ireland laws on abortion, same-sex marriage, set to change

October 21 2019, by Danica Kirka



Pro-choice activists take part in a photo call in the grounds of Stormont Parliament, Belfast, Monday Oct. 21, 2019. Abortion is set to be decriminalized and same-sex marriage legalized in Northern Ireland as of midnight, bringing its laws in line with the rest of the U.K. (Niall Carson/PA via AP)

Northern Ireland is set to decriminalize abortion and set the stage for legalization of same-sex marriages as of midnight Monday, bringing its laws in line with the rest of the U.K.

This is happening because British lawmakers voted last year in favor of changing these laws if Northern Ireland's government wasn't up and running by Oct. 21.

Under the new measures, the U.K. government will take responsibility for putting regulations in place to provide access to terminations. Women will be offered free transportation to obtain [abortion services](#) in England in the meantime.

Grainne Teggart of Amnesty International said the change would make the system more "compassionate."

"From midnight tonight history will be made, these oppressive laws that have policed our bodies and our healthcare will be brought to an end," she said. "Finally, our rights and our healthcare are being brought into the 21st century."

But Democratic Unionist Party leader Arlene Foster said that the law change would not mark the end of legal efforts to prevent the introduction of abortion services in Northern Ireland. She said the party would explore legal options

"This is not a day of celebration for the unborn," she said.

Same-sex marriage will become legal in January.

Northern Ireland's government has been suspended for more than two-and-a-half years amid a dispute between the major Protestant and Catholic parties, leaving Britain's Parliament to make some key decisions.

Activists on both sides of the abortion issue gathered outside the Stormont Assembly on Monday in hopes of pressuring lawmakers. The

assembly was sitting for the first time since March 13, 2017 after being recalled by lawmakers wishing to protest changes to the abortion laws.

The session ended bitterly.

Activists favoring the new law held aloft cardboard letters spelling out "decriminalised" in front of Parliament Buildings ahead of the sitting. Anti-[abortion](#) activists prayed.

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