# Calls mount for urgent reform of abortion laws after Nicola Packer case



# Calls for Urgent Reform of Abortion Laws Following Painful Case

The recent acquittal of Nicola Packer has reignited debates over abortion law in the UK, with healthcare professionals and lawmakers urging immediate reform. Ms Packer, a 45-year-old woman, was found not guilty at Isleworth Crown Court of unlawfully administering substances to procure a miscarriage—an allegation that arose after she took prescribed abortion medication while being 26 weeks pregnant, significantly beyond the 10-week limit for home use.

The ordeal faced by Ms Packer, spanning nearly four and a half years, highlights the intense difficulties women endure when navigating the current legal landscape surrounding abortion. Her case has been described by friends and supporters as a "shocking wake-up call" to the necessity of legal reform. Helle Tumbridge, a close friend of Ms Packer, vividly captured the emotional gravity of the situation, stating that it felt like a "persecution" for a "tragic accident."

Compounding the distress, Ms Packer revealed she only discovered her pregnancy when she took a test on November 2, 2020, and after ingesting the medication, she presented the foetus at a hospital in a backpack—a situation that no woman should have to endure. Explaining her actions in court, she expressed disbelief at the implications of her pregnancy, saying “If I had known I was that far along I wouldn’t have done it.”

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists issued a statement asserting that the case illustrates how "outdated and harmful" existing abortion laws can be. The college has joined a coalition of over 30 medical, legal, and public health experts who are calling on Parliament to take urgent action to safeguard women's reproductive rights and abolish the criminalisation of abortion.

Debate over the legal landscape of abortion has a long history in the UK. The 1967 Abortion Act legalised abortion under certain conditions, but numerous cases, including a recent event where a woman was jailed for exceeding the legal limit, have intensified scrutiny over how these laws operate in practice. In June 2023, a justice minister reaffirmed that the law is “settled” in England and Wales, suggesting that any change will require significant political will amidst deeply held beliefs on both sides of the abortion debate.

Stella Creasy, a Labour MP, has indicated that proposed amendments to the Crime and Policing Bill could be published shortly. This amendment aims not only to decriminalise abortion but also to ensure that women have assured rights in this sphere. Creasy's comments underscore an aim to enshrine the right to choose as a fundamental human right, removing the risk of vulnerable women being subjected to the same traumatic legal processes as Ms Packer.

The case has prompted strong reactions within political circles, with Labour MP Tonia Antoniazzi labelling the situation faced by Ms Packer “completely unacceptable.” She highlighted the indignities suffered by Ms Packer, who was taken from her hospital bed to a police cell while facing charges. Explaining the broader implications, Antoniazzi stated, “This is utterly deplorable, and it is not justice."

Legal scholars and activists have long pushed for the decriminalisation of abortion, advocating for legislation that reflects contemporary medical standards and human rights perspectives. Historical debates in Parliament have frequently centred on how to balance the rights of the mother with those of the unborn. In light of cases like Ms Packer's, the conversation is evolving towards not just reforming, but fundamentally reassessing the framework within which reproductive rights operate in the UK.

As calls for change grow louder, it remains to be seen how Parliament will respond to this growing demand for legal reform—to ensure that women are not left feeling like “second-class citizens” in a society that claims to value their rights.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/abortion-case-prompts-calls-for-legal-reform-after-womans-four-year-ordeal-5XRML7DCT5NOLNRUU2NZ2ZCO7I/), [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/abortion-case-prompts-calls-for-legal-reform-after-womans-four-year-ordeal-5XRML7DCT5NOLNRUU2NZ2ZCO7I/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/abortion-case-prompts-calls-for-legal-reform-after-womans-four-year-ordeal-5XRML7DCT5NOLNRUU2NZ2ZCO7I/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/abortion-case-prompts-calls-for-legal-reform-after-womans-four-year-ordeal-5XRML7DCT5NOLNRUU2NZ2ZCO7I/), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/07/supreme-court-dismisses-bid-to-overturn-northern-ireland-abortion-laws)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/15/england-and-wales-abortion-law-has-been-settled-tory-mp-tells-commons), [[6]](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1990/apr/24/amendment-of-law-relating-to-termination)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/10/a-key-proposal-for-abortion-law-reform)[[6]](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1990/apr/24/amendment-of-law-relating-to-termination)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/abortion-case-prompts-calls-for-legal-reform-after-womans-four-year-ordeal-5XRML7DCT5NOLNRUU2NZ2ZCO7I/), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/10/a-key-proposal-for-abortion-law-reform)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/abortion-case-prompts-calls-for-legal-reform-after-womans-four-year-ordeal-5XRML7DCT5NOLNRUU2NZ2ZCO7I/), [[6]](https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1990/apr/24/amendment-of-law-relating-to-termination)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/abortion-case-prompts-calls-for-legal-reform-after-womans-four-year-ordeal-5XRML7DCT5NOLNRUU2NZ2ZCO7I/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/abortion-case-prompts-calls-for-legal-reform-after-womans-four-year-ordeal-5XRML7DCT5NOLNRUU2NZ2ZCO7I/> - Nicola Packer, a 45-year-old woman, was acquitted at Isleworth Crown Court in London of unlawfully administering a substance to procure a miscarriage. The trial, which lasted two weeks, was described as a culmination of a traumatic four-and-a-half-year ordeal. Healthcare professionals and MPs have called for legal reform, highlighting the outdated and harmful nature of current abortion laws. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists emphasized the need for urgent action to protect women's reproductive rights and prevent similar cases in the future.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/07/supreme-court-dismisses-bid-to-overturn-northern-ireland-abortion-laws> - In June 2018, the UK Supreme Court dismissed a legal challenge to Northern Ireland's restrictive abortion laws, stating they were incompatible with human rights legislation. The court's decision intensified calls for legislative reform, urging politicians to address the issue. The ruling underscored the need for a comprehensive review of abortion laws to align them with human rights standards and public health considerations.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/15/england-and-wales-abortion-law-has-been-settled-tory-mp-tells-commons> - In June 2023, a UK justice minister stated that abortion law in England and Wales has been settled by Parliament and that the government does not intend to change it. This statement followed a case where a woman was jailed for taking abortion pills after the legal limit. The minister's comments aimed to clarify the government's position amidst ongoing debates about abortion legislation.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/10/a-key-proposal-for-abortion-law-reform> - In 2017, a group of legal scholars and professionals proposed significant reforms to UK abortion laws, advocating for decriminalization and the establishment of a statutory framework to regulate abortion services. The proposal aimed to modernize the legal approach to abortion, ensuring it aligns with contemporary medical practices and human rights standards.
6. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1990/apr/24/amendment-of-law-relating-to-termination> - In April 1990, UK Parliament debated amendments to the Abortion Act 1967, discussing proposed time limits for abortion and the criteria under which abortions could be performed. The debate highlighted the complexities of balancing the rights of the fetus and the mother, with various amendments suggesting different time frames and conditions for legal abortions.
7. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1977/feb/25/abortion-amendment-bill> - In February 1977, the UK House of Commons discussed the Abortion Amendment Bill, which proposed changes to the existing abortion laws. The debate focused on various aspects, including the criteria for abortions, the role of medical professionals, and the legal framework governing abortion services. The discussion aimed to address concerns about the adequacy and fairness of the current legislation.