



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

SAFE ACCESS ZONES FOR ABORTION SERVICES – ANNUAL REPORT

December 2024

VERSION CONTROL

VERSION	DATE	SUMMARY OF CHANGES
1.0	October 2024	First Issue
2.0	December 2024	Final draft

Introduction

This is the first annual report of the Department of Health since the introduction of Safe Access Zones, covering the 12-month period from 29 September 2023 – 30 September 2024.

Abortion Services are now available in all five Health & Social Care (HSC) Trusts in Northern Ireland. Since the introduction of the Abortion (Northern Ireland) (No 2) Regulations 2020 on 31 March 2020, which provided the legal framework for abortions in Northern Ireland, there have been 5,497 women and girls who have accessed abortion services in Northern Ireland up until 31 March 2023 (source: [Northern Ireland abortion statistics 2020/21 - 2022/23 | Department of Health](#)).

Until the introduction of Safe Access Zones on 29 September 2023, women, and girls as well as health service staff, directly encountered anti-abortion protests and protestors outside hospital and clinics, and frequently experienced harassment and intimidation.

The UN Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and Girls recommended that women should be protected from harassment by anti-abortion protestors by investigating complaints, prosecuting, and punishing perpetrators. However, the law in Northern Ireland was limited in how these incidents could be dealt with.

Recognising the need for legislative provision, a Private Members Bill was introduced in the Northern Ireland Assembly by Clare Bailey MLA on 13 September 2021 to enable Safe Access Zones to be established by operators at any premises providing abortion services. The Bill was passed by the Assembly on 24 March 2022, and was initially delayed becoming law after it was referred to the Supreme Court by the Northern Ireland Attorney General. In December 2022, the Supreme Court ruled that Safe Access Zones legislation is not incompatible with the Convention rights of those who seek to express opposition to the provision of abortion services in Northern Ireland.

When the Bill received Royal Assent on 6 February 2023, making it an Act of the NI Assembly, Northern Ireland became the first region in the United Kingdom and Ireland to introduce a law to protect women, girls, and staff from accessing and providing abortion services.

The Department of Health established a Task & Finish Group comprising representatives from each of the Trusts and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to plan for the implementation of the zones and provide a standardised approach across each of the sites where Safe Access Zones would be implemented.

The Safe Access Zones became operational at all Trust sites on 29 September 2023. The Department, Trusts and the PSNI have been monitoring the operation and effectiveness of the zones and the purpose of this report is for the Department to set out whether, in its opinion, the Safe Access Zones have been effective in protecting the safety and dignity of protected persons, in line with [Section 8 of the Abortion Services \(Safe Access Zones\) Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2023](#).

The Department would like to place on record its thanks to those Trust and PSNI representatives who were and remain instrumental in overseeing the implementation and monitoring of Safe Access Zones in Northern Ireland. A special thanks also to former Department of Health official, Nicola Barber, for leading the preparation and developing Operator Guidance enabling the zones to come into effect.

1. Executive Summary

- There are currently eight Safe Access Zones operational across five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust areas – all of these became operational on 29 September 2023.
- Five of these Safe Access Zones extend for 100 metres, two for 130 metres and one for 150 metres.
- The Department has not received any notifications of amendments to the extent of the Safe Access Zones at any site.
- The Task & Finish Group, established for the purpose of implementing the Safe Access Zones, met three times throughout the year to monitor implementation of the Safe Access Zones and receive feedback.
- There have been eight recorded breaches of the Safe Access Zones by the Northern Trust since 29 September 2023, resulting in two arrests and one warning.
- The PSNI have received approximately 108 calls for service.
- Concerns have been raised with the Department in relation to ongoing protests at Causeway Hospital.
- Overall feedback received from Trusts, the PSNI and other stakeholders is that the introduction of Safe Access Zones has been a positive development in Northern Ireland and that they are effective in protecting women and staff accessing and providing abortion services.
- Safe Access Zones are now also operational in England & Wales, Scotland, and Ireland with some key differences in law in how the Safe Access Zone has been applied.
- On balance, the Department considers that the legislation is working effectively and does not consider that any legislative amendments are required at this time.
- Furthermore, the Department considers that the current monitoring and evaluation methods remain appropriate to assess the effectiveness of Safe Access Zones and do not propose any amendments at this time.

2. Background

- 2.1 Safe Access Zones were established under NI Assembly legislation, the [Abortion Services \(Safe Access Zones\) Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2023](#) (referred to below as “the Act”), to protect women and girls accessing abortion services, information, advice and counselling, and anyone accompanying them, and protect staff working at these locations. These are referred to as “protected persons” within the Act. Under the law, anti-abortion protests and other behaviours are prohibited within any Safe Access Zone once it has been established, and this may be enforced by the PSNI.
- 2.2 The Act makes it a crime to do an act in a Safe Access Zone, either intentionally or recklessly, that will or might:
- directly or indirectly influence a protected person in their decision to attend an abortion clinic; OR
 - prevent or impede their access; OR
 - harass, alarm or distress that protected person.
- 2.3 The Act received Royal Assent and came into effect on 6 February 2023. Criminal offences and enforcement provisions within the Act, came into effect from 7 May 2023. Safe Access Zones were subsequently introduced at all health service locations providing abortion services from 29 September 2023.
- 2.4 The Act creates responsibilities for the Department of Health, the operators of premises as defined in the Act and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) (see Chapter 3 for details of responsibilities). These responsibilities were outlined in the [Operator Guidance](#) which was developed by the Department of Health and sets out how Safe Access Zones are to be implemented and monitored by the Department, by operators such as Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts or by other organisations in line with the legislation.
- 2.5 A Safe Access Zone includes the “protected premises” where abortion services are provided, as well the public areas around the protected premises at a distance of **at least 100 metres from each entry and exit point**. This distance

may be extended up to a maximum of 250 metres from entry and exit points if the operator considers it appropriate to allow safe access to “protected persons”.

- 2.6 The Safe Access Zones only apply to the strictly designated public space areas. They do not apply to private properties.

3. Responsibilities

- 3.1 This section provides a summary of the responsibilities of providers of abortion services (i.e. operators, which currently only includes HSC Trusts), the Department of Health and PSNI. Further information is available in the [Operator Guidance](#).

Operator

Establishing a Safe Access Zone

- 3.2 An **operator is responsible for establishing a Safe Access Zone** and determining the extent of the Safe Access Zone at each premises. Factors such as the geographical area and the history and extent of any anti-abortion protest activity at the location can be considered.
- 3.3 Operators are responsible for considering proportionality when determining the size of a Safe Access Zone at their premises and should engage with the PSNI as part of the determination process. Ultimately, the final decision on a Safe Access Zone is one for the operator, who should weigh up the factors involved and have a rationale for a decision and retain this as a formal record.
- 3.4 Operators must notify the Department of Health that they wish the premises to be protected. The Safe Access Zone is established when the Department has been notified.
- 3.5 **Operators are also responsible for bringing the existence and extent of any Safe Access Zone to the attention of members of the public.** This includes the erection of Safe Access Zone signage, publication of Safe Access Zone maps, and effective communication of this information. Effective communication includes the provision of an information circular to any private premises within the Safe Access Zone.

Reporting a suspected breach, Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and staff training

- 3.6 Operators are responsible for developing a Standard Operating Procedure and providing appropriate training to ensure that relevant staff are aware of the Safe Access Zones and how to safely manage a suspected breach.

Monitoring the Effectiveness of Safe Access Zones

- 3.7 **Operators must monitor the effectiveness of the Safe Access Zone** by keeping a record of the nature and extent of any breaches of the zone (and the legal outcome) and / or incidents at the premises including protest activity. Operators are also responsible for gathering feedback from protected persons by way of survey and anonymised testimonials and seeking property owner/resident feedback within a Safe Access Zone.

Extending a Safe Access Zone

- 3.8 If an operator considers that a Safe Access Zone, as established, is not providing safe access to the premises for protected persons, **the operator can give notice to the Department that it wishes to extend the Safe Access Zone by a specified distance up to a maximum of 250 metres**. Operators must give due consideration to proportionality when determining whether to extend a Safe Access Zone and should engage with the PSNI as part of the determination process. The rationale for any decision to extend a Safe Access Zone should be recorded and retained by the operator.

Withdrawal of a Safe Access Zone

- 3.9 In line with the Act, an operator of a protected premises may at any time withdraw the notice given to the Department for the establishment of the Safe Access Zone.

Department of Health

Establishment of a Safe Access Zone

- 3.10 It is the Department's responsibility to publish and maintain a **list of Safe Access Zones on the Department's website and to ensure that it is updated in line with any changes**.

Monitoring the Effectiveness of Safe Access Zones

3.11 As set out in Section 8 of the Act, the **Department must publish an annual report**, setting out whether, in the opinion of the Department, each Safe Access Zone has been effective in protecting the safety and dignity of protected persons.

3.12 The **Department will gather insight to inform their opinion** prior to publishing the annual report. These sources may include:

- Detail collated yearly from each operator of protected premises;
- Feedback and opinion gathered directly from the PSNI;
- Case study examination of specific case studies or success stories related to the Safe Access Zone implementation to understand its impact on protected persons;
- Benchmarking to compare the Safe Access Zone effectiveness to similar initiatives or zones in other locations/jurisdictions; and,
- Long-term analysis to analyse trends over time to determine whether the Safe Access Zones continue to meet their objectives and adapt strategies accordingly.

3.13 The **Department will keep monitoring and evaluation methods under review** and adjust these as appropriate to help ensure the effectiveness of Safe Access Zones and identify any potential improvements.

Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

3.14 The **PSNI has powers of enforcement** under the legislation and can be contacted by a member of staff at any protected premises, or by a member of the public, in the event of any potential breach of the law. The PSNI has employed a “4 E’s approach” to policing the Safe Access Zones – Engage, Explain, Encourage and Enforce, if required.

3.15 Any breaches of the Act will be dealt with appropriately and those found guilty of an offence could face a fine of up to £2,500 (not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale).

4. Current Safe Access Zones

4.1 All five Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts introduced Safe Access Zones from 29 September 2023 across eight locations providing abortion services as set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Trust	Site Name	Meterage
Northern	Causeway Hospital	100m
Western	Altnagelvin Hospital	100m
Southern	Craigavon Area Hospital	100m
Southern	Daisy Hill Hospital	130m
Belfast	Bradbury Wellbeing and Treatment Centre	150m
Belfast	College Street	130m
South Eastern	Lagan Valley Hospital	100m
South Eastern	Ulster Hospital	100m

4.2 There have been no further notifications to the Department since 29 September 2023 to remove, extend or establish a new Safe Access Zone at any Trust premises. Additionally, there have been no notifications to the Department from non-statutory providers of information, advice, or counselling about abortion services, who, under the Act, can also establish a Safe Access Zone.

4.3 Information on the location of each Safe Access Zone is displayed at all protected premises and published on the Department of Health¹ and HSC Trust websites. Public signage highlights the legal requirements at each Zone.

4.4 The Safe Access Zones only apply to the strictly designated public space areas. They do not apply to private properties.

¹ <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/safe-access-zones-now-established-northern-ireland>

5. Key developments in other jurisdictions

- 5.1 Northern Ireland became the first region across the United Kingdom and Ireland to introduce Safe Access Zones at all locations providing abortion services, with these becoming operational on 29 September 2023.
- 5.2 Since then, Safe Access Zones have become operational in Scotland (24 September 2024), Ireland (17 October 2024) and England & Wales (31 October 2024). [Annex A](#) provides a comparison of the law in each jurisdiction.
- 5.3 In each jurisdiction across the United Kingdom and Ireland, the protected premises comprises the premises where a relevant healthcare provider provides termination of pregnancy services. This includes General Practitioners' Practices in Ireland. The Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Act (Northern Ireland) 2023 is the only law that also enables the protection of premises where information, advice or counselling related to termination of pregnancy takes place. The Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Scotland Act 2024 does however, provide for Scottish Ministers to amend the definition of protected premises by way of regulations.
- 5.4 In all jurisdictions, the aim is to protect those accessing or providing abortion services. The Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services) (Safe Access Zones) Act 2024 in Ireland does not mention those facilitating abortion services (as outlined in Scotland and England & Wales law) or accompanying a person accessing the treatment (as outlined in Northern Ireland law).
- 5.5 The extent of the Safe Access Zones varies across the United Kingdom and Ireland. In Scotland, a 200 metre Safe Access Zone is applied automatically but this can be extended or reduced by Scottish Ministers as required. In Ireland, 100 metres applies with no provision to extend and in England & Wales, 150 metres applies with no provision to extend. Northern Ireland has the only law where a distance appropriate to local geography may be determined by an operator within a set range.

5.6 All the laws prohibit the same acts within a Safe Access Zone, although Scotland, Ireland and England & Wales highlight a number of exceptions. In Scotland, it is also an offence under the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Scotland Act 2024, if someone does a prohibited act in a private place (such as a private residence) within the boundary of a Safe Access Zone that can be seen or heard in the public places that are part of the Zone.

6. Feedback on the Operation of Safe Access Zones

6.1 To monitor the effectiveness of the Safe Access Zones, Trusts and the PSNI have kept records of incidents and breaches and have shared these with the Department. In addition, the Task & Finish Group, set up for the purpose of implementing the Safe Access Zones and comprising Departmental, Trust and PSNI officials, met on three further occasions to assess progress and receive feedback. The Department also invited several stakeholders, both pro-choice and anti-abortion, to provide feedback for the purpose of informing the first annual monitoring report.

6.2 This section provides an overview of the feedback received.

HSC Trusts

6.3 A summary of the records provided by HSC Trusts is included in Table 2 below.

Table 2

	Incidents recorded at Safe Access Zone	No of Breaches Recorded	No of times PSNI involved in Breaches
Northern Trust	Eight incidents recorded from October 2023 to September 2024 (including 1 planned protest – Gospel Service)	8 breaches	3 times - protestors arrested on one occasion
Western Trust	One planned protest at Altnagelvin Hospital on 9 June 2024	1 breach	1 – PSNI attended scene and engaged with protestors
Southern Trust	Protestors witnessed beyond the Safe Access Zone limit	No breaches	None
Belfast Trust	No incidents	No breaches	None
South-Eastern Trust	Two planned protests: 18 May 2024 at Ulster Hospital Site 4 August 2024 at Lagan Valley Hospital	No breaches	None

- 6.4 As outlined, there were a number of planned activities (also referred to as prayer meetings / Gospel service) in the vicinity of Safe Access Zones within the Western Trust, Northern Trust and South Eastern Trust. PSNI engagement with the organising groups both prior to and on the day of the activities resulted in no further action. This was either because the Safe Access Zone was not breached and / or the instruction to move outside the Safe Access Zone was complied with.
- 6.5 The Northern Trust reported the highest number of incidents at Causeway Hospital. Each of the eight incidents resulted in a breach of the Safe Access Zone. The PSNI were not contacted in all circumstances due to either insufficient information or the protestors moving on. The first recorded breach on 3 October 2023 resulted in two arrests. Another incident resulted in a warning being issued in July 2024.
- 6.6 Other incidents / breaches within the Northern Trust involved protestors within the Safe Access Zone handing out leaflets to members of the public in a car parking area. Protestors also stored their banners and equipment within hospital grounds. In the incidents where the PSNI did not attend, Northern Trust staff attended the area and, when possible, asked protestors to move on.
- 6.7 Whilst protests still occur at the boundary of other Trust Safe Access Zones, there have been no reported breaches of the Zones. All Trusts consider that the implementation of Safe Access Zones has enabled women and staff to access sites without fear of intimidation. Belfast Trust, in particular, have reported that prior to the introduction of the Safe Access Zones, there were regular – often abusive – protests at least once a week at their sites. With the introduction of Safe Access Zones, this has completely removed the protests from the vicinity and patients and staff can attend the premises without fear or abuse or attempts to stop them entering the building or being followed after they leave.

PSNI

6.8 Information recorded by the PSNI is outlined at Table 3 below. The PSNI had approximately **108 calls for service** since the introduction of Safe Access Zones. This includes calls from members of the public, hence the difference in Trust figures highlighted in Table 2 above.

Table 3

	No of Calls for Service	Details	Number of Arrests Recorded & Outcome
Northern Trust	59	Number of these related to protest activity. Extensive engagement with protestors has meant that more recent incidents comply with the legislation	Two - One pleaded guilty and one has recently been convicted of doing an act within a Safe Access Zone and failing to comply with a direction to leave a Safe Access Zone.
Western Trust	2	Relate to two protests that occurred in June 2024. One related to the planned protest as highlighted in Table 1 (police advice and guidance issued) and another smaller protest that was not known about by the Trust (no further action required / taken).	-
Southern Trust	45	Consistent engagement with protestors meant that no action was required / taken.	-
Belfast Trust	None	-	-
South Eastern	2	Protest / prayer meetings. No further action required following engagement with protestors.	
Total	108		

6.9 The PSNI have reported that the joint working and collaborative relationship between local Trusts and Neighbourhood Policing Teams has proved essential in ensuring shared awareness and understanding of the new legislation and approach to reported incidents or potential offences.

- 6.10 Whilst there were a number of small protests in the early months after the zones became operational, this was largely resolved by PSNI through engagement with protesters and associated groups, and the approach of explaining the legislation and encouraging compliance prior to any enforcement action (the 4 E's approach). PSNI employed a measured approach that balanced the right to peaceful protest with the Safe Access Zones legislation, ensuring a fair and transparent, consistent approach to all incidents and locations. This resulted in only three persons being reported for offences across Northern Ireland, resulting in two convictions to date. The third did not progress at the direction of the Public Prosecution Service (reported under Section 9 of the Public Order (NI) Order 1987).
- 6.11 In terms of the Belfast Trust and the South Eastern Trust, the PSNI's view is that these Safe Access Zones have been very effective and there have been no issues. There have been no incidents reported at the Belfast Trust and any protests at South Eastern Trust have adhered to the legislation following engagement with the PSNI.
- 6.12 In the Southern Trust, PSNI again consider the Safe Access Zones to be effective. With the exception of the initial protest at Craigavon Area Hospital there has been no disruption to the local community and there is continued facilitation of lawful/peaceful protest with no infringement on human rights.
- 6.13 PSNI's view of the Northern Trust Safe Access Zone is that it works well. However, as protests are continuing at the edge of the Safe Access Zone, the police are still called frequently and are required on these occasions to make judgements about what is a breach of Public Order legislation.
- 6.14 While there have been a low number of calls in respect of the Western Trust, PSNI report that officers feel the Safe Access Zone at Altnagelvin Hospital would benefit from further signage so that the zone would be easily identified to members of the public and the police.

6.15 Public reaction to Safe Access Zones, from the PSNI's point of view, has been mixed. The PSNI has advised the Department that advocates of reproductive rights and many healthcare professionals have welcomed the law, seeing it as an essential measure to protect vulnerable individuals. Some pro-choice individuals also desire stronger enforcement of Safe Access Zones and have expressed a degree of frustration in relation to the 4 E's approach to enforcement, whereby arrest is only used by police as a last resort. At the same time, some anti-abortion groups have argued despite the Supreme Court's earlier ruling that the legislation infringes upon their right to protest and free speech. The PSNI view overall is that it appears that most are satisfied that they have an area outside the Safe Access Zones to express their views.

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6.16 Whilst an invitation to provide input to this report was extended to a number of stakeholders, Alliance for Choice were the only Group who opted to do so. Alliance for Choice advised that it has direct knowledge and experience of protest activity outside clinics and hospitals prior to the introduction of the zones as they offered an accompaniment service for women.

6.17 Since the introduction of Safe Access Zones, Alliance for Choice advised that they are now very rarely needed or requested to accompany women to their appointments. They report that the Safe Access Zones have had a positive impact on staff and women and enable Alliance for Choice to provide reassurance to women prior to their appointment. Alliance for Choice Derry, however, advised that they would like to see an extension to the Safe Access Zone at Causeway Hospital.

6.18 Throughout the year, the Department has also been contacted by some local MLAs concerned with the ongoing protest activity outside Causeway Hospital. Whilst it is recognised that the protests are outside the boundary of the Safe Access Zones, the Department was advised that these are situated at the

Lodge Road Roundabout, which is the main route for many attending Causeway Hospital.

- 6.19 Those attending the hospital, and elected representatives, have raised concerns about the graphic and offensive nature of the posters on display. While members of the public and those attending other appointments at the hospital are not defined as “protected persons” under the legislation, some have reported feeling extremely traumatised by witnessing these protests. The Department has been asked to consider extending the Safe Access Zone to the maximum extent of 250m, however, the Department does not have any role in this regard.
- 6.20 Whilst the Department has no authority to extend the Safe Access Zone at Causeway Hospital or at any premises, it has been advised by Trust management that the matter has been considered and will be kept under review. Department officials attended the hospital earlier this year for the purpose of preparing this report and assessing the effectiveness of the legislation. Officials walked the site with Trust Management and an MLA who had raised concerns with the Department and witnessed two protestors with placards (non-graphic) at the boundary of the Safe Access Zones. One of these protestors also entered the hospital grounds at the time to avail of the facilities which are open to members of the public. This issue was dealt with swiftly by Trust management.
- 6.21 It was noted in discussion with Trust management that any extension of the current Safe Access Zone up to the maximum distance permitted in legislation would continue to place the boundary on a main route to the hospital and would also include the car park of a local shopping centre, which may impact on more members of the public. It is therefore unlikely that the visibility of protests or calls to the PSNI would reduce. However, it is recognised that it may deter protestors from entering the grounds of the hospital, where they may come into contact with protected persons, as has happened over the course of the year.

7. Effectiveness of Safe Access Zones

- 7.1 In light of the evidence presented from Trusts and the PSNI and feedback that the Department has received since the introduction of the Safe Access Zones on 29 September 2023, it is the Department's opinion that, on balance, **each of the eight Safe Access Zones has been effective in protecting the safety and dignity of protected persons.**
- 7.2 The Department recognises that at some sites, particularly Causeway Hospital, the continued presence of protests and the nature of those protests may cause distress to members of the public passing by or attending the hospital. However, the Department notes that the intention of the legislation was not to remove the right to protest but rather to protect women and staff specifically from harassment, alarm or distress when attending a clinic for abortion services within the immediate vicinity of these premises. The Department, and the Northern Trust, are content that the Safe Access Zone is effective in doing this.
- 7.3 The Department is of the opinion that the Northern Trust is managing the situation appropriately and within the confines of the law, although it is recognised that the ongoing monitoring places resource pressures on the Trust, particularly when protestors enter the grounds of the hospital. The Department acknowledges that there have been repeated breaches of the Safe Access Zones at Causeway Hospital and that the Trust has developed a Standard Operating Procedure for managing those breaches and when the PSNI should become involved. As enforcement is a matter for the PSNI, it is for them to decide, based on the specific scenario, if and when the law has been broken. The Trust and the PSNI have both referenced the good working relationship developed over the course of the year.
- 7.4 Furthermore, the Department is content that the Northern Trust have fully considered and examined the options available to it including extending the Safe Access Zone to 250m and is content that this is kept under review at this time.

7.5 The Department considers that the current monitoring and evaluation methods are appropriate for helping ensure the effectiveness of Safe Access Zones and identifying any potential improvements.

Comparison of Safe Access Zones' Legislation across UK & Ireland

	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Ireland	England & Wales
Legislation	Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Act (Northern Ireland) 2023	Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Act 2024	Health (Termination of Pregnancy Services) (Safe Access Zones) Act 2024	Section 9 of the Public Order Act 2023
Date it came into Effect	29 September 2023	24 September 2024	17 October 2024	31 October 2024
Meterage	100-250m	200m automatically but this can be extended or reduced by Scottish Ministers as required	100m with no provision to extend	150m with no provision to extend
What does it apply to (i.e. what premises)	<p>Protected premises are premises where treatment, information, advice or counselling relating to the lawful termination of pregnancy is provided in accordance with the Abortion (Northern Ireland) (No.2) Regulations 2020, and where the approved operator of the premises has notified the Department of Health that they wish to establish a Safe Access Zone.</p> <p>The Safe Access Zone includes the protected premises, as well as the public area outside the protected premises which lies within a distance between 100m-250m from each</p>	<p>The hospital or clinic where abortion services are provided (referred to in law as the 'protected premises') the public area of any grounds of the hospital or clinic, and any public areas within 200 metres of the boundary of the grounds (if there are any, or from the premises if not)</p> <p>Scottish Ministers may by regulations modify the definition of "protected premises."</p>	<p>Relevant healthcare premises where a relevant healthcare provider provides termination of pregnancy services. A relevant healthcare provider can mean a general practitioner, an obstetrician (or gynaecologist) or a hospital that provides acute in-patient services.</p>	<p>The measure applies to any clinics and private hospitals that are approved under the Abortion Act 1967, and for any NHS hospital that has given notification in the current or previous calendar year that it has carried out abortions.</p> <p>The relevant zones also need to be on or next to a public highway or road, in an open space to which the public has access, or within the area of land attached to an abortion clinic, or in a</p>

	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Ireland	England & Wales
	entrance to, or exit from, those premises, as set by the operator of the premises.			location that is visible from any of those areas.
Who does it aim to protect	<p>A protected person is a person attending protected premises for the purposes of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - accessing the treatment, information, advice, or counselling provided there; OR - accompanying a person accessing the treatment, information, advice, or counselling provided there, at the invitation of that person; OR - working in, or providing services to, the protected premises. 	<p>A person who is in the safe access zone for the purpose of accessing, providing, or facilitating the provision of abortion services at the protected premises</p>	<p>Persons accessing a relevant healthcare premises to avail of, or provide termination of pregnancy services.</p>	<p>Any person accessing, providing, or facilitating the provision of abortion services at an abortion clinic</p>
What is prohibited within the Safe Access Zone	<p>The Act makes it a crime to do an act in a Safe Access Zone, either intentionally or recklessly, that will or might:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - directly or indirectly influence a protected person in their decision to attend an abortion clinic; OR - prevent or impede their access; OR - harass, alarm or distress that protected person. 	<p>Doing something which either intends to, or is reckless as to whether the act has the effect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - influence someone's decision to access, provide or facilitate the provision of abortion services. - prevent or impede another person from accessing, providing, or facilitating the 	<p>Within the zones, it is illegal to carry out certain activities that are intended to obstruct or impede a person's access to a relevant healthcare premises or with the intent of influencing a person's decision in relation to availing of, or providing, termination of pregnancy services.</p>	<p>To intentionally or recklessly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - influence any person's decision to access or facilitate abortion services at an abortion clinic - obstruct any person from accessing or facilitating abortion services at an abortion clinic - cause harassment, alarm, or distress to any person in

	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Ireland	England & Wales
		<p>provision of abortion services, or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cause harassment, alarm, or distress to another person. <p>A person also commits an offence if they do an act in a private place (such as a private residence) within the boundary of a Safe Access Zone that is capable of being seen or heard by another person who is within the safe access zone for the protected premises.</p>	<p>This includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - photographing, filming or otherwise recording a person; - communicating material; - threaten or intimidate; or - follow or repeatedly approach 	<p>connection with a decision to access, provide or facilitate abortion services at an abortion clinic.</p>
Exceptions		<p>A person does not commit an offence where the person does anything in the course of—</p> <p>(a) accompanying with permission another person who is accessing (or attempting to access) abortion services at protected premises but only to the extent that the person’s act affects the other person,</p> <p>(b) providing, or facilitating the provision of, abortion services at protected premises,</p>	<p>Nothing shall prohibit a person from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - engaging in lawful protest, advocacy, or dissent within 100m of an entrance to either House of the Oireachtas, provided such protest, advocacy or dissent is not directed at a specific relevant healthcare premises, or persons accessing a relevant 	<p>Nothing in this section applies to—</p> <p>(a) anything done in the course of providing, or facilitating the provision of, abortion services in an abortion clinic,</p> <p>(b) anything done in the course of providing medical care within a regulated healthcare facility,</p> <p>(c) any person or persons accompanying, with consent, a person or persons accessing, providing, or facilitating the</p>

	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Ireland	England & Wales
		(c)providing other health care at protected premises, (d)engaging in conduct that is lawful under section 220 (peaceful picketing) of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992	healthcare premises, within that 100 metres. - engaging in lawful conduct that occurs inside a place of religious worship Nothing shall prohibit anything done by a relevant healthcare provider or any person employed by, or acting on behalf of, a relevant healthcare provider in the course of the provision of healthcare services, including the provision of information and advice relating to termination of pregnancy services.	provision of, or attempting to access, provide or facilitate the provision of, abortion services, or (d)the operation of a camera if its coverage of persons accessing or attempting to access an abortion clinic is incidental.
Penalties for breaching the Safe Access Zone	Any breaches of the Act could face a fine of up to £2,500 (not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale).	A person who commits an offence under the Act is liable— (a)on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, (b)on conviction on indictment, to a fine.	A person who is charged with an offence may be liable to a fine and/or a term of imprisonment of up to six months. Those who are found guilty of repeat offences may face harsher penalties. These penalties are in line with similar offences in other legislation.	A person guilty of an offence is liable on summary conviction to a fine.
Monitoring the Effectiveness	The Department of Health is required to produce an annual report to be laid in the NI Assembly.	Publish a report and lay it before the Scottish Parliament after 2 years of introduction of the	A review should be carried out no later than 18 months after the implementation and as soon as practicable after the	N/A

	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Ireland	England & Wales
		zones and each subsequent period of 3 years.	completion of the review, a report of the findings to be laid before each House of the Oireachtas.	