

Ireland approves 'life-saving' abortions for first time

July 12 2013, by Conor Barrins

Irish lawmakers on Friday overwhelmingly approved abortion for the first time in limited cases where the mother's life is at risk, in a vote that revealed deep divisions in the predominantly Catholic nation.

The change was prompted by the death last year of an Indian woman who had been refused an [abortion](#) in an Irish hospital, but more broadly ends years of uncertainty over the legal status of terminations in the country.

Legislators voted through the bill by 127 to 31 against in the early hours after two days of marathon debate in parliament. It will now go to a vote in the upper house, where the government has a majority.

But in a sign of the rifts that remain on the issue, a junior minister quit her post after voting against the bill and faces exclusion from Prime Minister Enda Kenny's Fine Gael party.

Kenny revealed recently he had received abusive letters written in blood and opponents of the bill have branded him a murderer, while 35,000 abortion opponents marched in Dublin on Saturday.

"I am deeply disappointed to have to vote against the government's abortion bill today," said Lucinda Creighton, junior minister with responsibility for European affairs in Kenny's cabinet.

The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Bill allows for abortion in

circumstances where doctors certify there is a real and substantial risk to the life of the mother, as opposed to a risk to her health.

It also permits a termination when one [obstetrician](#) and two [psychiatrists](#) unanimously agree that an expectant mother is a suicide risk.

The "suicide clause" in particular has divided society, with some anti-termination lawmakers warning that it will lead to a more liberal abortion regime in Ireland.

The bill follows a 2010 European Court of Human Rights ruling that found Ireland failed to implement properly the [constitutional right](#) to abortion where a woman's life is at risk.

Under a 1992 Supreme Court ruling, women in Ireland are legally entitled to an abortion if it is needed to save a mother's life—but six successive governments have failed to introduce legislation to reflect this.

The global attention following the death of 31-year-old Indian woman Savita Halappanavar in a Galway hospital in October prompted Kenny's government to act.

Halappanavar had sought a termination when told she was miscarrying, but the request was refused as her life was not at risk at the time. She died of blood poisoning days after miscarrying.

Human Rights Watch (HRW), the US-based rights group, said the new Irish legislation still "fails" women.

"The new law leaves intact the broad criminal ban on abortion. A woman pregnant as a result of rape, for example, or whose pregnancy is not viable, still can't get a legal abortion in Ireland," HRW said in a

statement.

Irish pro-choice groups agreed that the new law does not go far enough.

"Overall the legislation is not going to safeguard women's lives and women's rights," Sarah McCarthy of Galway Pro-Choice told AFP.

She doubted that the legislation could have saved Halappanavar.

"It doesn't provide for terminations in cases of an inevitable miscarriage and that's absolutely shameful," McCarthy said.

Kenny did not allow a free vote on the bill. Creighton has been expelled from the party, along with four other government lawmakers who voted against it at an earlier stage.

Creighton said she had voted against the government because of her misgivings about the suicide clause.

"I feel deeply and strongly that aspects of this bill are based on flawed logic and absolutely zero medical evidence," she said.

If passed in the upper house, the bill will go to the president, Michael D. Higgins, who can sign it into law or refer it to the Supreme Court if he feels it is unconstitutional.

New figures from the health ministry in Britain released on Thursday show 3,982 women, including 124 under the age of 18, travelled from Ireland to England or Wales for a termination in 2012.

Between 1980 and 2012, more than 150,000 women travelled from Ireland to England and Wales for a termination, according to the figures.

Predominantly Catholic Malta is now the only country in Europe to maintain a total ban on abortion.

Cyprus and Poland have strict laws which only allow termination when there is a danger to the mother or baby, and in cases where the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest.

Malta abortion ban the last in Europe

Ireland on Friday adopted a controversial law allowing approved abortion for the first time in limited cases where the mother's life is at risk.

Here is a state of play in the 28-nation European Union:

- AUSTRIA

Three months of a pregnancy or in case of serious health concerns for the mother or baby.

- BELGIUM

Twelve weeks, afterwards in case of serious health concerns for the mother or baby.

- BULGARIA

Twelve weeks, beyond that if the life of the mother is at risk, or for severe foetal malformations.

- CROATIA

Ten weeks, thereafter for medical reasons or in case of rape.

- THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Twelve weeks, after that in case of serious health concerns for the mother or baby or rape.

- DENMARK

Twelve weeks. After that the abortion has to be approved by the authorities who take into account exceptional circumstances, like danger to the mother, rape, incest or suspicion of Down's Syndrome.

- ESTONIA

Twelve weeks, and beyond that for medical reasons and/or for women younger than 15 or older than 45.

- FINLAND

Twelve weeks. A doctor's authorisation is necessary but in practice is systematic. Beyond that health and social authorities decide on a case by case basis.

- FRANCE

Twelve weeks, and beyond that for medical reasons.

- GERMANY

Abortion in Germany is permitted in the first 12 weeks upon condition of mandatory counselling, during which counsellors will try to dissuade the woman. Afterwards in cases of medical necessity, but not in case of rape.

- GREECE

Twelve weeks, beyond that for medical reasons, rape or incest.

- HUNGARY

Twelve weeks and up to 18 weeks if the patient is younger than 18, beyond that for medical or social reasons.

- IRELAND

Abortion is allowed in circumstances where there is a real and substantial risk to the life of the mother or where an expectant mother is a [suicide risk](#).

- ITALY

Twelve weeks for medical or social reasons, beyond for medical reasons only.

- LATVIA

Twelve weeks (up to 16 in case of rape) and after that for medical reasons.

- LITHUANIA

Twelve weeks, and beyond that on doctors' advice for medical reasons.

- LUXEMBOURG

Twelve weeks for social and medical reasons or rape, beyond that for medical reasons.

- MALTA

Abortion is completely banned. Women found to be having abortions face from 18 months to three years in prison.

- NETHERLANDS

Twenty-four weeks, and beyond for medical reasons. The abortion must take place in one of the 17 abortion clinics or 92 hospitals authorised by the government.

- POLAND

Abortion is allowed in case of rape, incest, danger to the life of the mother or the irreversible malformation of the foetus, in the first 12 weeks.

- PORTUGAL

Ten weeks on request, and up to 16 weeks in cases of rape. 24 weeks if the child will be born with severe malformations.

- ROMANIA

Twelve weeks, afterwards for medical reasons.

- SLOVAKIA

Twelve weeks and beyond that for medical reasons or rape.

- SLOVENIA

Ten weeks, thereafter for medical reasons.

- SPAIN

Twelve weeks, beyond that for medical reasons.

- SWEDEN

Eighteen weeks, and beyond that on the authorisation of the health and social services, usually for medical reasons.

- UNITED KINGDOM

Twenty-four weeks, and afterwards for medical reasons. In Northern Ireland, the woman's health must be at risk.

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