

Lithuanian leader vetoes strict IVF law

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Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite on Monday vetoed strict legislation on in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), saying the proposed law favoured by the influential Catholic Church ignores modern medicine.

Adopted last week, the legislation would limit the number of [embryos](#) that can be used in IVF to three, forbids screening them for genetic disorders before implantation and bans freezing them.

Grybauskaite said such provisions "prevent [infertile couples](#) from receiving up-to-date treatment methods", and currently apply in just two fellow EU states, Ireland and Malta.

IVF treatment consists of fertilising an egg outside a woman's body to produce an embryo that can then be implanted in her womb.

In 2012, the European rights court condemned Italy for its ban on screening embryos, saying its laws leave couples who want to avoid passing on diseases little room for manoeuvre.

Socially conservative lawmakers in predominantly Catholic Lithuania argue that embryos must be protected like human beings and have a right to life.

The church's opinion carries weight in the Baltic state, where three-quarters of the three million citizens are Catholic.

Catholic, Lutheran and Orthodox clergymen in December urged

lawmakers to "reject the suggested creation of excess embryos, their freezing and destruction."

Until now, IVF was regulated by a vague health ministry decree and available only in private clinics for around 2,000 euros (\$2,200).

The vetoed legislation would also have introduced IVF treatment in publicly funded hospitals for the first time.

In order to override a presidential veto it would need the vote of at least 71 lawmakers in the 141-seat parliament.

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