

Cambodia bans booming commercial surrogacy industry

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Cambodia has become the latest country to issue a ban on commercial surrogacy after curbs on the industry in other parts of the globe sparked a local boom in the unregulated baby business.

Surrogacy agencies started springing up in the Southeast Asian nation after former hubs like Thailand and India blocked foreigners from the services following a flurry of scandals and concerns about exploitation.

With cheap medical costs and no laws excluding [gay couples](#) or single parents, Cambodia quickly absorbed much of the demand.

But a government edict sent to Cambodian fertility clinics and seen by AFP on Thursday said that surrogacy was now "absolutely banned".

The proclamation, signed by the health minister last week, asked all medical professionals to comply with the injunction, though it did not spell out a legal punishment.

Phon Puthborey, spokesman for the Ministry of Women's Affairs, said the government was working on other regulatory schemes to prevent rights abuses in the controversial industry, which is outlawed in most countries.

"This is a transitional period because we have not had a law on surrogacy," he told AFP.

"We are looking for (other) possible measures to respond to the matter effectively. It could be a surrogacy law that includes protections for women and children so that they would not become victims of trafficking," he added.

Sam Everingham, global director of the consultancy Families Through Surrogacy, slammed the "abrupt" ban and said it would likely trigger panic among expectant parents and surrogates now facing an uncertain future.

"This sudden change does no favours to surrogates or children given the lack of information and lack of clarity," he told AFP.

Cambodia now boasts some 50 [surrogacy](#) agents, a number of which cropped up in the past year, according to Everingham.

"It was an industry that grew very quickly," he said, adding that Cambodia had become the "last hope" for many couples that would have previously sought services in neighbouring Thailand.

Bangkok's military government passed a law banning foreign couples from using Thai women as surrogates last year after a series of controversies—including tussles over custody—tainted the lucrative industry.

In one controversy, authorities discovered nine babies in a Bangkok apartment that had been fathered by a Japanese man using Thai surrogate mothers.

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