

# Abortion bans around the world

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Traditionally Catholic Ireland has announced a referendum in May on easing some of the strictest legislation in Europe that imposes a near-total ban on abortion.

The poll will decide if [abortion](#) clauses should be removed from the constitution so the government can propose new laws allowing unrestricted terminations up to 12 weeks into pregnancy.

The country approved limited abortion for the first time in 2013 when the mother's life is at risk, but not in other circumstances such as rape or malformation of the foetus.

While many countries have similar allowances, around 18 ban abortion completely.

Here is a snapshot of the global situation based on information from the World Health Organisation and US-based Center for Reproductive Rights.

## **Total ban**

Predominantly Catholic Malta is the only European Union country to totally ban abortion, imposing jail terms of between 18 months and three years if the law is broken.

Abortion is also banned in Andorra, the Vatican and San Marino, which are in Europe but not the EU.

Globally there are total bans in Congo-Brazzaville, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Madagascar, Mauritania, Nicaragua, Palau, Philippines, Senegal and Suriname.

In El Salvador the internationally criticised criminalisation of those found to have terminated pregnancies has led to 27 women being jailed, some serving terms of up to 30 years.

## **Restricted**

Many countries allow abortions in cases where the mother's life is deemed to be in danger.

A partial list includes: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Guatemala, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Laos, Lebanon, Myanmar, Oman, Paraguay, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Uganda, Venezuela, West Bank/Gaza and Yemen.

Unlike the rest of the United Kingdom, abortion is also illegal in the province of Northern Ireland except where the mother's life or mental health is in danger. The British government said in June it will fund abortions in England for women arriving from Northern Ireland.

Other countries also allow abortions only in cases of rape or threat to the mother's or baby's health, including Cyprus and Poland in Europe.

To the concerns of pro-choice groups, Poland's parliament rejected mid-January a draft bill that would have liberalised current abortion laws and sent for consideration a proposal to prohibit the procedure when foetuses are deformed.

Chile in September last year ended a strict ban that had been in force for decades when then president Michelle Bachelet signed into law legislation to decriminalise abortion in certain cases, including on health

issues.

India does not allow medical terminations after 20 weeks unless there is a threat to the mother's life, while South Korea also has restrictive laws, bucking the regional trend.

In Brazil a bill is under consideration in congress that would ban access to all abortions, even in cases of rape and women whose lives are in danger.

## **Widely allowed**

Abortion has been accepted, without restriction, in most parts of North America, Europe and northern Asia as well as Australia, Cambodia, Guyana, Mozambique, South Africa, Uruguay and Vietnam.

Most EU countries allow abortion up to 10 or 12 weeks of pregnancy, including France, Belgium, Denmark, Greece and Portugal. This moves to 14 weeks in traditionally Catholic Spain, 18 weeks in Sweden and 24 weeks in the Netherlands and Britain.

In the United States abortion was legalised nationwide in 1973, but has been under threat since Donald Trump became president with some Republicans seeking restrictions.

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