

Abortion rights around the world

October 22 2019

Abortion laws vary around the world, some countries have outright bans while others maintain highly restrictive laws.

After the liberalisation of [abortion laws](#) came into force in Northern Ireland on Monday, here is a snapshot of the global situation.

Total ban

Predominantly Catholic Malta is the only European Union country to ban [abortion](#) totally, 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 members of the European Union.

In El Salvador, the courts have handed down lengthy jail sentences, some of up to 30 years, to women judged to have resorted to abortion.

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

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, Lebanon, Myanmar, Paraguay, South Sudan, Syria, Uganda, Venezuela, West Bank/Gaza and Yemen.

In Brazil the law only allows terminations in cases of rape, risk to the life of the mother or if the foetus is missing part or all of the brain.

In 2017, Chile ended nearly three decades of a strict ban when then president Michelle Bachelet signed into law legislation to decriminalise abortion in certain cases.

In April 2019 South Korea's constitutional court ordered the country's decades-old abortion ban to be lifted in a landmark ruling and ordered the law to be revised by the end of 2020.

Pressure for change

Women from Europe and North America benefit from the most liberal legislation, with some notable exceptions.

EU member Poland has one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the bloc. A bill submitted in 2018 by ultra-conservatives to restrict abortion even further sparked mass demonstrations across the country.

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

In May 2019 the US state of Alabama signed the most restrictive abortion law in the country, providing for a near-total prohibition, even in cases of rape and incest.

Under the measure, expected to come into effect at the end of 2019,

performing an abortion is a crime that could land doctors in prison for up to 99 years.

The states of Kentucky, Mississippi and Missouri have also tightened their abortion laws.

All of the state bans have either been blocked by a judge or are headed for the courts, but there is no guarantee these laws will be taken up by the high court.

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