

Ireland Introducing New 'Limited Access' Abortion Laws After Woman's Death

Laws allowing limited access to abortion will be introduced in Ireland, the only EU member state that bans the procedure, following the death of a woman who was refused a termination, the government said on Tuesday.

The death last month of 31-year-old Savita Halappanavar, who was **denied an abortion** of her dying fetus and later died of blood poisoning, shocked the predominantly Roman Catholic country and spurred the government to act on an issue it had delayed for decades.

Abortion was banned in all circumstances by a constitutional amendment in 1983, but when challenged by a 14-year-old rape victim in the so-called "X-case" nine years later, the Supreme Court ruled a termination was permitted when the woman's life was at risk, including from suicide.

Successive governments sidestepped the politically divisive issue of clarifying the circumstances under which the mother's life could be judged to be at risk. Some members of the ruling Fine Gael party have indicated that they may not be able to back the new legislation.

"The drafting of legislation, supported by regulations, will be within the parameters of Article of the constitution as interpreted by the Supreme Court in the X case," the government said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The legislation should provide the clarity and certainty in relation to the process of deciding when a termination of pregnancy is permissible, that is where there is a real and substantial risk to the life, as opposed to the health, of the

woman.”

The death of Halapannavar, an Indian living in Ireland, highlighted the lack of clarity in Irish law that leaves doctors in a legally risky position and re-ignited the **abortion debate**, leading to large protests by both pro-choice and **pro-life** groups outside parliament and around the country.

The European Court of Human Rights said in 2010 that Ireland must clarify its law, a ruling which led to the commissioning of an experts’ report which said a woman was still only lawfully entitled to an abortion when there was a real and substantial risk to her life.

Members of Prime Minister Enda Kenny’s conservative Fine Gael party, including minister for European Affairs Lucinda Creighton, have expressed particular misgivings that the inclusion of suicide in any new legislation could lead to abortion on demand.

There was no specific reference to the risk of suicide as grounds for an abortion in the government’s statement which said further decisions would be made at a later stage relating to “policy matters that will inform the drafting of the legislation”

Kenny has said that he expects the government to vote as one on the issue, meaning that any defectors could be expelled from his party.

While this would be unlikely to threaten the government’s large majority, it would be a blow after the junior coalition Labour Party, which has campaigned for a clarification of the country’s abortion rules, expelled its fifth member in less than two years last week for voting against budget cuts.

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