

MEDIA FACT SHEET

Europe Abortion Laws 2026: Policies, Progress and Challenges

OVERVIEW

- **Widespread legality:** Abortion is now legal in almost all European countries.
- **Remaining bans:** Andorra, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco and Poland retain highly restrictive laws. Andorra has the only complete ban. In the United Kingdom, abortion on request is not legal except in Northern Ireland, although it is widely available in practice.
- **Progressive trend:** Countries across Europe continue to undertake law reform to expand abortion access by removing barriers and extending timeframes. In the past 10 years, 21 countries have removed abortion restrictions.
- **Repeal of bans:** Since 2018, Cyprus, Faroe Islands, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Jersey, Northern Ireland and San Marino have repealed highly restrictive abortion laws and legalised abortion on request.
- **Regressive threats:** Armenia, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Poland, Russia have introduced new restrictions in the past decade.
- **Remaining barriers:** Despite legality, regulatory barriers such as mandatory waiting periods, biased counselling, third-party authorisation requirements, and lack of abortion cost coverage still impede access to care in many places.
- **Ongoing criminalisation:** 29 countries have repealed all criminalisation of individuals who seek abortion care outside legal pathways, but retain some form of criminal penalties for healthcare professionals or others who assist in accessing care.

EUROPE AT-A-GLANCE	
Grounds for Legal Abortion	Barriers to Care
43 out of 49 countries allow abortion on request.	14 countries still impose a mandatory waiting period prior to abortion (48 hrs–7 days).
48 countries allow abortion when a woman's life is at risk (all except Andorra).	16 countries still require mandatory counselling prior to abortion.
46 countries allow abortion to protect health (physical or mental).	3 countries impose biased or directive counselling prior to abortion.
45 countries allow abortion in cases of fatal foetal impairment.	20 countries still criminalise women for having abortions outside of legal pathways.

KEY NUMBERS

- **43 out of 49 countries** allow abortion on request, at least in early pregnancy.
- **21 countries** have expanded access in the last decade; **7 countries** have introduced new restrictions.
- **Only 5 countries** retain highly restrictive laws.
- **29 countries** no longer criminalise women for obtaining abortions outside of legal pathways.
- **4 countries** (Albania, Hungary, the Netherlands and Switzerland) allow abortion on request only if the woman confirms she is in a state of distress.
- **14 countries** that have legalised abortion still impose a mandatory waiting period.
- **16 countries** that have legalised abortion still require mandatory counselling prior to abortion. In 3 countries (**Germany, Georgia and Hungary**) it is directive/biased.
- **21 countries** provide abortion free of charge or cover it under public insurance.
- **10 countries** have reformed laws to allow confidential access to care for adolescents in line with international human rights standards. **Many countries** still require parental consent until 16-18 years of age.

ABORTION LAW IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

- **25 out of 27 EU Member States** allow abortion on request.
- **Only 2 EU Member States** (Poland and Malta) retain highly restrictive abortion laws allowing abortion only in highly exceptional circumstances.
- **Health grounds:** All Member States except Malta allow abortion in situations where there is a serious risk to a woman's health.
- **Fatal foetal impairment:** All Member States except Malta and Poland allow abortion in cases of fatal foetal impairment.
- **Procedural barriers:**
 - Only 8 Member States still impose a mandatory waiting period.
 - Only 2 Member States (Germany and Hungary) still mandate directive counselling sessions aimed at discouraging abortion.
- **Coverage:** 15 Member States now provide abortion free of charge or fully cover it under public health insurance.
- **13 Member States** still criminalise women who have an abortion outside of legal pathways.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

1. Legalise abortion on request and repeal highly restrictive laws.
2. Decriminalise abortion and related care.
3. Remove mandatory waiting periods and counselling requirements.
4. Ensure free abortion care or coverage under public health insurance schemes.
5. Reform restrictive timeframes for abortion on request.
6. Guarantee access to medication abortion, including self-management, in line with WHO guidelines.
7. Ensure access to abortion care for adolescents in line with international human rights standards.
8. Eliminate harmful third-party authorisation requirements.
9. Ensure people seeking abortion and abortion care providers are protected from harassment and violence.

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