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# **HUNGARY's government further tightens abortion law by decree**

## **Hungary tightens abortion law by decree**

*In a sign of the extreme-right flexing its muscles, Hungary's government amended the law to now require women requesting an abortion to prove they have seen the foetus's vital signs.*

Hungary's nationalist-populist government amended the country's abortion law following the lead of the extreme right, with women now needing to prove to doctors they have listened to the "heartbeat of their foetus" before gaining access to abortion services.

With this [decree](#) issued on Monday, Hungary joins a regional trend of conservative and religious forces trying to restrict women's rights. In October 2020, the Polish Constitutional Tribunal – stuffed with judges appointed by the populist right – [tightened the existing legislation](#) to virtually ban abortion. That same month, a group of ultra-conservative MPs in Slovakia [tried, but narrowly failed](#), to impose new delays on women's access to abortion by extending the current 48-hour mandatory waiting period to 96 hours.

In Hungary, the arrival of the extreme-right [Mi Hazank \(Our Homeland\)](#) party in parliament following the April general election appears to be pushing Viktor Orbán's government to further align itself with ultra-conservative forces, say experts.

Mi Hazank's deputy president, Dóra Duro, has long campaigned for the introduction of a "heartbeat" law ostensibly as a way reduce the number of abortions performed in the country.

In the government decree published in the National Gazette on Monday, it reads: "Foetal vital functions have to be presented to patients in a clearly identifiable manner".

“I find it striking that the government introduces a measure which has a direct effect on women’s lives without any public consultation,” Reka Safrany, president of the Hungarian Women’s Lobby, told BIRN, saying it is a clear tightening of the current abortion legislation that, she fears, will further humiliate women.

“The government is sending the message to women that we have no control over our own bodies,” she added.

This is not the first time Fidesz has turned for inspiration to the far-right opposition. The government’s [anti-LGBT campaign](#) also began with [Dura publicly shredding an LGBT-friendly children’s book in 2020](#), which was followed by legal restrictions on same-sex couples adopting.

Yet abortion has not traditionally been a particularly contentious issue in Hungary. Hungarian society is mostly pro-choice and the number of abortions has been steadily declining, from 56,000 in 2010 to 23,900 in 2020, due mostly to education but perhaps also to generous government policies supporting childbearing.

Current legislation allows women to request an abortion until the 12th week of pregnancy if they feel “they are in a critical situation”. Even so, they need to take part in two compulsory consultations prior to abortion with childcare services, where they are often humiliated, women’s rights organisations allege.

Even though members of Hungary's conservative government have repeatedly promised not to touch the country's abortion laws, several steps taken over the last few years have raised fears among those campaigning for women's rights.

The Hungarian constitution – written in 2012 by the current government – states that “a foetus has to be protected from conception”.

And in 2012, medical abortion (i.e., through use of an abortion pill) was banned by the Fidesz government, leaving women with no alternative to the much more traumatic surgical abortion.

The Fidesz government, along with a number of autocratic and oppressive regimes, is a [co-sponsor of the Geneva Consensus Declaration](#), which campaigns against abortion and promotes the traditional family model.

President Katalin Novak said in a recent [speech](#) that she would support “protecting life from the moment of conception” and predicting that there might be steps taken towards tightening abortion rights.

*Photo credits: EPA-EFE/SZILARD KOSZTICSAK*

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