

France debates law to let lesbians and single women have IVF

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Politicians brace for protests over plan to end discrimination over fertility treatments

The French parliament on Tuesday begin a heated debate over [Emmanuel Macron](#)'s first major social reform: a law to end discrimination over women's reproductive rights by [allowing lesbian couples and single women](#) access to medically assisted procreation, such as IVF and sperm donation.

"This is about what society we want to live in and offer future generations," said the health minister, Agnès Buzyn. "It is about reflecting [France](#) as it is today and all French people in their great diversity...Same-sex parents and single parents exist today, that's a fact, it would be hypocritical not to see them and not to recognise them [in law]."

Under current French law, only heterosexual couples who have been married or living together for more than two years have the right to access procedures such as in vitro fertilisation, artificial insemination or sperm donation. The centrist government wants to extend this right to all women by passing a new law before the summer.

But the parliament was braced for a tense debate over several days amid vocal opposition from conservative groups, rightwing politicians and senior Catholic figures. Demonstrators will take to the streets in Paris on 6 October in a march organised by conservative groups who say the new law will "deprive children of a father". The head of the French conference of Catholic bishops has argued it is the "duty" of all concerned citizens to demonstrate against the bill.

The new law would bring [France](#) into line with many of its neighbours. In several countries including the UK, Spain and Belgium, such procedures are open to all women. French equality groups have fought for years against what they have called blatant "sexist" discrimination against single women and women in same-sex relationships.

Macron himself has not spoken publicly on the issue since he became president in 2017, leaving it to the prime minister and senior ministers to insist France is ready for the change.

However, Macron last week told lawmakers from his party, La République En Marche, that the draft law was fraught with risk for the government. The president had repeatedly delayed introducing the legislation for the past two years for fear of mass protests by conservative campaigners.

In 2013, the [legalisation of same-sex marriage](#) in France was unique among its European neighbours in sparking months of [large street demonstrations](#), which saw violent clashes between far-right groups and riot police and led to a rise in homophobic attacks.

This weekend, the ethics board of France's National Academy of Medicine issued a report warning that "the deliberate conception of a child deprived of a father is not without risk for the child's development".

Several government ministers shot back that this was wrong. The health minister, said it was false to claim there was a link between growing up in a single-parent family and being damaged.

Jean-Louis Touraine, a lawmaker for Macron's party and medical professor who has helped draw up the text, said: "All the children born in these conditions tell us how happy they are, how they haven't suffered from any great lack."

Some in the rightwing party Les Républicains have opposed the bill. Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally party has called for the issue to be put to a referendum.

Xavier Breton, a lawmaker from Les Républicains, has accused the government of "denying the difference" between men and women.

Much criticism has focused on the notion of single women becoming lone parents, with hospital psychologists telling a parliament commission that a woman raising a child alone could have a negative impact on the child. Other experts insist that a large number of women in France already raise families alone.

Leftwing parties have all backed the bill, which analysts say could help Macron recover some lost support on the left after he pushed through a series of pro-business tax cuts in the first half of his five-year mandate, which saw critics label him the "president of the rich".

The draft legislation would also allow children conceived with donor sperm to learn the donor's identity when they turn 18, ending the anonymity that donors in France have been guaranteed until now.

For lesbian couples, the child's birth certificate would state the names of the "mother and mother" instead of the "mother and father".

The law would also allow women in their mid-30s to freeze their eggs - a procedure currently available only to women undergoing treatment that could affect their fertility, such as radiation therapy or chemotherapy for cancer.

The government has estimated that the bill would benefit around 2,000 women annually.

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