

Thailand OKs abortions up to 20th week, but bigger barriers remain

Thursday 29 September 2022, by [ITTHIPONGMAETEE Chayanit](#) (Date first published: 27 September 2022).

Starting next month, women may obtain abortions up to the 20th week of pregnancy - eight more weeks than before - but advocates say the law still falls short of providing access to safe abortions for all women.

Though the new law [promulgated](#) yesterday allows women to terminate pregnancies between the 12th and 20th weeks - with professional consultation - an abortion rights advocate said more must be done to expand access across socioeconomic levels and regardless of how far along the pregnancy.

"I think, in the end, it should be women's decision what to do with their bodies," said Supecha Baotip, founder of Tam Tang, an NGO that provides information about safe abortions in Thailand.

The amendment, signed by health minister Anutin Charnvirakul, amended Criminal Code Section 305 (5). It will come into effect 30 days after it was announced in the Royal Gazette - Oct. 26.

Starting Oct. 26, women within the legally permitted timeframe - over 12 weeks pregnant but under 20 weeks - can seek consultations in person, in writing, by phone or online with medical experts who will determine if they are eligible to have an abortion.

Despite widespread belief, abortion has long been de facto legal in Thailand through a loophole in the law which makes broad exceptions for impacts on a woman's health, physical or mental.

It was only last year that abortion's legality was made more explicit with legislation permitting it within 12 weeks.

Supecha noted that, while Criminal Code 305's broad exception allowing women to terminate pregnancies due to "physical" or "mental" risks, the law fails to include the "economic" impact.

"What is still missing in the law is economic problems. What if I'm very poor? What if I want to focus on my career, not having a kid?" Supecha told *Coconuts Bangkok* today. "Do I have to have suicidal thoughts so that I can have abortion?"

Supecha went on to say that Thailand still struggles with availability of health clinics that offer services on abortion. Roughly 100 health clinics in Thailand offer abortion services - more than half of them remain secretive to the public. Bangkok currently has only 11 health clinics that provide abortion services.

That means that while the middle class and affluent in Bangkok have little trouble finding a facility, they remain out of reach to many women elsewhere.

Given Thailand's socially conservative strain of Buddhism, which views abortion as a sin, medical professionals' attitudes are also another obstacle.

“Many doctors and nurses have to change their mindset, too, because even if we seek abortion from them, they may end up rejecting us because they think it’s a sin,” Supecha said. “This will go back to the same problem that pushes women away back to illegal and unsafe alternatives.”

The Royal Gazette’s announcement came only one day after an event advocating for abortion rights, Bangkok Abortion 2022, took place in the capital’s Thonglor area.

Tomorrow, which is International Safe Abortion Day, the National Human Rights Commission will [host a panel discussion](#) on abortion rights at Hotel Nikko on Soi Sukhumvit 55.

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