

Iran's bans make illegal abortions soar

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Iran's dictatorship tightened restrictions on medical abortions and banned the free distribution of contraceptives in 2021 amid a moral panic around the birth-rate. Iranian women have been choosing fewer children in part due to economic crisis.

This has led to public health alarm about numbers of illegal abortions. Government officials have said that each year between 300,000 to 600,000 abortions are performed in the country, and over 90% are illegal. Access to contraception and legal abortion is driving a dangerous black market. Until recently abortions could be legally performed during the first four months of pregnancy if three doctors agreed that a pregnancy threatened a woman's life, or the foetus had severe disabilities that could produce extreme hardship for the mother. But under the "rejuvenation of the population and support of the family" law passed in November 2021, abortion cases are now be decided by a panel that includes a judge and two medical professionals.

UN Human Rights experts have spoken out against the law and its consequences.

"Data clearly shows that criminalising the termination of pregnancy does not reduce the number of women who resort to abortion," the experts said. "Instead, it forces women to risk their lives by undergoing clandestine and unsafe procedures."

Underground abortions are not always dangerous but many are carried out in unsanitary and unsafe conditions. Free contraception could massively reduce the number of abortions carried out in Iran.

Raised concern about restrictive legislation pushing women into illegal abortion comes six months into a brave and resilient protest movement for women's rights in Iran. Recent strikes have boosted the movement.

An opinion survey of 158,000 Iranians conducted by the Dutch Gamaan institute in late December 2022 showed that 81% rejected the Islamic state, with 15% in support. Among those who rejected, 40% would prefer a democratic republic and 22% a constitutional monarchy.

Support for Iranian women and workers is high in the UK but also passive. Solidarity demonstrations have been largely made up of Iranians.

The Solidarity with the Iranian Workers' movement committee has been launched to try and build active solidarity with the Iranian protests and strikes. Chaired by John McDonnell MP, the committee aims to provide briefings and information on the people's struggle in Iran, mobilise support and solidarity with the revolutionary uprising, condemn rights violations and executions, and facilitate direct links between workers' organisations.

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