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Russia's Mordovia Becomes First Region to Outlaw 'Coercion' Into Abortion

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An operating room of a hospital's department of gynecology. **Alexander Ryumin / TASS**

Updated to reflect that the final version of the legislation does not introduce fines for abortion "propaganda," as was previously reported.

Russia's republic of Mordovia has become the country's first region to outlaw the act of "coercing" women into undergoing abortion, independent media reported.

The regional-level law passed Thursday potentially sets the stage for similar laws across the country.

According to information cited by the Mediazona news website, the misdemeanor crime of "coercion" into abortion encompasses actions that involve compelling women to undergo abortions "through persuasion, offers, bribery, deceit, or by imposing other demands."

The law, according to Mediazona, will not affect medics required to inform certain patients of the health risks they face if they become pregnant.

“The whole world is experiencing a demographic decline right now … Russia opened this Pandora’s box with Lenin’s 1920 decree legalizing abortion,” the state-run news outlet Rossiyskaya Gazeta cited Natalya Moskvitina, the law’s author and head of the Women for Life foundation, as saying.

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“Today our country is a flagship of traditional family values,” she added.

The original version of the law published on the republic of Mordovia's website had also introduced fines for abortion “propaganda,” which included activities that “promote [abortion] as a societal norm,” “foster a negative view on pregnancy and childbirth,” convey messages about the “safety and harmlessness” of abortions, or involve making “derogatory statements” about pregnant women and the human fetus.

The page displaying the law became inaccessible on Thursday afternoon, and Rossiyskaya Gazeta confirmed that the ban on “propaganda” had been excluded from the final version of the bill.

Set to come into effect in 10 days, the law stipulates administrative fines for individuals found guilty of “coercing” women into having abortions.

These fines for individuals will range from 5,000 to 10,000 rubles ($53-$107), while legal entities may face fines ranging from 100,000 to 200,000 rubles ($1,070-$2,140).

Foreigners will be ordered to pay double the fine amounts issued to Russian citizens.

While Russia has historically maintained a liberal abortion policy — with the exception of the Stalin-era ban that lasted until 1955 — the conservative turn among the country's leadership, combined with a push from the Russian Orthodox Church, have raised fears for the future of reproductive rights.

In July, Health Minister Mikhail Murashko publicly backed initiatives that would limit the distribution of abortion-inducing drugs in pharmacies and bar all privately owned medical facilities from administering the abortion procedure.

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