

# [***France on-track to constitutionalize abortion rights***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B72-RHV1-JBSS-S00R-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Paris (CNN) &#8212; The French National Assembly has passed a historic bill that moves the country one step closer to enshrining the right to abortion in its constitution.

In a vote in the lower house of the French parliament on Tuesday, 493 lawmakers voted in favor of the bill, 30 against. The bill will now move to the Senate for debate and a vote and, if approved, a special body composed of both chambers of the parliament will meet again for its adoption.

The bid for constitutionalization became a priority for the French government following the overturning by the United States Supreme Court of Roe v. Wade in June 2022. The cause had been championed for several years by left-wing lawmakers and women's rights activists.

When parliamentary discussions began at the lower house over the text of the proposed bill last week, the threat of France following in the footsteps of the US echoed loudly in the chamber. Almost all of the lawmakers that spoke in support of constitutionalization stressed the importance of ensuring that the reversal of reproductive rights witnessed across the Atlantic would never reach France's shores.

"History is full of examples of... fundamental rights... which everyone... believed to have been definitively acquired, and which were then swept away... as we were recently reminded by the decision of the US Supreme Court," Justice Minister Eric Dupont-Moretti said in his opening speech. "We now have irrefutable proof that no democracy, not even the largest of them all, is immune."

If the bill becomes law, France will become the first country in the world to include abortion rights in its constitution, according to a constitutional expert and Guillaume Gouffier Valent, a lawmaker in charge of the law, marking a historic moment for reproductive rights in the country and around the world.

France's Prime Minister Gabriel Attal hailed the vote as "a great victory for women's rights," while Gender Equality Minister Aurore Berge called it "historic." "We have a duty to press on. For our mothers who fought. For our daughters, so that they never have to fight again," Berge wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter.

A long road to adoption

Although the bill has now been approved by the National Assembly, the lower house of the French parliament, it is not yet guaranteed to pass into law. A vote will take place in the Senate in February and later in the French Congress, a special body composed of both chambers of parliament. The adoption of the bill relies on a three-fifths majority vote in the latter, which is expected to happen in time for International Women's Day on March 8, 2024.

[*Speaking to French media*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccOxxNR2K1Q), Gerard Lacher, the president of the French Senate, recently voiced his opposition to the bill, saying he doesn't think that "abortion is threatened in our country," and arguing that constitutionalization is therefore unnecessary. Some right-wing lawmakers have expressed similar viewpoints, maintaining that abortion rights in France are in no imminent danger.

Speaking to the National Assembly during parliamentary discussions on the bill, Gender Equality Minister Berge responded to these arguments, highlighting the rise in anti-abortion movements and the rollbacks on abortion rights occuring in other countries. These developments are raising alarm bells among French campaigners like Berge, emphasizing the need to permanently safeguard abortion rights before a potential conservative shift in ***politics*** - one that's happening across the world - makes it impossible to do so.

"This law is not just a symbol, because for too many women, this right is still hindered... because insidiously, throughout the world, this right is retreating," Berge said in her speech. "There's no reason to believe that what's happening around us can't happen here too, as if we were immune to any form of regression," she added.

"It's now that we need to protect the right to abortion as strongly as possible in France," Gouffier Valent, the lawmaker in charge of the bill, told CNN. "You don't take out insurance when your house is already on fire," he added.

A national move with a universal message

France's decision to constitutionalize abortion was spurred in large part by a global context riddled with roll-backs on reproductive rights. Elsewhere in Europe, right-wing governments have been cracking down on abortion in the past few years.

In eastern Europe, both Hungary and Poland have recently introduced restrictions on abortion access, measures that were frequently mentioned by France's own lawmakers during the debate in the National Assembly.

At the same time, the overturning of Roe v. Wade in the US left many French women wondering if they would be next. Now, they hope France's own move to enshrine abortion rights could serve as inspiration abroad.

Barbara Pravi, a French singer-songwriter who herself had an abortion aged 17, said she wants women around the world to know they're not alone. "I don't know if the United States will see France as an inspiration, but I hope it could give hope to women there," she told CNN.

Some, however, argue that the bill would not help with on-the-ground access to abortion, a growing issue particularly in rural parts of the country. Sarah Durocher, president of Planning Familial, the French branch of Planned Parenthood International, told CNN that "women are reporting real difficulties in accessing abortion. Some women have to travel from one region to another to get an abortion. There's a shortage of doctors, maternity wards and local abortion clinics are being closed."

Yet, for people like Pravi, and for campaigners who have been fighting for this bill, it represents a symbolic and groundbreaking move, one that will affect attitudes towards abortion for generations to come. Constitutionalization "changes people's minds," Pravi told CNN. "It could take...five, six, seven, maybe 10 years. But I know that my children will never think about the question [of] abortion."

Gouffier Valent shares Pravi's sentiment. This law "means everything," he said, "because of the message we're sending to French women and men for current and future generations... And the universal message we want to send to the whole world in defense of women's rights."

This is a developing story. It will be updated with more details.

By Claudia Colliva and Maya Szaniecki, CNN

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