

Belgian Catholic doctors' association against further liberalisation of abortion laws

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The medical society warns of a shift to more extensive interventions and vulnerability to social pressure around abortion.

Following the report of the Academic Commission, the abortion bill is currently being re-discussed within the government to liberalise the abortion law. The 6-day reflection period would be shortened and the permitted period extended from 12 to 18 weeks (after fertilisation).

The Belgian Medical Society of St. Luke's is opposed to this change in the abortion law for the following reasons:

- An abortion procedure during pregnancy does not **respect the human dignity** of the unborn child.
- Shortening the mandatory reflection period is to **the detriment of good support and guidance for women with an unwanted pregnancy**. It is important that pregnant women in difficulty receive adequate advice on their rights and possible help to bring the pregnancy to term. An informed decision on this issue takes time.
- An extension of the permitted period does not take into account the serious consequences for the women as well as for the medical staff. An abortion after 14 weeks of pregnancy requires **a heavier and more technical intervention** on the foetus, and thus also on the woman's body. It also creates **additional psychological stress for the woman and the medical team**. More than 2500 health care providers, mainly women, did not support an extension of the permitted period in the 2019 petition.
- An extension of the permitted period risks prolonging the period of doubt. Many women often wait to make their decision until the last moment around the legal term. With this extension, **a shift from early to late abortions can be expected**.
- It appears from the assistance provided that women who wish to maintain their pregnancy despite difficult circumstances are under more social pressure to have an abortion until they are past the legal term. The current 12-week term then offers a way out for these women who are **under pressure from their environment to have an abortion**. In a recent BBC survey, 15% of British women said they had been pressured to have an abortion. Given that, according to the 2018-2019 report of the Belgian Abortion Commission, relationship problems contributed 14% to the choice of abortion, further research on coercion around abortion is also indicated in our country.
- We call on politicians to place the welfare, care and interest of both the woman in a difficult situation and her unborn child at the centre of this debate.

Belgian Medical Society of Saint Luke



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