

The single women fighting Giorgia Meloni's IVF ban

Critics of the Italian prime minister, who had a daughter out of wedlock, say her defence of traditional family values is just an excuse to punish alternative lifestyles



Giorgia Meloni has been rolling back reproductive rights, angering campaigners such as Giorgia Wurth, right, who has written a book about the experiences of single mothers in Italy

ILLUSTRATION BY JADE BORLEY

James Imam, Milan

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Four years ago, Valentina Curatolo, a childless single woman living in Milan, decided she wanted to have a baby through IVF. The snag was Italian law permitted

only women in heterosexual relationships to access the treatment.

So the human resources worker, 40 at the time, found a clinic in Madrid and arranged for 16 eggs she had had extracted and stored six years earlier to be flown over at a cost of almost €3,000 (£2,528). Curatolo estimates that the entire process — flights to Spain and hotels included — set her back €10,000. It would have cost her just €500 in Italy today.

“The thing that makes me angry is that only less well-off people are affected by this limitation,” said Curatolo, now 44, at a roadside bar in Milan, accompanied by Edoardo, her two-year-old son, whom she conceived through IVF. “Anyone with money can get around the problem — they take a flight and go elsewhere.”



Valentina Curatolo was forced to go abroad and spend thousands of euros before she had her son, Edoardo, through IVF

Curatolo is one of more than a dozen female campaigners now determined to overturn the ban. With Italy's constitutional court due to rule on the matter next year, they believe they may be on the cusp of a historic victory.

The case coincides with attempts by [Giorgia Meloni's](#) government to reverse Italy's chronic population decline. Births slid to a low of just 379,890 last year, a 3.4 per cent drop, the ISTAT statistics agency announced last month.

While the government has spent €16 billion in benefits on families with children this year — including subsidised daycare, increased parental leave and bonuses for women with two children — the measures appear to have had little impact. There were 4,600 fewer births in the first seven months of this year compared with the previous year.

Meanwhile, Meloni, an erstwhile champion of the “traditional family”, has been rolling back reproductive rights. After ordering city councils to ban both members of same-sex couples from registering themselves as a child's legitimate parents, Italy's parliament last month voted to ban women from travelling abroad to have children through surrogacy.

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“A common sense norm against the commodification of women's bodies and children,” Meloni wrote on X after the result. “Human life is priceless and not a bargaining chip.”

For the government's critics, the surrogacy ban raises the question of whether Meloni cares more about promoting family orthodoxy or facilitating child births. They note that the prime minister, who was raised by a single mother, had her own teenage daughter, Ginevra, out of wedlock and recently split from the child's father.

“It's one rule for them and another for us,” Curatolo said.

That may be about to change. [Italy's](#) constitutional court has already declared previous articles from the country's overarching law on assisted reproductive technology (ART) unconstitutional, opening the way to treatment for couples with transmissible genetic diseases and donor fertilisation, whereby sperm, eggs or both are donated by somebody outside a heterosexual couple.

Now a legal challenge has thrown the future of the ART law — first introduced by Silvio Berlusconi's government in 2004 — into question.

The latest case began when Evita, a 40-year-old woman from Turin, whose surname has not been made public, challenged the fact that a Tuscan reproductive clinic had denied her IVF treatment because she was single. In September, a Florence court agreed that the restrictions may violate Italy's constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Filomena Gallo, who heads the legal team at the Luca Coscioni Association for the freedom of scientific research, which is supporting Evita, expects the constitutional court to hear the case in the spring. "As soon as the court declares a prohibition to be unconstitutional, it is cancelled," Gallo explained.

While there are no official figures for how many single women in Italy gave birth through assisted reproduction, Giorgia Wurth, a Swiss-Italian television actress who interviewed a number of the women for a book, *Mamme single per scelta* (Single Mothers by Choice), published last year, estimated there were thousands of cases every year.



Barbara Zoina, part of a campaign group against Italy's ban, had ten rounds of artificial insemination and IVF abroad before having her daughter, Zoe Judith

Many receive treatment in Spain or the UK. Numerous other European countries — including Hungary, Poland and Switzerland — bar single women or same-sex couples from accessing IVF and artificial insemination.

Twenty single women have formed a campaign group, associated with the Luca Coscioni Association, that is aimed at dismantling the ban in Italy.

One of its members, Barbara Zoina, 49, had ten rounds of artificial insemination and IVF — in Denmark, Belgium and Spain — between 2019 and this year, spending tens of thousands of euros. Travelling to unfamiliar cities to conceive her child, Zoe Judith, who was born 2020, was “extremely trying”, she said.

Micol Teofilo, 30, said removing the ban would help normalise single motherhood, a little-understood phenomenon in Italy. Having decided at an early age she did not want a man in her life, Teofilo had IVF in London and Madrid and gave birth to a boy, Alister, four years ago. Speaking at a bar on the outskirts of

Milan, she said strangers had described her as “crazy” for choosing to bring up a child without a father.

Wurth said she wrote her book to start a discussion. “Talking about single mothers remains a taboo,” she said.

However, Jacopo Coghe, a spokesman for Pro Vita e Famiglia, an anti-abortion group, urged the constitutional court not to reject the ban. “A child should not be deprived at the dinner table of one of its two parents — in this case its father,” Coghe said. “The desire of a parent to have a child at all costs harms the dignity of that child.”

Coghe argued there were “very few cases” of single women trying to access the treatment, meaning lifting the ban would have only a negligible impact on Italy’s birthrate. “It doesn’t make sense to try and fix a problem by creating other problems,” he said.

Curatolo, however, said she hoped a change to the law would be just one step on a longer journey of winning reproductive rights. “I have my child now,” she says. “I want to leave him a better country in which he does not face similar hurdles to me.”

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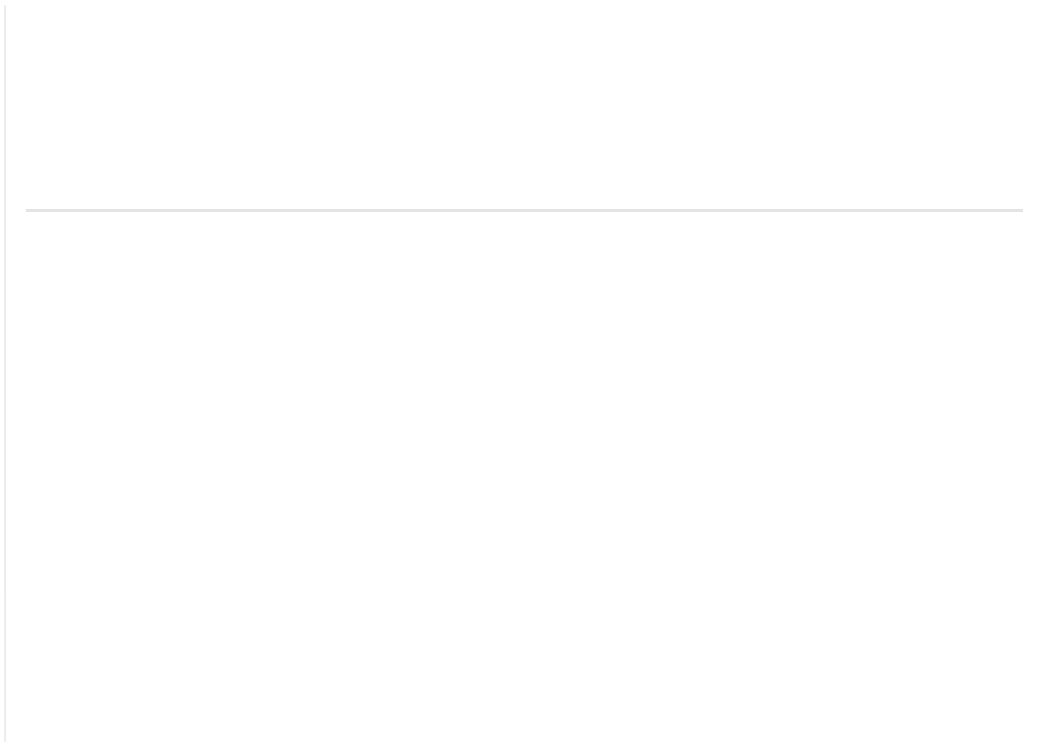
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