

Committee: SOCHUM 1

Topic: The Question of Abortion Rights

Chair: Krish Patel

School: Reigate Grammar School

Summary

Abortion is a highly controversial and discussed issue in the world with different nations having varying views and rights. Abortion is a procedure which involves the termination of a pregnancy before the foetus is viable. Whilst abortion is a common health intervention, the legality and safety of the procedure differs between nations. 6 out of 10 unintended pregnancies end in an induced abortion, so it affects a large number of people. However, 45% of abortions are unsafe, with 97% of these in developing nations. These unsafe procedures are preventable but are the leading cause of maternal deaths. The practice of unsafe abortion is common in nations where the practice is against the law or restricted by date of the procedure. As well as these unsafe abortions posing a risk to the person's physical health, they can have a huge impact on their mental health. This can be due to the stigma associated with having abortions. This is an important issue to discuss and debate, as it not only affects a huge number of people, but in some cases restrictive access to abortions can mean that people are being denied their human rights (including the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and at its most serious denying people of the right to life if they die from unsafe procedures). However, countries that have restricted access to abortions use arguments such as the right to life to say that the pregnancy should not be terminated as the foetus is living. The debate has come to a head most recently in the United States of America when they overturned Roe V Wade.

Definition of Key Terms

Abortion - Termination of a pregnancy before the foetus reaches viability, resulting in the removal or expulsion of the embryo or foetus from the uterus.

Contraception - Methods and devices used to prevent pregnancy, including hormonal methods and intrauterine devices.

Health Equity - Health equity is the state in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health.

Maternal Mortality - The death of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, regardless of the duration or site of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management.

Pro-choice - A stance that supports a women's right to choose whether or not to have an abortion, emphasizing reproductive autonomy and bodily integrity.

Pro-life - A stance that opposes abortion and advocates for the protection of foetal rights and the sanctity of life.

Reproductive Rights - The rights of individuals to make decisions regarding their own reproductive health, including the right to access contraception, family planning, and safe abortion services.

Roe v. Wade - A landmark decision in the Supreme Court of the United States in 1973 that legalised abortions nationwide, establishing that a woman has a constitutional right to terminate her pregnancy.

Unsafe Abortion - Unsafe abortions are defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "a procedure for terminating an unintended pregnancy carried out either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment that does not conform to minimal medical standards, or both."

Background Information

Legality of Abortions

As stated above, 6 out of 10 unintended pregnancies end in an abortion so this is a large issue that needs to be addressed. Abortion is an extremely prevalent issue in the United States of America, especially after Roe v Wade was overturned in 2022. Even before Roe v Wade, abortion was a highly contested issue. Until the 1800s, abortions were commonplace, but with the establishment of the AMA (American Medical Association) in 1847 started to criminalise them. By 1910 abortion was illegal in all states. In the 1920's and 30's even though abortion was still illegal it became more prevalent due to the

Depression. In the 1940s and '50s more doctors were prosecuted for performing abortions, which drove the practice underground and into less skilled hands. In the 1950s and 1960s, up to 1.2 million illegal abortions were performed each year in the U.S. In 1965, 17% of reported deaths attributed to pregnancy and childbirth were associated with illegal abortion. In 1973, abortion was legalised by Roe v Wade. By making abortion illegal it hasn't stopped abortions, but only made them more unsafe. Other countries where the legality of abortions is an issue or has been debated include Poland, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Malta. Only two countries have laws that vary from state to state, and these are the United States and Mexico. While the USA is decreasing the legality of abortion, Mexico is increasing it. In 2021, the Mexican Supreme Court unanimously recognized a constitutional right to legal, safe, and free abortion services early in pregnancy. Since then, states across Mexico have been changing their laws to reflect that right. Even though abortion is technically legal in some countries, there can also be laws that prevent it being easy to access. Some countries have laws that state abortions are only legal if the pregnant person's life is in danger.

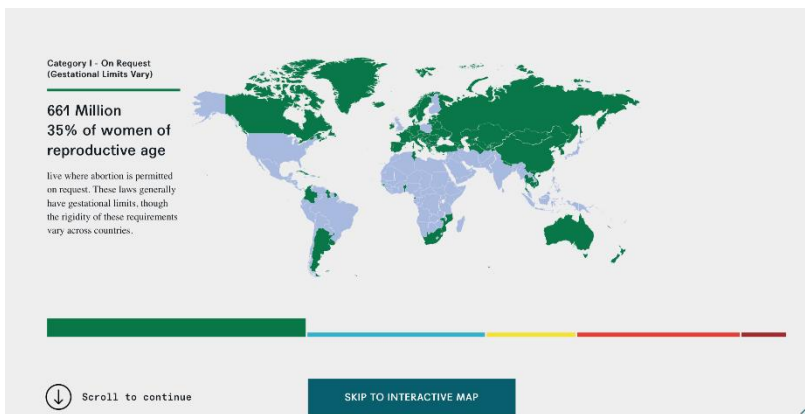


Fig 1.A. Countries where abortion is accessible upon request (Center for Reproductive Rights)

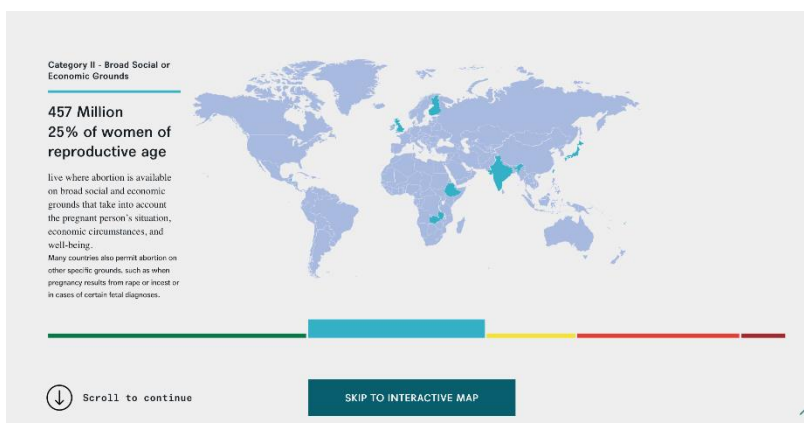


Fig.1.B. Countries where abortion is accessible based on broad social and economical grounds (Center for Reproductive Rights)

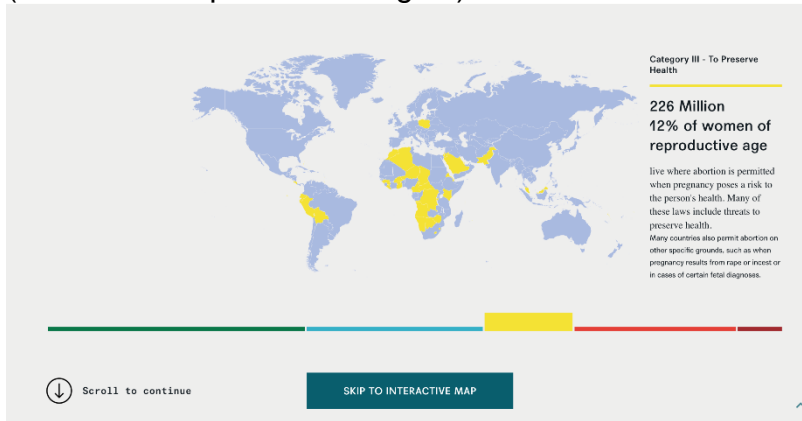


Fig.1.C. Countries where abortion is accessible when pregnancy poses a risk to the person's health (Center for Reproductive Rights)

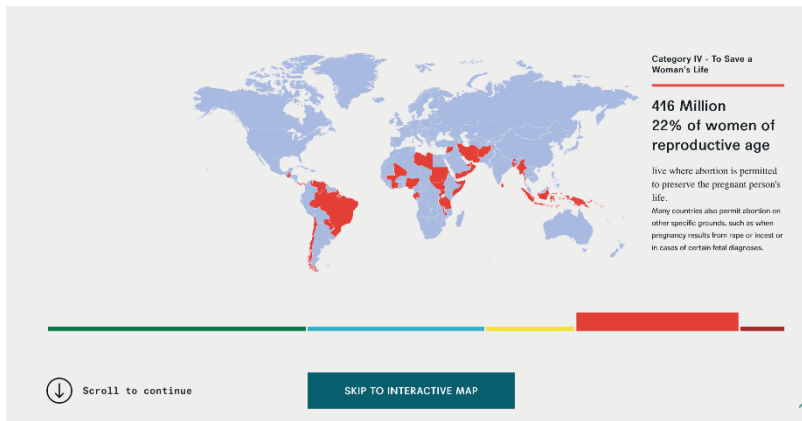


Fig.1. D. Countries where abortion is accessible only to preserve the pregnant person's life (Center for Reproductive Rights)

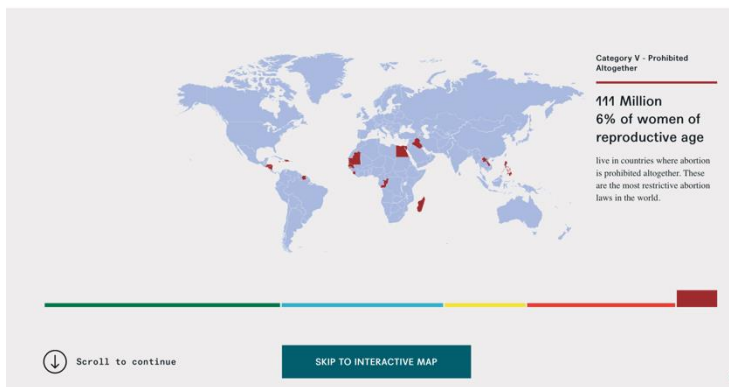


Fig.1. E. Countries where abortion is completely prohibited (Center for Reproductive Rights)

Methods of Abortion

There are two main methods of abortion:

- 1) medical abortion ("abortion pill") – taking 2 medicines, usually 24 to 48 hours apart, to induce an abortion. The medicines are called mifepristone, and misoprostol. Within 4 to 6 hours of taking the second medicine, the lining of the womb breaks down, causing pain, bleeding and loss of the pregnancy.
- 2) surgical abortion – having a procedure to remove the pregnancy, which can be under local or general anesthetic. Surgical abortion can either be done with a vacuum or by forceps.

These are both methods of safe abortion when done by qualified healthcare providers. However, unqualified healthcare providers or individuals themselves can try to imitate these, which would count as an unsafe abortion. This can include people drinking toxic chemicals such as bleach, inflicting injury to the abdomen, or by using unsterilised equipment such as coat hangers.

Accessibility of Abortions

Whilst abortions are legal in several nations, access to them is not always unrestricted. Individuals require access to safe methods. Governments may legalise abortions so that it appears that the nation is welcome to abortions, but they impose numerous restrictions which target patients seeking abortion and their health care practitioners. Moreover, insurance coverage restrictions also are a substantial barrier in some nations where public health care for abortions is not available. This can be a major source of increasing reproductive health inequities.

Recent years have seen a drastic increase in the number and scope of legislative measures restricting abortion. In 2019, states of the US imposed 58 restrictions on abortion, of which 25 would ban all, most or some abortions. Several states of the US also passed laws banning abortions at 8 weeks of gestation or earlier. As a result of the restrictions, the rate of maternal mortality in the US is the highest of women of reproductive age. Moreover, there is a lack of support in this sector for black women with them facing three times the rate of maternal mortality than white women.

The consequences of a lack of access to safe, affordable, timely and respectful abortion care impacts both the physical and mental health of pregnant women. Inaccessibility of quality of abortion risks violating a range of human rights of women and girls, including the right to life; the right to the highest attainable standard physical and mental health; the right to benefit from scientific progress and its realisation; the right to decide freely and responsibly on the number, spacing and timing of children; and the right to be free from torture, cruel and inhuman and degrading treatment, and punishment.

Unsafe abortion is responsible for 4.7-13.2% of maternal deaths. In developed nations, it is estimate that 30 women die for every 100 000 unsafe abortions. In developing regions, that number rises to 220 deaths for every 100 000 unsafe abortions. An estimated 7 million women per year in developing nations are treated in hospital for complications of unsafe abortion. Unsafe abortions cost health systems in developing nations US\$ 553 million per year due to long term disability related to the condition.

Physical health risks which are associated with unsafe abortions include but are not limited to:

Incomplete abortion (where all pregnancy tissue is not removed from the uterus)

Hemorrhage

Infection

Uterine perforation

Damage to genital tract

Restrictive abortion regulations can cause stress and stigma especially among women who identify as part of the LGBTQI+ community. Many member states discriminate against women who are lesbians, bisexual and/or transgender. They may face stigma and biased views in the provision of healthcare, as well as presumptions that they do not need access to contraception and abortion-related information and services. In some contexts, 28% transgender and gender non-conforming individuals report facing harassment in medical settings, and 19% report being refused medical care altogether due to their transgender status, with even higher numbers among communities of colour.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Top 3 Countries with highest abortions:

United States of America

People's Republic of China

The Republic of India

Top 3 Countries with highest abortions per 100,000 people (excl. Greenland):

Georgia

Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Republic of Madagascar

Member states where abortion is a prominent topic:

United States of America

Republic of Poland

Republic of Malta

As abortion involves all member states, here is a map depicting the legality of abortion in different member states:

Access to abortion as of June 2022

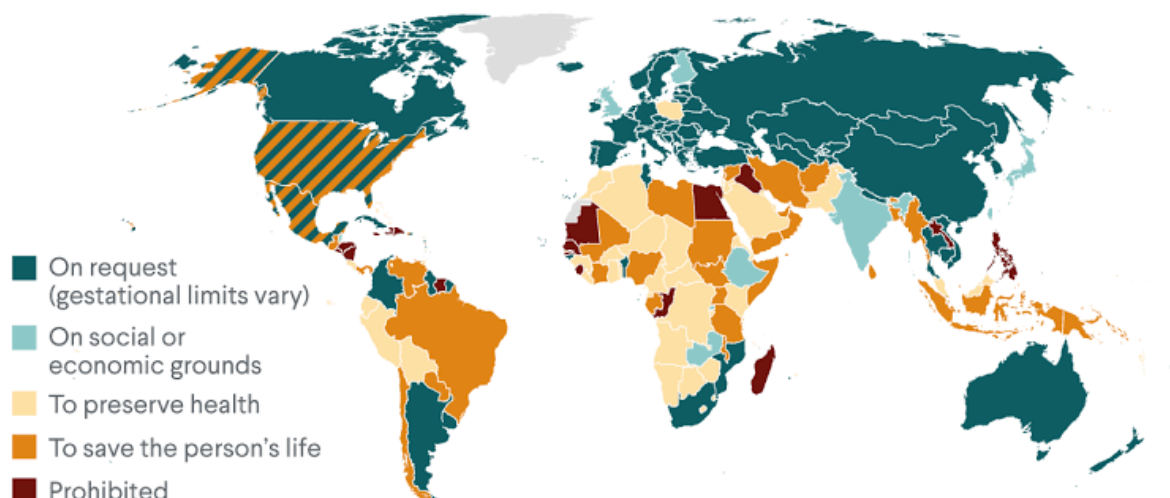


Fig.2. Abortion laws around the world (Council on Foreign Relations)

Timeline of Events

Timeline of events in reverse chronological order leading up to present day.

Date	Description of Event
24 June 2022	Roe v Wade is overturned in the United States, relinquishing the right of a woman to choose.
30 March 2021	Mexico's supreme court decriminalises abortion, setting a precedent for the country
6 October 2020	The Constitutional Tribunal in Poland rules that abortion due to foetal abnormalities is unconstitutional, sparking widespread protests
23 January 2020	The Trump administration expands the "Mexico City Policy", which restricts funding to foreign organisations to provide abortion services of information.
30 December 2019	Argentina's Senate legalises abortion, becoming the first major Latin American nation to do so.
30 December 2018	India's lower house of Parliament approves a bill to amend the country's law to allow women to terminate pregnancies up to 24 weeks.

25 May 2018	Ireland holds a referendum, legalising abortion by overturning its 8 th Amendment.
2007	Nicaragua tightens abortion laws, imposing a complete ban even in cases of threat to a women's life.
2002	Portugal legalises abortion during first 10 weeks of pregnancy
22 January 1973	The U.S. Supreme Court case Roe v. Wade legalises abortion in the United States, establishing the right to choose.
1967	The United Kingdom passes the Abortion Act, legalising abortion under certain circumstances
1960	The first oral contraceptive is approved for contraceptive use in the United States impacting discussions about reproductive rights
1953	The European Convention for Human Rights became effective, including stating that everyone has the right to life, and the right to privacy about their family.
1920s	Soviet Russia becomes one of the first countries to legalise abortion.
1910	Abortion was made illegal in every US state

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Convention on elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women – December 1979

International Safe Abortion Day – 28th September

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), signed by 179 countries including the United States, recognised how deadly unsafe abortions are, and urged all countries to provide post-abortion care to save lives, irrespective of the legal status of abortion. The document also highlighted that all people should be able to access quality information about their reproductive health and contraceptives. However, this resolution does not cover all countries or ensure that abortion is made legal and accessible. As so many different countries have differing opinions and views and laws it is difficult to create a resolution that will be accepted by all member states. The World

Health organisation does have guidelines about what abortion/ pregnancy care should be available and in 2021 published updated recommendations for best practice when it comes to abortion care.

Possible Solutions

Working with a global organisation like the WHO to establish guidelines for what abortion care should be in every country as a minimum. Organisations such as the WHO and the Human Rights Watch believe that abortion care is a human right and should be accessible (because restricting access can be seen as preventing the right to life if the mother is in danger).

There is also an argument that regardless of the legality of abortions, they will always happen, so it is more important to focus on preventing unwanted pregnancy rather than outlawing or making abortion legal. Countries should have comprehensive sex education in their curriculums, including discussions on consent, contraception, and STDs. Countries should also ensure that birth control is accessible, as there is no point in teaching about contraceptive methods if they cannot be easily accessed by young people.

There is also a discussion to be had about whether abortion is often the choice people make due to lack of support for mothers, and that better, more inexpensive childcare and more focus on parents' needs in the workplace would decrease the need for abortions.

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