

# The World's Abortion Laws

April 2005

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*Currently, more than 61% of the world's people live in countries where induced abortion is permitted either for a wide range of reasons or without restriction as to reason. In contrast, 26% of all people reside in countries where abortion is generally prohibited.*

The table below illustrates the varying degrees to which countries worldwide permit access to abortion. Countries in Category I have the most restrictive laws. Those in each subsequent category recognize the grounds specified in the preceding category as well as additional grounds. Depending on such factors as public opinion, the views of government officials and providers, and individual circumstances, laws in each category may be interpreted more broadly or restrictively than indicated by their classifications below.

## **Prohibited Altogether or Permitted Only to Save the Woman's Life**

The most restrictive laws are those that either permit abortion only to save a woman's life or ban the procedure entirely. Many countries in this category (appearing in bold on p.2) explicitly permit abortion when a pregnancy threatens a woman's life. In other countries, laws that make no explicit exception are often interpreted to permit abortion under life-threatening circumstances on the grounds of "necessity." Such an exception may also be recognized in national norms of medical ethics.

## **Physical Health Grounds**

Laws that authorize abortion to protect the pregnant woman's life and physical health form Category II. These laws sometimes require that the threatened injury to health be either serious or permanent. While laws in this category do not explicitly permit abortion to protect mental health, many are phrased broadly enough – referring simply to "health" or "therapeutic" indications – to be interpreted to allow abortion on mental health grounds.

## **Mental Health Grounds**

Laws in Category III expressly permit abortion to protect the woman's mental health, as well as her life and physical health. The interpretation of "mental health" varies around the world. It can encompass, for example, psychological distress suffered by a woman who is raped or severe strain caused by social or economic circumstances.

## **Socioeconomic Grounds**

Laws in Category IV, which allow abortion on socioeconomic grounds, permit consideration of such factors as a woman's economic resources, her age, her marital status, and the number of her children. Such laws are generally interpreted liberally.

## **Without Restriction as to Reason**

Finally, the least restrictive abortion laws are those that allow abortion without restriction as to reason. Most countries with such laws, however, impose a limit on the period during which women can readily access the procedure.

A number of countries explicitly recognize three other grounds for abortion: when pregnancy results from rape; when pregnancy results from incest; and when there is a high probability of fetal impairment. Countries that recognize these grounds may fall within any of the categories described above. In addition, countries in any category may restrict access to abortion by requiring a woman to obtain parental or spousal authorization. These additional grounds and restrictions are identified according to the notes set forth on page two.

**I. Prohibited Altogether or Permitted Only to Save the Woman's Life** (countries printed in bold make an explicit exception to save a woman's life.)

<b>Afghanistan</b>	Iraq	<b>Papua New Guinea</b>
Andorra	Ireland	<b>Paraguay</b>
Angola	<b>Kenya</b>	Philippines
<b>Antigua &amp; Barbuda</b>	<b>Kiribati</b>	San Marino
<b>Bangladesh</b>	Laos	Sao Tome & Principe
Bhutan-U	<b>Lebanon</b>	Senegal
<b>Brazil-R</b>	Lesotho	<b>Soloman Islands</b>
<b>Brunei Darussalam</b>	<b>Libya-PA</b>	Somalia
Central African Rep.	Madagascar	<b>Sri Lanka</b>
Chile-x	<b>Malawi-SA</b>	<b>Sudan-R</b>
Colombia	<b>Mali-R/I</b>	Suriname
Congo (Brazzaville)	Malta	Swaziland
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	Marshall Islands-U	<b>Syria-SA/PA</b>
Dem. Rep. of Congo	Mauritania	<b>Tanzania</b>
<b>Dominica</b>	Mauritius	Togo
Dominican Republic	<b>Mexico</b> ∅- R	Tonga
Egypt	Micronesia-U	Tuvalu
El Salvador-x	Monaco	<b>Uganda</b>
Gabon	<b>Myanmar</b>	<b>United Arab</b>
<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>Nicaragua-SA/PA</b>	<b>Emirates-SA/PA</b>
Guinea-Bissau	Niger	<b>Venezuela</b>
Haiti	<b>Nigeria</b>	<b>West Ban &amp; Gaza Strip</b>
Honduras	Oman	Yemen
<b>Indonesia</b>	Palau-U	
Iran	<b>Panama-PA/R/F</b>	

*72 Countries, 26% of World's Population*

## **II. To Preserve Physical Health**

(also to save the woman's life)

Argentina-R1	Equatorial Guinea-SA/PA	Peru
Bahamas	Eritrea-R/I	Poland-PA/R/I/F
Benin-R/I//F	Ethiopia-R/I//F/+	Qatar-F
Bolivia-R/I	Grenada	Rep. of Korea - SA/R/I//F
Burkina Faso-R/I//F	Guinea-R/I//F	Rwanda
Burundi	Jordan	Saudi Arabia-SA/PA
Cameroon-R	Kuwait-SA/P A/F	Saint Lucia
Chad-F	Liechtenstein- +	Thailand-R
Comoros	Maldives-SA	Uruguay-R
Costa Rica	Morocco-SA	Vanuatu
Djibouti	Mozambique	Zimbabwe-R/I//F
Ecuador- R1	Pakistan	

*35 Countries, 10.1% of World's Population*

## **III. To Preserve Mental Health**

(also to save the woman's life and physical health)

Algeria	Liberia-R/I//F	Saint Kitts & Nevis
Botswana-R/I//F	Malaysia	Samoa
Gambia	Namibia-R/I//F	Seychelles-R/I//F
Ghana-R/I//F	Nauru	Sierra Leone
Hong Kong-R/I//F	New Zealand-I//F	Spain-R/F
Israel-R/I//F/+	Northern Ireland	Trinidad & Tobago
Jamaica-PA	Portugal-PA/R/F	

*20 Countries, 2.7% of World's Population*

#### IV. Socioeconomic Grounds

(also to save the woman's life, physical health and mental health)

Australia-∅	Finland-R/F/+	Luxembourg-PA/R/F
Barbados-PA/R//F	Great Britain-F	Saint Vincent &
Belize-F	Iceland-R//F/+	Grenadines-R//F
Cyprus-R/F	India-PA/R/F	Taiwan-SA/PA//F
Fiji	Japan-SA	Zambia-F

*14 Countries, 20.7% of World's Population*

#### V. Without Restriction as to Reason

Albania	Denmark-PA	Norway-PA
Armenia	Estonia	Puerto Rico <sup>v</sup>
Austria*	France*	Romania*
Azerbaijan	Fmr. Yugoslav Rep.	Russian Fed.
Bahrain	Macedonia-PA	Serbia
Belarus	Georgia	& Montenegro-PA
Belgium*	Germany*	Singapore***
Bosnia-	Greece-PA	Slovak Rep.-PA
Herzegovina-PA	Guyana†	Slovenia-PA
Bulgaria	Hungary	South Africa
Cambodia*	Italy-Δ/PA	Sweden**
Canada°	Kazakhstan	Switzerland
Cape Verde	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan
China°-S	Latvia	Tunisia
Croatia-PA	Lithuania	Turkey-†SA/PA
Cuba-PA	Moldova	Turkmenistan
Czech Rep.-PA	Mongolia	Ukraine
Dem. People's Rep. of	Nepal-S	United States- <sup>v</sup> ∅PA
Korea°	Netherlands <sup>v</sup>	Uzbekistan
		Vietnam°

*54 Countries, 40.5% of World's Population*

**A note on terminology:** "Countries" listed on the table include independent states and, where populations exceed one million, semi-autonomous regions, territories and jurisdictions of special status. The table therefore includes Hong Kong, Northern Ireland, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

#### Gestational Limits Key

*Note: All Countries have a gestational limit of 12 weeks unless otherwise denoted. Gestational limits are calculated from the first day of the last menstrual period, which is generally considered to occur two weeks before conception. Statutory gestational limits calculated from the date of conception have thus been extended by two weeks.*

- Δ Gestational limit of 90 days
- † Gestational limit of 8 weeks
- ‡ Gestational limit of 10 weeks
- \* Gestational limit of 14 weeks
- \*\* Gestational limit of 18 weeks
- \*\*\* Gestational limit of 24 weeks
- <sup>v</sup> = Law does not limit pre-viability abortions
- ° = Law does not indicate gestational limit

#### Key for Additional Grounds, Restrictions and Other Indications:

- R-Abortion permitted in cases of rape
- R<sub>1</sub>-Abortion permitted in the case of rape of a woman with a mental disability
- I-Abortion permitted in cases of incest
- F-Abortion permitted in cases of fetal impairment
- SA-Spousal authorization required
- PA-Parental authorization/notification required
- ∅ = Federal system in which abortion law is determined at state level; classification reflects legal status of abortion for largest number of people
- x-Recent legislation eliminated all exceptions to prohibition on abortion; availability of defense of necessity highly unlikely
- S-Sex selective abortion prohibited
- U-Law unclear

*Population statistics provided by the Alan Guttmacher Institute.*