



WORLD ABORTION POLICIES 2007

Introduction. The overwhelming majority of countries, 97 per cent, permit abortion to save the woman's life. In five countries, abortion is not permitted. Abortion laws and policies are significantly more restrictive in the developing world. In developed countries, abortion is permitted for economic or social reasons in 78 per cent of countries and on request in 67 per cent of countries. In contrast, 19 per cent of developing countries permit abortion for economic or social reasons, while in 15 per cent of developing countries abortion is available on request. Many countries have additional procedural requirements that must be met before an abortion may be legally performed. Additional requirements may relate to the gestational limits within which abortion may be performed, mandatory waiting period, parental or spousal consent, third-party authorization, the categories of health providers permitted to perform abortions, the types of medical facilities where abortions may be performed and mandatory counselling. In addition, even when abortion is legally permitted, access to abortion services may be limited. It is important to point out that up-to-date information on the status of abortion policy is not readily available for all countries. The information for some countries is either incomplete or unclear. Readers are therefore invited to provide information, comments or corrections they deem useful to the Director, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York, NY 10017. The data included in the chart were based on information available as of 31 December 2006.

Grounds on which abortion is permitted. A total of seven grounds on which abortion is permitted are identified: (1) to save the woman's life; (2) to preserve physical health; (3) to preserve mental health; (4) in case of rape or incest; (5) to foetal impairment; (6) for economic or social reasons and (7) on request. Each of these grounds is described below.

(1) To save the woman's life. The performance of abortion is most commonly permitted on the grounds of saving the life of the woman. Although some countries provide detailed lists of what they consider life-threatening situations, in general, these situations are not explicitly specified and are therefore left to the judgment of the physician or physicians performing or approving the abortion. The overwhelming majority of countries, 97 per cent in the less developed regions and 96 per cent in the more developed regions, either explicitly permit abortion to be performed when a pregnancy threatens a woman's life or allow it under the general criminal law principle

of necessity. Exceptions include Chile, El Salvador, the Holy See, Malta and Nicaragua, all of which have provisions restricting the performance of abortion. However, even in these countries, it is unclear whether a defence of necessity would be rejected by a court in serious cases involving a threat to the life of a pregnant woman.

(2) To preserve physical health. In the majority of countries, abortion is permitted when it is necessary to preserve the physical health of the woman. The term "physical health", however, has been defined in a number of different ways. In some countries, the definition is narrow, often encompassing lists of conditions that are considered to fall under this category; in other countries, the term "physical health" is broadly defined, allowing room for interpretation. In the more developed regions, 88 per cent of countries permit abortion to preserve physical health, compared to 60 per cent of countries in the less developed regions.

(3) To preserve mental health. Many countries specifically provide for the legal performance of abortions in cases involving a threat to the mental health of the pregnant woman. What constitutes a threat to "mental health" however, varies significantly. In some countries, the abortion law does not specify whether the term "health" encompasses both physical and mental health, but merely provides that an abortion is permitted when it averts a risk of injury to the woman's health. In such cases, since the law does not make a distinction, both physical and mental health grounds have been coded as permitted. Eighty-six per cent of countries in the more developed regions allow abortion to protect the mental health of the woman, whereas fifty-seven per cent of countries in the less developed regions have adopted such laws.

(4) Rape or incest. Permitting abortion in cases of rape or incest is a common provision. Even in countries with restrictive laws, abortion is often allowed on those grounds. Some countries specifically mention rape or incest in their legislation. Other countries refer to these as cases in which the pregnancy is the result of "a criminal offence", with no specification of the nature of the offence. In other countries, abortions are permitted only in the case of the rape of a woman with mentally impaired functions. While 84 per cent of countries in the more developed regions have laws that permit abortion in case of rape or incest, 37 per cent of countries in the less developed regions have such laws.

(5) Foetal impairment. Abortions are often permitted on the grounds of foetal impairment, even in countries with restrictive abortion legislation. Several countries specify the type and level of impairment necessary to justify an abortion. In the more developed regions, 84 per cent of countries permit abortions because of foetal impairment, whereas 32 per cent of countries in the less developed regions do so.

(6) Economic or social reasons. The laws permitting abortions on socio-medical, economic or social grounds vary widely. Some laws specifically mention economic or social conditions while others only imply them. Most laws that permit abortion on economic or social grounds are interpreted quite liberally and, in practice, differ little from laws that allow abortion on request. While 78 per cent of countries in the more developed regions have laws permitting abortion on economic or social grounds, 19 per cent of countries in the less developed regions allow abortion on the same grounds.

(7) On request. In countries that allow abortion on request, a woman seeking an abortion is not required to justify her desire to have an abortion under the law. In a number of countries, she may be required to state that she is in a situation of crisis or distress. Sixty-seven per cent of countries in the more developed regions have adopted such laws, whereas fifteen per cent of countries in the less developed regions make abortion available on request. For purposes of this chart, if an abortion can be authorized on request, it is assumed that an abortion can be performed during the period when it is authorized on any other of the grounds listed, even if the law does not explicitly mention such grounds.

Abortion rate. Accurate information on induced abortion is difficult to obtain in many countries. In countries where abortion is legal under broad conditions, statistics on abortion are collected and are of reasonable completeness and accuracy. In other countries, official data are lacking or are incomplete. A common problem is that some privately performed abortion procedures go unreported and are therefore not reflected in the statistics available. Also, some countries may include spontaneous abortions in the number of reported abortions. In countries where abortion is restricted, official statistics are generally not available or highly incomplete. Information on the

number of abortions is available for 61 countries. Abortion rates in 26 of those 61 countries range from 10 to 20 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 years; 16 countries have abortion rates above 20 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44, while 19 countries have an abortion rate below 10 abortions per 1,000 women.

Contraceptive prevalence. The use of contraception has been increasing steadily worldwide, 61 per cent of women who are married or in union use some contraceptive method and 54 per cent use a modern contraceptive method. In the less developed regions contraceptive prevalence averages 59 per cent among women who are married or in union and it averages 69 per cent in the more developed regions.

Total fertility. Total fertility measures the number of births a woman would have during her lifetime if she were to follow current age-specific fertility rates. In 2000-2005, total fertility at the world level stood at 2.6 births per woman. Total fertility was estimated to be 2.9 births per woman in the less developed regions and 1.6 births per woman in the more developed regions. Total fertility is greater than 5 births per woman in 35 of the 148 developing countries. Overall, the countries with fertility higher than 5 births per woman account for 10 per cent of the world population.

Maternal mortality. Maternal mortality is a major concern in the world and in particular in less developed regions. The improvement of maternal health is one of the eight goals included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Of the estimated 529,000 maternal deaths worldwide in 2000, 68,000 deaths were reported to be due to complications of unsafe abortion. In 2000, the maternal mortality ratio was 442 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in the less developed regions. In contrast, the maternal mortality ratio was 20 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in the more developed regions.

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Region and country	Grounds on which abortion is permitted							Contraceptive prevalence					Total fertility					Maternal mortality ratio				
	To save the woman's life (1)	To preserve physical health (2)	To preserve mental health (3)	Rape or incest (4)	Foetal impairment (5)	Economic or social reasons (6)	On request (7)	Abortion rate		All methods/modern methods (percentage)	Total fertility (births per woman) 2000-2005	Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) 2000	Abortion rate		All methods/modern methods (percentage)	Total fertility (births per woman) 2000-2005	Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) 2000					
								Year	Rate				Year	Rate								
World	97	67	64	48	45	34	28	1999	61/54	2.6	400	1999	61/54	2.6	400							
More developed regions	97	88	86	84	82	78	67	1996	69/56	1.6	20	1996	69/56	1.6	20							
Less developed regions	96	60	57	37	32	19	15	1999	59/53	2.9	442	1999	59/53	2.9	442							
Africa	97	67	64	48	45	34	28	2001	27/20	5.0	833	2001	27/20	5.0	833							
Eastern Africa	97	67	64	48	45	34	28	2001	23/17	5.6	1 022	2001	23/17	5.6	1 022							
Burundi	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2000	16/10	6.8	1 000	2000	16/10	6.8	1 000							
Comoros	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2000	26/19	4.9	480	2000	26/19	4.9	480							
Djibouti	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2000	-	5.1	730	2000	-	5.1	730							
Eritrea	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2002	8/5	5.5	630	2002	8/5	5.5	630							
Ethiopia	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	2005	15/14	5.9	850	2005	15/14	5.9	850							
Kenya ¹	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2003	39/32	5.0	1 000	2003	39/32	5.0	1 000							
Madagascar ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2003/04	27/17	5.4	550	2003/04	27/17	5.4	550							
Malawi ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2004	33/28	6.1	1 800	2004	33/28	6.1	1 800							
Mauritius ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	1991	75/49	2.0	24	1991	75/49	2.0	24							
Mozambique	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2003/04	17/12	5.5	1 000	2003/04	17/12	5.5	1 000							
Rwanda	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2000	13/4	5.7	1 400	2000	13/4	5.7	1 400							
Seychelles	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	2003	21.6	1.9	1 100	2003	21.6	1.9	1 100							
Somalia ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2000/01	23/18	7.1	880	2000/01	23/18	7.1	880							
Uganda ¹	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2005	26/20	5.0	1 500	2005	26/20	5.0	1 500							
United Republic of Tanzania ¹	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2001/02	34/23	5.7	750	2001/02	34/23	5.7	750							
Zambia	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	1999	54/50	3.6	1 100	1999	54/50	3.6	1 100							
Zimbabwe	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	1999	54/50	3.6	1 100	1999	54/50	3.6	1 100							
Middle Africa	97	67	64	48	45	34	28	2001	24/6	6.2	1 053	2001	24/6	6.2	1 053							
Angola ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2001	6/5	6.8	1 700	2001	6/5	6.8	1 700							
Cameroon	X	X	X	X	-	-	-	2004	26/13	4.6	730	2004	26/13	4.6	730							
Central African Republic ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2000	28/7	5.0	1 100	2000	28/7	5.0	1 100							
Chad	X	X	-	-	-	-	-	2000	8/2	6.7	1 100	2000	8/2	6.7	1 100							
Congo ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2005	44/14	6.3	510	2005	44/14	6.3	510							
Democratic Republic of the Congo ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2001	31/4	6.7	990	2001	31/4	6.7	990							
Equatorial Guinea	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2000	33/12	4.0	420	2000	33/12	4.0	420							
Gabon ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2000	29/27	4.1	-	2000	29/27	4.1	-							
São Tomé and Príncipe ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2000	29/27	4.1	-	2000	29/27	4.1	-							
Northern Africa	97	67	64	48	45	34	28	2001	51/45	3.2	235	2001	51/45	3.2	235							
Algeria	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2000	64/50	2.5	140	2000	64/50	2.5	140							
Egypt	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2005	59/57	3.3	84	2005	59/57	3.3	84							
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	1995	45/26	3.0	97	1995	45/26	3.0	97							
Morocco	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2003/04	63/55	2.8	220	2003/04	63/55	2.8	220							
Sudan	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	1992	10/7 ⁴	4.4	590	1992	10/7 ⁴	4.4	590							
Tunisia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1996	8.6	2001	63/53	2.0	120	1996	8.6	2001	63/53	2.0	120			
Southern Africa	97	67	64	48	45	34	28	1998	52/51	2.9	247	1998	52/51	2.9	247							
Botswana	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	2000	40/39	3.2	100	2000	40/39	3.2	100							
Lesotho	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2004	37/35	3.6	550	2004	37/35	3.6	550							
Namibia	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	2000	44/43	4.0	300	2000	44/43	4.0	300							
South Africa	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	2000	4.5	1998	56/55	2.8	230	2000	4.5	1998	56/55	2.8	230			
Swaziland	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2000	28/26	4.0	370	2000	28/26	4.0	370							
Western Africa	97	67	64	48	45	34	28	2002	13/8	5.8	886	2002	13/8	5.8	886							
Benin	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	2001	19/7	5.9	850	2001	19/7	5.9	850							
Burkina Faso	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	2003	14/9	6.7	1 000	2003	14/9	6.7	1 000							
Cape Verde	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1998	53/46	3.8	150	1998	53/46	3.8	150							
Côte d'Ivoire	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	1998/99	15/7	5.1	690	1998/99	15/7	5.1	690							
Gambia ¹	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2000	10/9	4.7	540	2000	10/9	4.7	540							
Ghana	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	2003	25/19	4.4	540	2003	25/19	4.4	540							
Guinea	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2005	9/6	5.9	740	2005	9/6	5.9	740							
Guinea-Bissau ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2000	8/4	7.1	1 100	2000	8/4	7.1	1 100							
Liberia	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	1986	6/6	6.8	760	1986	6/6	6.8	760							
Mali ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2001	8/6	6.9	1 200	2001	8/6	6.9	1 200							
Mauritania ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2000/01	8/5	5.8	1 000	2000/01	8/5	5.8	1 000							
Niger ²	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2000	14/4	7.9	1 600	2000	14/4	7.9	1 600							
Nigeria ²	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2003	13/8	5.8	800	2003	13/8	5.8	800							
Senegal	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2005	12/10	5.0	690	2005	12/10	5.0	690							
Sierra Leone ¹	X	X	X	-	-	-	-	2000	4/4	6.5	2 000	2000	4/4	6.5	2 000							
Togo	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	2000	26/9	5.4	570	2000	26/9	5.4	570							
Asia	97	67	64	48	45	34	28	1999	63/58	2.5	324	1999	63/58	2.5	324							
Eastern Asia	97	67	64	48	45	34	28	1997	82/81	1.7	53	1997	82/81	1.7	53							
China	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1998	24.2	2004	90/90	1.7	56	1998	24.2	2004	90/90	1.7	56			
Dem. People's Rep. of Korea	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1990/92	62/53	2.0	67	1990/92	62/53	2.0	67							
Japan ²	X	X	-	-	-	-	-	2004	12.3 ⁷	2000	56/51	1.3	10	2004	12.3 ⁷	2000	56/51	1.3	10			
Mongolia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1997	21.7	2000	67/54	2.4	110	1997	21.7	2000	67/54	2.4	110			
Republic of Korea	X	X	X	X	X	-	-	1997	81/67	1.2	20	1997	81/67	1.2	20							
South-central Asia	97	67	64	48	45	34	28	2000	48/42	3.2	524	2000	48/42	3.2	524							



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