

The World's Abortion Laws

Currently, 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 on page two 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.

PERMITTED TO SAVE THE WOMAN'S LIFE OR PROHIBITED ALTOGETHER

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 generally 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, explicitly 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 access the procedure without providing legal justification. Abortions may be performed after that period only on prescribed grounds.

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.

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Countries, by restrictiveness of abortion law, 2009 *Categories from the Most to Least Restrictive*

I. To Save the Woman's Life or Prohibited Altogether

(countries printed in bold make an explicit exception to save a woman's life)

Afghanistan Mauritius
 Andorra **Mexico**—♦ R/F
 Angola Micronesia—U
Antigua & Barbuda Myanmar
Bangladesh Nicaragua—x
Bhutan—R/I/+ **Nigeria**
Brazil—R Oman
Brunei Darussalam Palau—U
 Central African Rep. **Panama**—PA/R/F
 Chile—x **Papua New Guinea**
 Congo (Brazzaville) **Paraguay**
Côte d'Ivoire Philippines
 Dem. Rep. of Congo San Marino
Dominica Sao Tome & Principe
 Dominican Republic Senegal
 Egypt **Soloman Islands**
 El Salvador—x Somalia
 Gabon **Sri Lanka**
Guatemala **Sudan**—R
 Guinea-Bissau Suriname
 Haiti **Syria**—SA/PA
 Honduras **Tanzania**
Indonesia **Timor-Leste**
Iran—F Tonga
 Iraq **Tuvalu**
Ireland **Uganda**
Kenya **United Arab**
Kiribati **Emirates**—SA/PA
 Laos **Venezuela**
Lebanon **West Bank &**
 Lesotho **Gaza Strip**
Libya—PA **Yemen**
 Madagascar
Malawi—SA **68 Countries,**
Mali—R/I **25.7% of World's**
 Malta **Population**
 Marshall Islands—U
 Mauritania

II. To Preserve Physical Health

(also to save the woman's life)

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

36 Countries,
9.6% of World's
Population

III. To Preserve Mental Health

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

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

23 Countries,
4.2% of World's
Population

IV. Socioeconomic Grounds

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

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

14 Countries,
21.3% of World's
Population

V. Without Restriction as to Reason

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

56 Countries,
39.3% 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: All Countries in Category V have gestational limits of 12 weeks unless otherwise indicated. Gestational limits are calculated from the first day of the last menstrual period, which is considered to occur two weeks prior to conception. Where laws specify that gestational age limits are calculated from the date of conception, these limits have been extended by two weeks.

Δ Gestational limit of 90 days * Gestational limit of 14 weeks ^V Law does not limit pre-viability abortion
 † Gestational limit of 8 weeks ** Gestational limit of 18 weeks ° Law does not indicate gestational limit; regulatory mechanisms vary
 ‡ Gestational limit of 10 weeks *** Gestational limit of 24 weeks

Indications:

R Abortion permitted in cases of rape I Abortion permitted in cases of incest F Abortion permitted in cases of fetal impairment
 S Sex selective abortion prohibited SA Spousal authorization required
 U Law unclear PA Parental authorization/notification required
 R₁ Abortion permitted in the case of rape of a woman with a mental disability

♦ Federal system in which abortion law is determined at state level; classification reflects legal status of abortion for largest group of people

+ Abortion permitted on additional enumerated grounds relating to such factors as the woman's age or capacity to care for a child

x Recent legislation eliminated all exceptions to prohibition on abortion; availability of defense of necessity (see p. 1) highly unlikely