

# 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.

# September 2009 • The World's Abortion Laws

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

<b>I. To Save the Woman's Life or Prohibited Altogether</b> (countries printed in bold make an explicit exception to save a woman's life)	<b>II. To Preserve Physical Health</b> (also to save the woman's life)	<b>III. To Preserve Mental Health</b> (also to save the woman's life and physical health)	<b>IV. Socioeconomic Grounds</b> (also to save the woman's life, physical health and mental health)	<b>V. Without Restriction as to Reason</b>
Afghanistan Andorra Angola <b>Antigua &amp; Barbuda</b> <b>Bangladesh</b> <b>Bhutan</b> –R/I/+ <b>Brazil</b> –R <b>Brunei Darussalam</b> Central African Rep. Chile–x Congo (Brazzaville) <b>Côte d'Ivoire</b> Dem. Rep. of Congo <b>Dominica</b> Dominican Republic Egypt El Salvador–x Gabon <b>Guatemala</b> Guinea-Bissau Haiti Honduras <b>Indonesia</b> <b>Iran</b> –F Iraq <b>Ireland</b> <b>Kenya</b> <b>Kiribati</b> Laos <b>Lebanon</b> Lesotho <b>Libya</b> –PA Madagascar <b>Malawi</b> –SA <b>Mali</b> –R/I Malta Marshall Islands–U Mauritania Mauritius <b>Mexico</b> –♦R/F Micronesia–U <b>Myanmar</b> Nicaragua–x <b>Nigeria</b> Oman Palau–U <b>Panama</b> –PA/R/F <b>Papua New Guinea</b> <b>Paraguay</b> Philippines San Marino Sao Tome & Principe Senegal <b>Soloman Islands</b> Somalia <b>Sri Lanka</b> <b>Sudan</b> –R Suriname <b>Syria</b> –SA/PA <b>Tanzania</b> <b>Timor-Leste</b> Tonga <b>Tuvalu</b> <b>Uganda</b> <b>United Arab Emirates</b> –SA/PA <b>Venezuela</b> <b>West Bank &amp; Gaza Strip</b> <b>Yemen</b>  <b>68 Countries, 25.7% of World's Population</b>	Argentina–R <sub>1</sub> Bahamas Benin–R/I/F Bolivia–R/I Nicaragua–R/I/F Burundi Cameroon–R Chad–F Comoros Costa Rica Djibouti Ecuador–R <sub>1</sub> 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  <b>36 Countries, 9.6% of World's Population</b>	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  <b>23 Countries, 4.2% of World's Population</b>	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  <b>14 Countries, 21.3% of World's Population</b>	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 <sup>V</sup> Norway–PA Portugal‡–PA Puerto Rico <sup>V</sup> Romania* Russian Fed. Serbia–PA Singapore*** Slovak Rep.–PA Slovenia–PA South Africa Sweden** Switzerland Tajikistan Tunisia Turkey‡–SA/PA Turkmenistan Ukraine United States <sup>V</sup> –♦PA Uzbekistan Vietnam°  <b>56 Countries, 39.3% of World's Population</b>

**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 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 abortion
- <sup>°</sup> Law does not indicate gestational limit; regulatory mechanisms vary

- Indications:**
- R Abortion permitted in cases of rape
  - S Sex selective abortion prohibited
  - U Law unclear
  - R<sub>1</sub> 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
  - I Abortion permitted in cases of incest
  - SA Spousal authorization required
  - PA Parental authorization/notification required
  - F Abortion permitted in cases of fetal impairment