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Key Facts on Abortion Worldwide
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We offer the following evidence to the Citizen's Assembly for their consideration. This evidence represents a compilation of findings from research, primarily conducted by investigators at the Guttmacher Institute, on trends in the incidence and legal status of abortion worldwide and the characteristics of women who have abortions.

Abortion trends worldwide¹

- During 2010–2014, an estimated 56 million induced abortions* occurred each year worldwide. This represents an increase from 50 million annually during 1990–1994.
- The increase in the annual number of abortion is mainly a result of population growth. The abortion rate, or the number of abortions for every 1,000 women of childbearing age (15–44 years old), is not affected by population growth.
- The global abortion rate is estimated at 35 abortions per 1,000 women of childbearing age per year in 2010–2014. This represents a slight decline from 40 per 1,000 in 1990–1994.
- Between 1990–1994 and 2010–2014, the abortion rate declined markedly in developed regions, from 46 to 27 per 1,000. In contrast, it remained roughly the same in developing regions.
- Women in developing regions now have a higher likelihood of having an abortion than their counterparts in developed regions: The abortion rates are 37 per 1,000 women and 27 per 1,000, respectively.
- The proportion of abortions worldwide occurring in developing regions rose from 77% to 88%.

* Hereafter, the term “abortion” will refer to induced abortions.

- Globally, 25% of pregnancies ended in abortion in 2010–2014.
- When countries are grouped according to the grounds under which the procedure is legal, highly restrictive abortion laws are not associated with lower abortion rates. The average rate is 37 abortions per 1,000 women where abortion is prohibited altogether or allowed only to save a woman's life, compared with 34 per 1,000 where it is available on request.
- High levels of unmet need for contraception help explain the prevalence of abortion in countries with restrictive abortion laws.

Marital status of women having abortions

- The estimated global abortion rate in 2010–2014 was 36 per 1,000 for married women and 25 per 1,000 for unmarried women. Married women are estimated to have higher abortion rates than unmarried women in all subregions except Western Africa and Northern America, where the reverse appears to be true.
- Globally, as of 2010–2014, a little more than one-quarter of all abortions—27% or 15 million—occurred among unmarried women.

Age of women having abortions²

- As of 2009, adolescents aged 15-19 years old accounted for a disproportionately small share of abortions, compared to their share of the population overall, across the 40 countries with liberal abortion laws and data on the ages of women having abortions.
- Approximately 11% of all abortions in Europe were obtained by adolescents.
- In most countries, the highest age-specific abortion rates were among women aged 20–29.
- High abortion rates in particular age-groups likely reflect high fertility rates, high levels of unmet need for contraception or difficulty using methods consistently and effectively, and a strong desire to avoid childbearing among women in these age groups.

Legality of abortion worldwide³

- As of 2008, 60% of the world's 1.55 billion women of childbearing age live in countries where abortion is broadly legal.
- Some 6% of women live in countries where abortion is not legally permitted on any grounds, and another 21% live in countries where it is permitted only when the woman's life is threatened. Some of these countries also permit abortion in the case of rape or extenuating circumstances.
- About 39% of women live in countries where abortion is permitted without restriction as to reason.

- Abortion is broadly legal[†] throughout Europe, except in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Malta and Poland.
- In the developing world, China was the first large developing country to enact a liberal abortion law, in 1957. The central and western Asian republics enacted similar laws in the 1950s.
- Between the late 1950s and 1997, abortion became legal on broad grounds in many developing countries, including Cuba (1965), Singapore (1970), India (1971), Zambia (1972), Tunisia (1973), Vietnam (1975), Turkey (1983), Taiwan (1985), Mongolia (1989), South Africa (1996) and Cambodia (1997).
- Since 1997, another 26 countries or populous jurisdictions broadened the grounds for legal abortion. During this same period, three countries increased legal restrictions on abortion: El Salvador, Nicaragua and Poland.

Observed declines and low rates of abortion^{1,4}

- The lowest abortion rates in the world can be found in western and northern Europe, where most countries have liberal abortion laws.
- The abortion rate in the United States was 16 per 1,000 in 1973, the year abortion was legalized nationwide. The recorded abortion rate increased until 1981 and declined continuously since then, to 15 in 2014, the lowest rate on record in the country.
- The largest declines in abortion incidence since 1990 occurred in subregions where abortion has been broadly legal, most notably Eastern and Southern Europe.
- Since 1990, contraceptive use worldwide increased. Where contraceptive use increased the most, abortion rates dropped the most.

¹ Sedgh, G et al. "Abortion incidence between 1990 and 2014: global, regional, and subregional levels and trends." *The Lancet* 388.10041 (2016): 258-267.

² Sedgh, G, et al. "Legal abortion levels and trends by woman's age at termination." *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* (2012): 143-153.

³ Cohen S, Facts and Consequences: Legality, Incidence and Safety of Abortion Worldwide, *Guttmacher Policy Review*, 2009, 12(4):2-6. Some facts have been updated since publication.

⁴ Jones, RK., and Jerman, J. "Abortion incidence and service availability in the United States, 2014." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* (2017).

[†] Abortion is said to be broadly legal if the procedure is permitted either without restriction as to reason or on socioeconomic grounds.