

**Committee:** SOCHUM 1

**Topic:** The Question of Abortion Rights

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## Summary

The question of abortion is a complex issue that covers moral, legal, medical, and social dimensions. Since the early 1500s, women have been fighting for rights that provide access to safe and legal abortion, reproductive health services, and gender equality. Many women also aim to emphasize the importance of allowing individuals to make informed and independent decisions about their own bodies and futures, particularly in cases of unintended pregnancies and health risks. Advocates for abortion rights argue that women should have autonomy over their own bodies and the right to make private medical decisions. In contrast, opponents often view abortion as the taking of a human life, advocating for the rights of the unborn child. This topic also sparks varying cultural, religious, and political arguments, making it a deeply delicate issue.

In 77 countries, abortion is legally and safely performed, yet this does not stand for the rest of the world. Still in 21 countries, the procedure is completely prohibited and in Texas, the option of the death penalty is being discussed to be used on abortion providers.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Abortion:** the deliberate termination of a human pregnancy, most often performed during the first 28 weeks of pregnancy

**Termination:** the act of ending something

**Pregnancy:** the period in which a foetus develops inside a woman's womb or uterus. It usually lasts around 40 weeks or just over 9 months

**Reproductive Rights:** Rights relating to reproductive health and the ability to make decisions about reproduction

**Contraception:** Methods or devices used to prevent pregnancy

**WHO:** the world health organisation

**Procedure:** a surgical operation

**Safe Abortion:** Access to abortion procedures performed by qualified healthcare providers in hygienic conditions

**Sexual and Reproductive Health:** Encompasses all aspects of sexual health and reproductive processes and rights.

**Post-Abortion Care:** Medical care and counselling provided after an abortion to ensure health and well-being

**Human Rights:** Basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, including the right to reproductive health

## Background Information

Abortion, the termination of a pregnancy, has been a complex, and deeply contentious question for decades. Historically, attitudes towards abortion have varied widely, with some cultures and religions permitting it under certain circumstances while others strictly forbid it. Moral opposition began to solidify into legal restrictions during the Middle Ages, in 1803, Britain first passed anti-abortion laws, which then became stricter throughout the century. As time went on, these turned into advancing laws with the increasing use of modern medicine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the professional view of abortion being a dangerous procedure having been done with crude methods, few antiseptics, and receiving high mortality rates.

Now, it is estimated that around 25 million unsafe abortions occur, leading to the creation of organizations such as the World Health Organization and the UN to advocate for the recognition of safe abortion as a fundamental aspect of reproductive health and rights. Still, factors such as, advances in medical technology, shifting societal values, and varying legal frameworks across

different countries continue to shape the ongoing discourse around this complex and polarizing issue.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

**United States:** The U.S. have been a central figure in the abortion debate, following the Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, which legalized abortion nationwide. However, its recent overturning in 2022 has reignited intense debates, legal battles and protests nationwide, with individual states now being able to regulate or ban abortions. The abortion debate in the US is highly polarized, with powerful advocacy groups on both sides such as Planned Parenthood and the National Right to Life Committee, both of which actively influence public policy and opinion.

**Poland:** Despite most European countries having become more open to the liberation of abortion laws, Poland still has some of the strictest abortion laws in the European Union. Recent legal changes led to further restrictions to access abortion. Despite these restrictive laws, there are movements in Poland advocating for reproductive rights, with organizations such as the Federation for Women and Family Planning working to challenge the legal constraints.

**Canada:** Canada has one of the most liberal abortion laws, with no legal restrictions on abortion since 1988. Abortion in Canada is treated like any other medical procedure, regulated through standard, publicly funded, healthcare provisions rather than specific legal restrictions. They also advocate for reproductive rights on the global stage, contributing to international efforts to improve access to safe and legal abortions.

**Amnesty International:** Is a global human rights organization which advocates for the decriminalization of abortion and the protection of women's reproductive rights worldwide. They conduct extensive research, publish reports, and spread awareness about the consequences of restrictive abortion laws.

**Planned Parenthood:** Is a major provider and advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights in the U.S. They play a significant role in providing abortion services and lobbying for reproductive rights. They operate over 600 health centres across the U.S., ensuring access to reproductive health services for millions of people, especially those in restricted communities.

Planned Parenthood also actively challenge restrictive laws and policies through legal action and public campaigns.

There are also various UN agencies, including the World Health Organization (WHO) which support reproductive rights and provide access to safe abortion services.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description
1803-	Britain passes the first law to criminalise abortion
1827 –	New York became the first state to criminalize abortion, which made post-quickening abortions a felony
1920 –	The Soviet Union legalized abortion on request, the first country to do so.
1931 –	Mexico abortion was legalized in cases of rape
1932 –	Poland was the first country in Europe outside the Soviet Union to legalize abortion in cases of rape and threat to maternal health
1935 –	Iceland became the first Western country to legalize therapeutic abortion under limited circumstances.
1955 –	South Korea criminalized abortion in the 1953 Criminal Code in all circumstances
1964 –	In Norway the first law to legalize abortion was passed
1967 –	The UK Abortion Act (effective 1968) legalized abortion in the United Kingdom under certain grounds
1973-	Roe V Wade is introduced, allowing women in the US to get an abortion up to 24 weeks
1975–1980 –	France (1975), West Germany (1976), New Zealand (1977), Italy (1978), and The Netherlands (1980) legalized abortion on demand in the first trimester
1997 –	Honduras established a penalty from 3-6 years in prison for women who obtain an abortion and for any medical staff who are involved

2020 – Argentina legalized abortion up to 14 weeks of pregnancy

2022 – Colombia decriminalizes abortion in the first 24 weeks

2022- Roe v Wade is overturned, allowing individual states to criminalise abortion

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

### **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):**

Acts as an international bill of rights for women, which asks member states to eliminate discrimination against women in all areas, including healthcare. The committee has interpreted the treaty to include access to safe abortion as part of women's reproductive rights.

### **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR):**

This acknowledges the right to the highest attainable standard of health, this includes access to reproductive healthcare, which implicitly supports safe abortion services.

**UNFPA** frequently organizes and participates in events that advocate for reproductive health and rights. These are mostly focused ensuring access to safe abortion services as part of comprehensive reproductive healthcare.

### **Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995:**

This event led to a broad policy agenda for women's empowerment. It called for the review of laws that punish women for undergoing illegal abortions and prioritised the importance of access to quality reproductive healthcare services.

**Commission on the Status of Women (CSW):** Is an annual event where member states discuss progress and challenges in gender equality and women's rights, some of which have addressed reproductive rights, including the issue of safe abortion.

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

**Roe v. Wade (1973):** The Supreme Court case legalized abortion throughout the US, establishing a woman's right to choose an abortion. This decision shaped abortion laws and debates in the U.S, however this was later overturned in 2022.

**European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) Rulings:** The ECHR has ruled on several cases regarding abortion access.

**United Nations Advocacy:** Various UN bodies have consistently advocated for the decriminalization of abortion and for ensuring access to safe, legal abortion services.

**WHO:** Have published guidelines on safe abortion practices, emphasizing the importance of access to safe, legal abortion services to protect women's health.

## **Possible Solutions**

- One solution may be to produce medical clinics which specialise in performing such a procedure in a clean and safe environment. WHO provide mobile clinics to treat vulnerable groups, but these could be made permanent to ensure that patients' health remains stable post operation. As well as physical support, mental health services could also be provided for those who have undergone an abortion.
- Another solution could be to implement an education program in schools globally, highlighting both the personal and medical need to undergo an abortion. This would aim to somewhat restrain the abuse that typically follows talks of abortion. These education programs could also provide information about the use of contraception and overall sexual health.
- A final solution could be the implementation of financial support towards women post-abortion who need further medical support, time off work, or towards organisations that provide safe spaces for women debating undergoing an abortion in restrictive or unsafe countries.

## Bibliography

(Title of source, author, date of publication – you may also wish to list some useful websites)

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