



## **World Health Organization**

### **Topic:**

**Examining the prohibition and safe access to abortions worldwide is an ethical dilemma in the health sector.**

### **Chairs:**

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### **Committee background:**

The World Health Organization (WHO) is an agency of the United Nations that focuses on global public health. This organization was founded on April 7, 1948, after World War II, when the United Nations recognized the need for an international organization to coordinate efforts against global health problems.

The main goals of WHO are to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable. Its principal focus is to achieve universal health coverage, prevent and respond to global health emergencies, and support healthier populations through policy guidance, research, and international cooperation. WHO sets international health standards, provides technical assistance to countries, and coordinates the responses to outbreaks and diseases that cross borders.

### **Background of the topic:**

Access to safe abortion services remains one of the most complex ethical and public health challenges faced by the international community. The World Health Organization identifies safe abortion as a critical component of reproductive healthcare; access to it is variable due to the legal restrictions, religious and cultural norms, and political ideologies. In many countries, abortion is either fully prohibited or it's allowed only under limited circumstances, like risk to the pregnant person's life or cases of rape. These prohibitions often stem from rooted moral and cultural beliefs, political polarization, and pressure from religious institutions. As a result, millions of individuals each year are forced to resort to unsafe methods that put their lives and health at risk. Unsafe abortions are an important leading cause of preventable maternal deaths globally, resulting in complications like severe infections, hemorrhage, infertility, and long-term psychological trauma. Beyond the health consequences, restrictive laws generate a social and economic burden, forcing individuals to abandon education, face financial hardship, or continue the unwanted pregnancies under unsafe or unsupported conditions.

The ethical dilemma emerges from the tension between protecting the health and autonomy of individuals and respecting the moral, legal, and cultural frameworks of each nation. Health professionals often face conflicting responsibilities that are to provide life-saving care that may clash with restrictive laws that threaten them with legal consequences. This undermines trust in the healthcare system and limits the ability of medical providers to follow international guidelines. The issue is important not only because it concerns fundamental human rights and bodily autonomy, but also because it impacts maternal mortality rates, gender equality, and overall public health. Ensuring safe access to reproductive healthcare is necessary for achieving global



health equity and meeting key Sustainable Development Goals such as good health and well-being, reduced inequalities, and gender equality.

The debate over abortion has evolved significantly over time. During the mid-20th century, unsafe abortions were widely recognized as a major contributor to maternal mortality, prompting early discussions on legal reform. A major shift came with the United Kingdom's 1967 Abortion Act, which legalized abortion under specific conditions, and the United States' 1973, which established nationwide access and influenced global perspectives. In the 1990s, some international conferences, like the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, reframed from reproductive health as a matter of human rights, encouraging countries to improve care where abortion was legal. In the 2000s and 2010s, the WHO released detailed technical guidelines, and several countries expanded legal access. However, in the 2020s, polarization has been increasing. Some nations strengthened protections and introduced telemedicine abortion services, while others enacted stricter bans or reversed previous legal protections. This highlights why access to safe abortion remains a pressing ethical dilemma for the health sector and a critical topic for the WHO to address.

### **Position of major nations:**

**United States:** Abortion laws differ across states. Some states allow abortion freely, but others have strict limits. These laws affect women's health and also influence international health funding.

**China:** Abortion is legal and widely available. It is mostly regulated for health reasons, with past policies sometimes used for population control.

**Russia:** Abortion is legal, but access most of the time can be difficult in rural areas.

**Unsafe abortions still occur in some regions.**

**United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada:** Abortion is legal and safe. Healthcare systems in these countries support women with proper medical care.

**India:** Abortion is legal under certain conditions, but in rural areas, access can be limited. This leads to unsafe abortions and health risks.

**Japan, South Korea:** Abortion is legal, though sometimes socially stigmatized. Overall, safe medical care is available.

**Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Chile:** Laws vary across these countries.

Argentina and some parts of Mexico allow abortion freely, while Brazil, Chile, and Colombia have more restrictions. Restrictive laws can lead to unsafe abortions.

**South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria:** South Africa has relatively liberal abortion laws, but other countries like Nigeria and Ethiopia have strict restrictions. Limited access creates public health challenges.



Saudi Arabia, Iran: Abortion is mostly illegal, except when it's about saving a woman's life. Access to safe abortion is very limited. Turkey, Indonesia, Philippines: Abortion is mostly restricted, only allowed in special situations. Women often face obstacles in obtaining safe care. Poland: Abortion laws are very strict. Many women must travel abroad to get safe abortions.

### **Definition of key terms:**

Abortion: The medical or surgical end of a pregnancy on purpose.

Safe Abortion: An abortion done by trained medical professionals, using safe methods, with proper care before and after.

Unsafe Abortion: An abortion done in unsafe conditions, by untrained people, or with dangerous methods. This can cause serious health problems or death.

Legal Status of Abortion: Shows if a country allows abortion and under what conditions.

Access to Abortion: How easy it is for someone to get a safe abortion, including legal permission, cost, distance to clinics, and quality of care.

Maternal Health / Maternal Mortality: The health of pregnant women. Unsafe abortions can harm women's health or even cause death.

Reproductive Rights: The right to make decisions about your own body, including whether to have children and whether to get a safe abortion.

### **Guiding questions:**

- What are the current abortion laws and access conditions in different countries?
- How does access to safe abortion affect women's health and maternal mortality?
- What are the main ethical, cultural, and religious arguments regarding abortion?
- What international treaties or agreements address reproductive rights and health?
- How do socioeconomic factors influence access to safe abortion services?
- How can countries respect cultural and religious values while ensuring women's health?
- What role should the World Health Organization play in supporting safe abortion access?
- How can countries collaborate to reduce unsafe abortions globally?
- Should restrictions on abortion be reconsidered in countries with high maternal mortality?
- How can delegates balance human rights, ethics, and public health in the debate?



- What concrete policies or measures can governments adopt to improve safe abortion access?
- How can international cooperation help implement effective reproductive health strategies?
- What steps can be taken to reduce barriers like legal, social, or economic, to safe abortion?
- How can resolution proposals ensure both safety and respect for ethical or cultural concerns?
- Which examples from other countries can be adapted to propose feasible solutions?

### **Countries list:**

United States	China	Russia
United Kingdom	France	Germany
India	Japan	Brazil
Canada	Mexico	Colombia
Argentina	Chile	South Africa
Nigeria	Ethiopia	Kenya
Saudi Arabia	Iran	Turkey
South Korea	Philippines	Indonesia
Poland		

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