

Research Report

Forum: The 6th Committee of the United Nations General Assembly

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Question of: Finding international agreements on the topic of abortion

Note: The proper main chair of the 6th Committee will be unable to attend MUNoH 2015, which we were only informed about three weeks before the conference. Therefore, the proper deputy chair, Marvin Gambusch, will now act as the main chair and will be assisted by our Secretary General, Alina Kempe. Due to time constraints, this research report can unfortunately only cover the basics of this topic. We sincerely apologize for this inconvenience.

Content of this report:

1. Definition of key terms
2. Background information
3. The issue
4. The task of the committee regarding the issue
5. Important questions for your preparation
6. Perhaps useful sources

Definition of key terms:

Abortion:

Abortion in general is the ending of a pregnancy which does not result in the birth of a child.

It can be either intended or spontaneous, which is then called miscarriage.

Intended abortion means the induced (intended) termination of a pregnancy, which is what the 6th Committee will focus on.

Intended abortion can be done by medication or surgery and can for example be caused by the health status of the pregnant woman or the child or the reason for the pregnancy, since not every pregnancy is intended, as pregnancy can also be the result of rape or of the failure of contraceptive methods.

Unsafe abortion:

An unsafe abortion is, according to the definition of the World Health Organization (WHO) an “abortion as a procedure for terminating an unintended pregnancy carried out either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment that does not conform to minimal medical standards, or both.”

World Health Organization (WHO):

The World Health Organization is an UN organization which focuses on improving health throughout the world. Besides trying to improve the public health status and fighting diseases, it publishes many surveys and the World Health Report. Those documents are often used as a reference for discussions on the topic of health. (Might be worth a visit...)

Abortion rate:

There are two definitions for abortion rate:

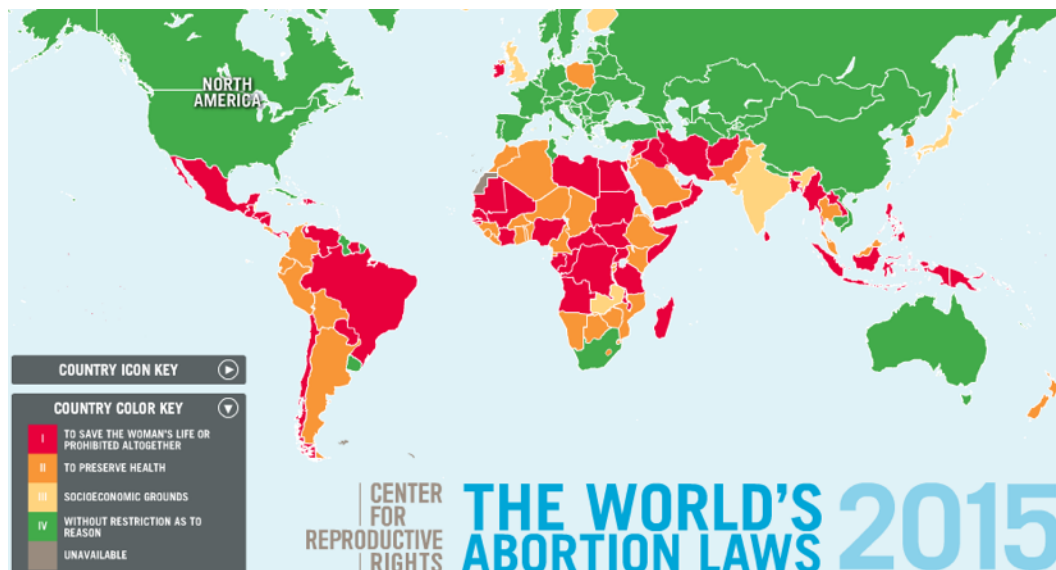
- The abortion rate is the number of induced abortions per 1,000 pregnancies.
- The abortion rate is the number of abortions x 1000 / the number of females aged between 15 and 44 years.

Background information:

About 205 million pregnancies occur every year. About 44 million abortions are done every year (125,000 per day). That implies that every fifth pregnancy ends in an abortion. Of those 44 million abortions, 22 million fall into the category of unsafe abortions.

Unsafe abortions cause 47,000 deaths and 5 million hospital admissions per year. Almost every unsafe abortion occurs in developing countries, which is a fact that might be misleading, since about 86% of all (safe & unsafe) abortions are carried out in developing countries. Reasons for unsafe abortion may be the illegality of abortion in the specific country, since the laws across the world regarding abortions are very different.

Here is a map that shows the laws on abortions in 2015:



<https://dejusticiablog.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/worlds-abortion-laws.png>

It shows that in most developing countries (such as most countries located in Africa or South America) abortion is illegal, while in developed countries abortion seems to be a legal option. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that every woman should have access to legal abortion.

This graph shows some numbers and rates on abortion sorted by region and over the years.

**Numbers and Rates:
Global and regional estimates of induced abortion,
1995, 2003 and 2008**

Region	No. of abortions (millions)			Abortion rate*		
	1995	2003	2008	1995	2003	2008
World	45.6	41.6	43.8	35	29	28
Developed countries	10.0	6.6	6.0	39	25	24
Excluding Eastern Europe	3.8	3.5	3.2	20	19	17
Developing countries	35.5	35.0	37.8	34	29	29
Excluding China	24.9	26.4	28.6	33	30	29
Africa	5.0	5.6	6.4	33	29	29
Asia	26.8	25.9	27.3	33	29	28
Europe	7.7	4.3	4.2	48	28	27
Latin America	4.2	4.1	4.4	37	31	32
North America	1.5	1.5	1.4	22	21	19
Oceania	0.1	0.1	0.1	21	18	17

*Abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44.
Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: incidence and trends worldwide from 1995 to 2008, *Lancet*, 2012 (forthcoming).

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<http://www.guttmacher.org/graphics/2012/01/17/AWW-table.gif>

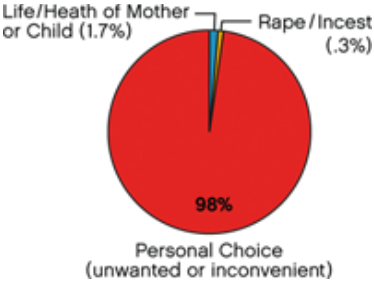
As you can see, the rate of abortions has been decreasing very slowly since 1995. When reviewing statistics like this one, please keep in mind that the birth rate might also have

changed, which would influence the number of abortions.

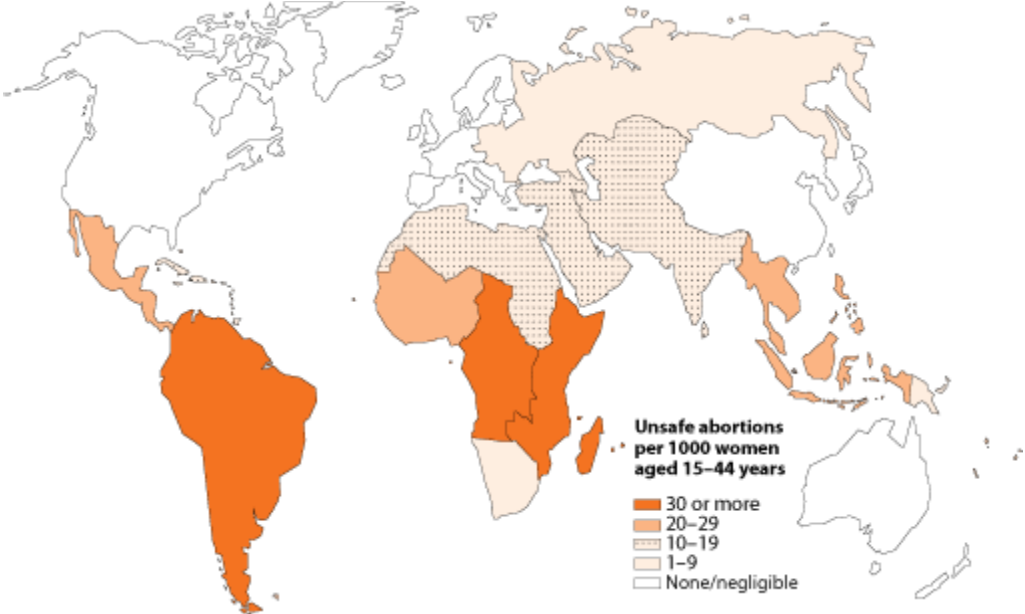
Whereas abortions in LEDCs (Least Economically Developed Countries) pose a high health risk, they are far less life threatening in MEDCs (Most Economically Developed Countries). As for reasons for abortions, they may be manifold. To take just one example, according to a survey, the most common reason for an abortion in the U.S. with 74% of all abortions is the dramatic changes in life a baby would have caused. This could for example be school or career. The effort a baby would cause was considered to be too high for 73%. Only in 12% (respective 13%) of abortions, the health of the pregnant woman (or fetus) was the reason. Just 1% of abortions were caused by an unwanted pregnancy due to rape.

Those statistics show that the most common reasons for abortion are more on the financial side or changes in life, rather than related to health status or the reason for the pregnancy.

Other sources prove the essentials:



<http://bound4life.com/images/Reasons.png>



http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/unsafe_abortion/uaworldmap.gif

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), every 8 minutes a woman in a developing nation will die of complications arising from an unsafe abortion. An unsafe abortion is defined as “a procedure for terminating an unintended pregnancy carried out either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment that does not conform to minimal medical standards, or both.” However, WHO deems unsafe abortion one of the easiest preventable causes of maternal mortality and a staggering public health issue.

Although, the overall abortion rate has declined, the proportion of unsafe abortion is on the rise, especially in developing nations. From 1995 to 2003, the overall number of abortions declined, but the unsafe abortion rate was steady (from 15 to 14 abortions per 1000 women, respectively), constituting an increase from 44% to 48%.³

In Western nations, only 3% of abortions are unsafe, whereas in developing nations 55% are unsafe. The highest incidences of abortions that are unsafe occur in Latin America, Africa, and South East Asia.

Legalization of abortion can prevent the unnecessary suffering and death of women. Restrictive abortion laws violate women's human rights based on agreements made at the UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 1 & 3 & 12 & 19 & 27.1).

The issue of unsafe abortion is a matter of a strong concern for UN, which works on the issue exclusively within the UNDP, UNFPA, WHO, World Bank Special Program of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP).

The issue:

Although abortion is legal in many parts of the world, it causes some intense debates on whether it should be allowed or not. People are arguing whether abortion should be a choice that every woman should have or should be treated as murder on innocent lives.

The discussion raises fundamental questions about humanity, human life, when life starts, what rights women should have concerning control over their body, what rights the unborn should have and about ethical and religious perceptions.

Basically, there are 2 perceptions on the topic of abortion:

-Pro-life: People who define themselves as pro-life are against any kind of abortion and state that abortion kills innocent lives and should be illegal.

-Pro-choice: People who define themselves as pro-choice are in favor of abortions since they believe that every woman should have a right to decide whether she wants to carry through with the pregnancy or not.

Some people also state that abortion should only be legal in case the health condition of the pregnant woman or the unborn is in danger, which is a kind of compromise between the two perceptions, securing both the health of the pregnant woman and the life of the unborn.

Those positions are, as you can see in a graph above, also represented by different countries. Until now, every country can decide on their own whether abortion should be legal or not.

The task of the 6th Committee regarding the issue:

The 6th Committee of the United Nations General Assembly is given the task to find international agreements on whether and in which cases abortion should be a legal option or not. Particularly, the 6th Committee should find agreements on in which case and how long into the pregnancy abortion should be allowed. Further, it should develop strategies to reduce the number of unsafe abortions and thereby the amount of deaths caused by those abortions.

Important questions for your preparation:

-What is the legal status of abortion in my country?

-Why is that so?

-What are the reasons for people in my country to have an abortion?

-What has my country done about abortions? Have there been any changes, lately?

-Does my country encourage other countries to act like my country?

-How many abortions happen in my country? How many of them are done unsafely?

-Is there a problem with (unsafe) abortions in my country?

-Are there possibilities to reduce the number of unsafe abortions?

-Is my country influenced by any religion?

-Could this influence my country's opinion on abortion?

-What can be arguments in favor of my country's opinion?

- What can be arguments against my country's opinion?
- What should the UN do regarding this issue?

Possible useful sources:

-WHO

-your countries health ministerial

-http://www.gutmacher.org/pubs/fb_IAW.html

-<http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/abortion/>

-http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/43798/1/9789241596121_eng.pdf

-http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241501118_eng.pdf

-<http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/abortion/mental-health.pdf>

-<http://abortion.procon.org/>

-<http://www.britannica.com/topic/abortion-pregnancy>

-<http://www.bustle.com/articles/52634-un-declares-abortion-rights-are-human-rights-promising-to-support-reproductive-rights-worldwide>

-<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/population/abortion/abortionlaws.htm>

Sources (apart from “perhaps useful sources”):

-<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion>

-http://www.gutmacher.org/pubs/fb_IAW.html#1

-<http://abortion.procon.org>

- <http://www.britannica.com/topic/abortion-pregnancy>

- http://womensissues.about.com/od/reproductiverights/a/AbortionReasons_2.htm

- http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44529/1/9789241501118_eng.pdf

- <http://www.who.int/about/en/>

- <http://www.medilexicon.com/medicaldictionary.php?t=75854>

