

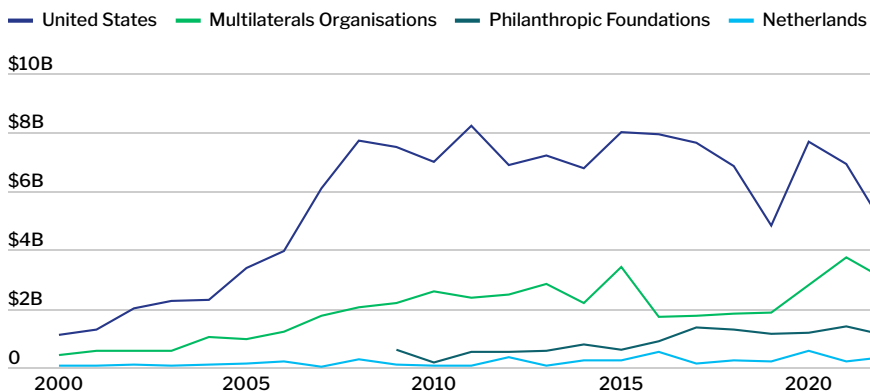
Ensuring Global Abortion Access in an Evolving Geopolitical Landscape

Abortion policies are shaped by international and domestic politics, but expanding safe access is critical to global health, gender equality, and sustainable development goals.

The urgency of the challenge: Forty percent of women around the world live in countries with partially or fully restrictive abortion laws. Despite its critical impacts on public health, education, and socioeconomic indicators, safe abortion access remains a highly politicized issue, one that is influenced by domestic and international politics. Indeed, abortion also acts as a signpost for democratic decline: countries with restrictive abortion laws have also demonstrated concurrent declines in press freedom, minority and LGBTQ+ rights, and other indicators of democracy. As a result, an issue of rights and health frequently becomes a proxy for broader ideological and geopolitical issues. Increasingly, restrictions on abortion access have shaped foreign policy decisions and funding, thereby undermining health, rights, and sustainable development.

Reproductive Health and Population Programs, ODA Commitments by Top Donors

United States remains leading SRHR donor; foundations and other countries showed steady support during U.S. funding declines, but unmet needs persist. 2000–2022, in billion 2022 USD



Source: OECD Data Explorer

FACTS AND FIGURES

\$10 million

Every USD 10 million decrease in U.S. family planning and reproductive health funding would likely result in 174,000 unintended pregnancies, 69,000 unplanned births, 56,000 unsafe abortions, and 300 additional maternal deaths worldwide.

45%

About 45 percent of abortions worldwide are unsafe, typically sought by women and girls under the age of 24.

9.12%

Eliminating abortion restrictions across the U.S. could lead to a 9.12 percent growth in female earnings and a 0.5 percent increase in national GDP.

1.7x

A study over 25 years in New Zealand found that women who had had an abortion before age 21 were 1.7 times more likely to attain a post-secondary education, compared to those who became pregnant but did not have an abortion.

Sources: Guttmacher (2024), UNFPA (2022), Shan and Ahman (2012), Fergusson et al. (2007), and IWPR (n.d.)

Abortion remains politicized around the world



1 Restrictions on abortion in official development aid undermine health and rights

Although the U.S. is the single largest bilateral donor to global public health, the U.S.' Mexico City Policy—or “global gag rule” in effect from the years 1984-1992, 2001-2008, and 2017-2020—prevented international non-governmental organizations that receive U.S. global health assistance funds from providing or promoting abortions, except in very limited circumstances. Yet, the gag rule has been correlated with higher rates of unwanted pregnancy and abortion in sub-Saharan Africa. It also has impacts beyond abortion. Many organizations were forced to curtail contraception services. Another reported side effect of the gag rule included reduced support for the provision of primary care in some settings; for example, in Uganda, after capacity of community health care was cut back. As a result, fewer women were able to safely access vital health care for themselves and their families.

2 Abortion restrictions in Poland have grave and systematic impacts

In October 2020, a Constitutional Tribunal in Poland significantly tightened already highly-restrictive abortion laws by prohibiting fetal diagnoses as grounds for abortion, which accounted for 98 percent of legal abortions in the country. This ruling sparked mass protests and ongoing legislative debates, with the Polish parliament now deliberating bills to legalize providing abortion services upon a patient's request. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), following an inquiry into Polish abortion laws, concluded that the current legislation causes grave and systematic human rights violations, and it has called for legal reform. Russian influence operations have reportedly shaped the political discourse over sexual and reproductive health and rights in Poland, impacting safe abortion access not only for Polish citizens but also the sizable Ukrainian refugee population, including those who have experienced sexual violence. Refugees' access to contraception and abortion remains limited in Poland and across the EU due to restrictive legislation, inadequate resources, and geographic and language barriers, among a range of factors.

3 Despite decisive victory for abortion in Colombia, access remains uneven while rights remain under threat

When a new, more liberal Colombian constitution was adopted in 1991, feminist groups—such as Causa Justa, which brought together over 100 Colombian feminist, peacebuilding, and other organizations—built a broad coalition to reframe abortion as a woman's right and a fundamental human right. Despite the partial decriminalization of abortion in cases of rape, incest, and fetal diagnoses in 2006, an average of 400 women per year were prosecuted for seeking abortions. However, a landmark ruling in 2022 fully decriminalized abortion up to the 24th week of pregnancy, representing the most progressive abortion legal framework in Latin America. This decision came after years of feminist advocacy and mobilization for greater socioeconomic and political rights, including during the peace process to end the long-running civil war between the government and the FARC. While this victory is significant, efforts continue to ensure the implementation of safe and legal abortion access—particularly in rural areas. Meanwhile, anti-abortion rights politicians have tabled a referendum to repeal the law and continue to advocate for abortion restrictions.

Policy priorities and opportunities ahead

To achieve gender equity and strengthen global health, key national and global stakeholders need to address the politicization and internationalization of abortion restrictions and coalesce around the importance of safe and legal abortion. Legalizing and guaranteeing abortion access will help ensure that women and healthcare professionals are not prosecuted for seeking and providing abortions, while reducing stigma will enable women to seek the care they need. Also crucial will be providing reliable, unrestricted funding from multiple sources, including bilateral and multilateral donors, the private sector, and philanthropic foundations, to expand abortion care and family planning. Finally, it is vital to grow the evidence base on the impacts of abortion access—and lack thereof—on social, economic, health, and political outcomes to inform effective policies and investments.