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ECOSOC 3 – Commission on the Status of Women

# Research Report

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Topic 2: The right to abortion within rural regions of states where the practice of abortion is legal by national standards



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## Introduction

The right to abortion remains a controversial topic in the whole world. Proponents and opponents are very far from each other, with most of the proponents recognising the difficulties and issues of the debates, but still considering it an important part of a women's right to choose her own future and to own and control her own body.

Opponents of abortion ranges all the way from people and groups only allowing abortion in emergencies to the ones' objecting to it completely under all circumstances, as they consider it murder of an unborn child.

Although abortion remains legal in many countries, access to abortion facilities in countries where abortion is legal can be limited in rural areas due to a lack of necessary facilities, stigma from communities etc.

The purpose of this document is to provide a brief overview regarding the right to abortion within rural regions of states where the practice of abortion is legal by national standards.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Abortion:** The termination of a pregnancy by removing the foetus, either through surgical procedure or by inducing the birth prematurely.

**Rural region:** A geographical area that is located outside a town/urbanized area.

**Legal by national standards:** An act that is considered legal under the criminal code of a country.

## Background information

Many religious groups are especially vocal opponents of abortion in general, with one of the main opponents being the catholic church, with an estimated membership of 1.28 billion people.<sup>1</sup> Islam also considers abortions to be wrong, but permits it in certain cases<sup>2</sup>, and with a membership of more than 1.6 billion<sup>3</sup> (this number is from 2012, so the number is probably considerably higher today), also makes up a large body of people that could potentially be against abortion for religious reasons. However, it is important to note that not all Muslims, Catholics etc. are against abortion because they belong to their specific religion, but as the religions consider the act of abortion to be wrong, it is fair to assume that a large number of members of these religions could be against abortion.

Religious communities are in many countries an important social aspect of rural regions. Churches are in many places, such as the US to Brazil, a place where a community gathers over religious services, but also to partake in social activities from suppers to games and activities.

Religious communities also often have a large grasp of a population in rural regions, making it difficult for women in particular to access abortion clinics, even though it is legal on a national level. This can be due to either regional or local policies that prohibits abortion clinics from opening or doctors from performing abortions. Pressure from local organisations can also affect the willingness of doctors to perform abortions as they could be scrutinized by the local community for having the procedure. Abortion could also be considered such a taboo that people that might want to or be in the need of an abortion, are not willing to go through with the procedure as the social consequences they would face from their community could be so severe that they would be regarded as outcasts.

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<sup>1</sup> Wooden, C (06/04/17). Visited 12/01/2018. Available at:  
<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2017/04/06/global-catholic-population-exceeds-1-28-billion/>

<sup>2</sup> BBC (07/09/09). Visited 17/01/2018. Available at:  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/islamethics/abortion\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/islamethics/abortion_1.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> Hackett, C (2012). *The Global Religious Landscape: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Major Religious Groups as of 2010*, Pew Research Center, printed p. 21. Online book visited 01/12/2018. Available at:  
<http://www.pewforum.org/files/2014/01/global-religion-full.pdf>

This has happened in recent times in the US, where a nun was excommunicated from the Catholic Church, after allowing a mother to have an abortion performed at the Catholic hospital she was working at as an administrator, as the mother was at a great risk of dying if she didn't have an abortion.<sup>4</sup>

Another issue is distance. In many countries, state of the art medical facilities are located in Urban regions. This is especially an issue when it comes to abortions. In Canada, scheduling an abortion outside of major cities and urban regions is more complicated due to a lack of private and public clinics, heavily booked operating rooms and few hospitals.<sup>5</sup> Looking at Canada where abortion is legal, it is fair to assume that many other countries face similar issues, considering Canada being a wealthy MEDC with an overall well-functioning single payer public health care system. Therefore, a lack of facilities and health infrastructure can also be considered an issue when it comes to the right of getting an abortion in a rural region.

## Major Countries and Organisations Involved

**Canada:** Abortion is legal in Canada during all stages of pregnancy.<sup>6</sup> Access to new types abortion pills with government subsidies, has recently been done by Canada, who have introduced a free abortion pill in Ontario, with advocates believing that it will improve access also in more rural areas of Canada, where it is more difficult to have an abortion performed.<sup>7</sup>

**Catholic Church:** The Catholic Church is one of the largest religions in the world with an estimated membership of 1.28 billion people.<sup>8</sup> The Catholic Church considers abortion a sin and are completely against abortion. Although the Catholic Church has lost most of their political

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<sup>4</sup> Hagerty, B. B (19/05/10). Visited 17/01/2018. Available at:

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126985072>

<sup>5</sup> Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (2017). *Access to Abortion in Rural/Remote Areas*, Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, printed p. 1. Online book visited 01/13/2018. Available at:

<http://www.arcc-cdac.ca/postionpapers/07-Access%20Rural-Remote%20Areas.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ralston, M et al. (30/09/08). Visited 17/01/2018. Available at:

<http://www.pewforum.org/2008/09/30/abortion-laws-around-the-world/>

<sup>7</sup> Bueckert, K (03/08/17). Visited 13/01/2018. Available at:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/shore-centre-abortion-pill-free-ontario-august-10-1.4233698>

<sup>8</sup> Wooden, C (06/04/17). Visited 12/01/2018. Available at:

<http://www.catholicerald.co.uk/news/2017/04/06/global-catholic-population-exceeds-1-28-billion/>

power, they still remain a very influential organisation, and have also influenced both communities and countries to condemn and abolish abortion.<sup>9</sup>

**WHO:** WHO sees unsafe abortions as a major problem, with restrictive laws, stigma, and unnecessary requirements such as mandatory waiting periods and tests as major issues that are preventing women from having safe abortions performed, which could lead to complications and even death.<sup>10</sup> Poor availability of services is also regarded as one of the major issues that are preventing women from having safe abortions according to the WHO.<sup>11</sup>

**United Nations:** The UN has recently been trying to push for abortion to be classified as a human right, but powerful member nations, such as the US, are not in support of classifying it as a human right.<sup>12</sup> The committee on elimination of discrimination against women have stated: “States parties should legalize abortion at least in cases of rape, incest, threats to the life and/or health of the mother, or severe foetal impairment, as well as provide women with access to quality post abortion care, especially in cases of complications resulting from unsafe abortions. States parties should also remove punitive measures for women who undergo abortion.”<sup>13</sup>

**UN Women:** As a part of the UN Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021, reproductive health and rights is a major focus for UN Women.<sup>14</sup> UN Women have stated: “UN-Women contributes

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<sup>9</sup> Sanchez, E. L (27/08/13). Visited 13/01/2018. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/27/abortion-rights-latin-america>

<sup>10</sup> WHO (2017). Visited 01/13/2017. Available at:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs388/en/>

<sup>11</sup> WHO (2017). Visited 01/13/2017. Available at:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs388/en/>

<sup>12</sup> Agence France-Presse (22/06/17). Visited 13/01/2018. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/22/women-abortion-un-human-rights-resolution-us-refuses>

<sup>13</sup> UN Human Rights Committee (n.d.). *Information Series on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Abortion*, UN Human Rights Committee, printed p. 2. Online book visited 01/12/2018. Available at:

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO\\_Abortion\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO_Abortion_WEB.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2017). *Draft update of the UN-Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, Annual Report of the Executive Director at the 2017 annual session, printed p. 7. Online book visited 01/13/2018. Available at:

[http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2017/annual%20session%202017/un-women%202018-2021%20strategic%20plan%20narrative\\_final.pdf?vs=5611](http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2017/annual%20session%202017/un-women%202018-2021%20strategic%20plan%20narrative_final.pdf?vs=5611)

efforts to repeal discriminatory legislation and norms that impede women’s access to sexual and reproductive health services provided by other partner agencies, thereby supporting demand.”<sup>15</sup>

**European Union:** The European Union passed the first major reproductive health resolution in 2002, which stated that no women should be prosecuted from having an abortion performed in any member state, but also explicitly mentions that abortion shouldn’t be promoted as a family-planning tool and should be prevented if possible.<sup>16</sup> The laws of the member states on abortion are also very different, from Ireland where abortions are illegal under most circumstances, to Greece where abortions can be performed on request until 12 weeks.<sup>17</sup> There is still an issue within the European Union and Europe in having abortions performed in rural regions due to a lack of abortion services from physicians, transport and facilities.<sup>18</sup>

**India:** Abortion is legal in India, but only up 20 weeks of pregnancy.<sup>19</sup> India has recently had success in improving access to abortions in rural areas by combining abortion clinics with primary health care facilities, which made the percentage of abortions performed in clinics or hospital instead of in the homes go to 99% from 70%.<sup>20</sup>

**United States of America:** Abortion is legal in the United States, but many groups and organizations – mainly religious – are trying to limit access to abortion as these groups consider

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<sup>15</sup> Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2017). *Draft update of the UN-Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, Annual Report of the Executive Director at the 2017 annual session, printed p. 7. Online book visited 01/13/2018. Available at:

[http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2017/annual%20session%202017/un-women%202018-2021%20strategic%20plan%20narrative\\_final.pdf?vs=5611](http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2017/annual%20session%202017/un-women%202018-2021%20strategic%20plan%20narrative_final.pdf?vs=5611)

<sup>16</sup> Hägele, M (2005). *Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the European Union*, Entre Nous No. 59, printed p. 26. Online book visited 13/01/2018. Available at:

[http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/69763/en59.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/69763/en59.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Duncan, P, et al (05/01/16). Visited 13/01/2018. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/05/abortion-laws-around-the-world-from-bans-to-easy-access>

<sup>18</sup> IPPF EUROPEAN NETWORK (2009). *Abortion Legislation in Europe*, IPPF EUROPEAN NETWORK, printed p. 7. Online book visited 13/01/2018. Available at:

[http://www.spdc.pt/files/publicacoes/Pub\\_AbortionlegislationinEuropeIPPFEN\\_Feb2009.pdf](http://www.spdc.pt/files/publicacoes/Pub_AbortionlegislationinEuropeIPPFEN_Feb2009.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Srivastava, R (06/09/17). Visited 17/01/2018. Available at:

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-women-abortion/not-a-womans-choice-indias-abortion-limit-puts-women-at-risk-say-campaigners-idUSKCN1BG3BL>

<sup>20</sup> Lyengar, K et al. (2016). *Improving access to safe abortion in a rural primary care setting in India: experience of a service delivery intervention*, Reproductive Health, printed p. 1. Online book. Available at:

<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1186/s12978-016-0157-5.pdf>

abortion to be equal to murder. Although abortion is legal in all states, a few states have introduced mandatory initiatives that requires the mother to either see an ultra sound image of the foetus<sup>21</sup>, or that only one abortion clinic is available in a state forcing mothers from rural regions to transport themselves far away from their home and families.<sup>22</sup>

## Relevant UN Resolutions

A/RES/34/180

Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly 18 December 1979 during the 34<sup>th</sup> session.

This resolution, also known as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, is a convention that seeks to eliminate all elimination against women, and states a number of rights that seeks to strengthen the equality of both men and women.<sup>23</sup>

Available at:

[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A\\_RES\\_34\\_180.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_34_180.pdf)

A/RES/49/128

Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly 19 December 1994 during the 92<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting.

This resolution is a report and endorsement of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, Egypt.<sup>24</sup> The Programme of Action that came as a result of the conference addresses the need and right for family-planning, including access to family

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<sup>21</sup> Guttmacher Institute (01/01/18). Visited 13/01/2018. Available at:

<https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/requirements-ultrasound>

<sup>22</sup> Arnold, A (04/05/17) Visited 13/01/2018. Available at:

<https://www.thecut.com/2017/05/mississippi-last-abortion-clinic-reproductive-rights-center-for-pregnancy-choices.html>

<sup>23</sup> United Nations (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, United Nations, printed, p. 1. Online book visited 17/01/2018. Available at:

[http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A\\_RES\\_34\\_180.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_34_180.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> United Nations (1994). Visited 01/17/2018. Available at:

<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/49/a49r128.htm>

planning.<sup>25</sup>

Available at: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/49/a49r128.htm>

E/CN.6/2000/PC/2

Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the UN Economic and Social Council on 19 January 2000 during the Preparations for the special session of the General Assembly entitled: "*Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century*".

The Beijing Platform for action is an agenda for the empowerment of women worldwide, and improving gender equality.<sup>26</sup>

Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/ecn6-2000-pc2.pdf>

UNW/2017/6/Rev.1

Strategic plan endorsed by the UN Women executive board 29 and 30 August 2017 second regular session.

Outlines the strategic direction for UN Women on achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030.<sup>27</sup>

Available at:

<http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2017/second%20regular%20session%202017/unw-2017-6-strategic%20plan-en-rev%2001.pdf?la=en&vs=2744>

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<sup>25</sup> UN Population Fund (2014). *Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population Development*, United Nations, printed, p. 61. Online book visited 17/01/2018. Available at: [http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/programme\\_of\\_action\\_Web%20ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/programme_of_action_Web%20ENGLISH.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> United Nations (1995). *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, printed, p. 16. Online book visited 17/01/2018. Available at: [http://beijing20.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa\\_e\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://beijing20.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> UN Women (2017). *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, UN Women, printed, p. 1. Online book visited 17/01/2018. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2017/second%20regular%20session%202017/unw-2017-6-strategic%20plan-en-rev%2001.pdf?la=en&vs=2744>

## Previous attempts to Solve the Issue

As mentioned earlier, both India and Canada have had success in improving access to safe abortions and abortion in general.

Canada by introducing a new type of abortion pill subsidised by the governments, that could make it easier for people in rural areas to access abortion, and India by improving primary health care facilities to accommodate abortions, instead of having abortions performed in the home.

## Possible Solutions

Improving access to education in general for women is a way of ensuring both empowerment of women in general, but also to allow women to educate themselves in both their rights as citizens when it comes to abortions. Sexual education classes that can both provide insights into the abortion procedure, but also teaching women on how to protect themselves during intercourse through teaching about contraceptive methods.

Regulation and legislation can also be used to limit the influence of certain groups in communities from influencing legislators and leaders to prevent abortions from occurring in the specific community. It is important to note, however, that groups do have freedom of speech and association, and should therefore also have the right – under most constitutions – to raise awareness and provide information on abortions and their viewpoints. Repealing regulations to limit the number of abortion clinics in certain regions could also be a solution to improving access to abortion facilities. Furthermore, ensuring that doctors won't be prosecuted or scrutinized from performing abortions could also be a necessary step in the right direction towards improving access to abortions.

Infrastructure, both in terms of health care and transportation, are also important considerations that could form the basis of a part of the solution, both in terms of increasing and improving abortion facilities, but also to improve access in terms of transportation to abortion and health care facilities.

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[http://www.spdc.pt/files/publicacoes/Pub\\_AbortionlegislationinEuropeIPPFEN\\_Feb2009.pdf](http://www.spdc.pt/files/publicacoes/Pub_AbortionlegislationinEuropeIPPFEN_Feb2009.pdf)s

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