

Global access to abortion still highly unequal

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After the US Supreme Court on Friday made the country the first to withdraw abortion rights, here is a snapshot of highly unequal access to terminations around the world.

While some countries have a total ban others permit terminations under certain conditions.

The US U-Turn: A first

The conservative-dominated US court overturned the landmark 1973 "Roe v Wade" decision that has enshrined a woman's right to a termination for half a century.

It said individual states can permit or restrict the procedure themselves.

Along with women in Canada, Europe and Oceania, the United States had typically benefited from the world's most liberal legislation on terminations.

However the [abortion](#) issue remains deeply divisive in the United States: laws severely restricting abortion have been passed already in 13 Republican-led US states, although they have until now been struck down for violating Roe v. Wade.

In neighbouring Canada, where in 1988 a top court ruling struck down restrictions on abortions, thousands of anti-abortion demonstrators held an annual rally in front of Canada's Parliament in May.

Illegal

Over the past 25 years, more than 50 countries have changed their laws to facilitate access to abortion, in some cases recognising its essential role in protecting a woman's life, her health and [fundamental rights](#).

Abortion nevertheless remains illegal in some 20 countries, notably in Africa, where Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Guinea-Bissau, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Senegal all maintain a ban.

Terminations also remain illegal in Honduras, Nicaragua, Suriname, Haiti and the Dominican Republic as well as the Philippines, Laos and Palau.

In Europe, there remain outposts which continue to uphold a total ban, in Andorra, Malta and the Vatican State.

Elsewhere, El Salvador adopted in the 1990s draconian legislation which banned terminations in all circumstances even if the mother's life were deemed at risk.

Theoretically, abortions are punishable by up to eight years in prison but some judges see any termination as an "aggravated homicide" which can bring terms of 30-50 years in jail.

Severely restricted

Many countries allow abortion, but subject to severe restrictions—notably if the mother's life is in danger.

Such countries include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ivory Coast, Libya, Myanmar, Sudan, Iraq, Syria, Uganda, Venezuela and Yemen.

Access to abortion is very limited in Brazil, only in cases of rape or again, if the mother's life is under threat.

Chile in 2017 ended almost 30 years of a blanket ban and now allows interventions for rape, or if the life of the mother or baby is at risk.

Chilean lawmakers approved a proposal last September to decriminalise abortions up to 14 weeks after conception though the senate still has to debate and vote on the matter.

In traditionally staunchly Catholic Poland, the constitutional court in October 2020 sparked protests after ruling against abortion in cases where the foetus is malformed.

Abortion in Poland is only permitted in cases of rape, incest or if the mother's life is in danger.

Recently won right

In parts of Europe, the right has been acquired, or improved on only recently.

The European microstate of San Marino gave approval by referendum last September.

Argentina's parliament passed a law authorising abortion up to the 14th week in December 2020. Previously, it was only legal in the case of rape or a mother's life being under threat.

New Zealand only decriminalised in 2020. While most Australian federal states had legalised by 2018, New South Wales took a year longer.

South Korea ordered an end to a ban in 2019 judged unconstitutional and a softening of highly restrictive legislation.

In traditionally Catholic Ireland abortion became legal in 2018 after much debate and following a referendum which overturned a constitutional ban.

The following year saw liberalisation in Northern Ireland, which had been the sole part of the United Kingdom still holding out.

Britain had legalised with a 1967 act of parliament—the Soviet Union having been first off the mark globally with legalisation in 1920.

Mexico's supreme court last September declared a ban as unconstitutional, paving the way for legalisation in the nation's 32 federal states.

Mexico's southern state of Guerrero on May 18 decriminalised abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, becoming the eighth region in the conservative Latin American country to do so.

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