

Research Report

Committee: UN Women

*Topic: The Question of Establishing Access to
Safe, Legal Abortion as a Global Minimum
Standard for Reproductive Healthcare*

I. Introduction

Access to safe and legal abortion remains one of the most debated issues in global reproductive healthcare. While some states have expanded access in recent years, others have introduced new restrictions. The question of whether safe and legal abortion should be recognized as a global minimum standard involves considerations of public health, human rights, national sovereignty, and cultural values.

Unsafe abortions remain a significant contributor to maternal morbidity and mortality worldwide. Where access to safe procedures is restricted, individuals often resort to unsafe methods, increasing health risks and long-term complications.

II. Global Context

International organizations such as the World Health Organization emphasize that access to safe abortion services is a key component of comprehensive reproductive healthcare. However, implementation varies widely. Legal restrictions do not necessarily eliminate abortion but often shift it into informal or unsafe sectors.

The debate over establishing a global minimum standard raises fundamental questions about state sovereignty, human rights obligations, and public health priorities.

III. Country Case Studies

United States of America

The United States has experienced significant legal changes following the 2022 Supreme Court decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*. As a result, abortion regulation was returned to individual states. Since then, a patchwork system has emerged.

Some states protect abortion access and have codified it into state law, while others have implemented near-total bans or strict gestational limits. This has led to interstate disparities, with individuals traveling across state lines to obtain services. Legal uncertainty, provider shortages in restrictive states, and increased financial burdens have become central concerns.

The U.S. situation illustrates how decentralized governance can create unequal access within a single country and has intensified international discussions about reproductive rights standards.

Poland

Poland currently enforces some of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe. Abortions are permitted only in very limited circumstances, such as when the pregnancy results from a criminal act or threatens the life or health of the pregnant person.

Recent legal reforms and constitutional court rulings have further narrowed access, leading to widespread public protests and political debate. Reports from civil society organizations indicate that many individuals seek services abroad or rely on informal networks to obtain abortion medication.

Poland demonstrates how legal restrictions can generate social division and raise concerns regarding compliance with broader European human rights frameworks.

Sweden

Sweden maintains one of the most liberal abortion policies in Europe. Abortion is available on request up to 18 weeks, with additional access possible under specific conditions. Services are integrated into the public healthcare system, and sexual education is comprehensive.

Access is generally equitable across regions, supported by strong public health infrastructure and gender equality policies. Sweden's approach frames abortion as a healthcare issue rather than a criminal matter and emphasizes autonomy, privacy, and informed consent.

Sweden often serves as a reference point in international discussions about reproductive healthcare standards.

IV. Key Challenges in Establishing a Global Minimum Standard

1. **Sovereignty:** States differ in constitutional structures, religious influences, and legal traditions, making uniform standards politically complex.
2. **Cultural and Religious Values:** Abortion policy is closely linked to moral and religious beliefs in many societies.
3. **Healthcare Infrastructure:** Even where abortion is legal, limited provider training and facility availability can restrict practical access.

IV. Policy Considerations for the International Community

Delegates may consider the following approaches:

1. Framing access to safe abortion within broader maternal health and public health strategies.
2. Encouraging harm-reduction models to prevent unsafe procedures.
3. Supporting comprehensive reproductive health education and contraception access.
4. Promoting dialogue that respects cultural contexts while upholding internationally recognized human rights principles.