

SPAIN EXPANDS LEGAL ACCESS TO ABORTION

On February 24, the Spanish senate approved a new law on sexual and reproductive health, which relaxes restrictions on women's access to abortion. The law allows abortion under any circumstances up to 14 weeks' gestation and declares the procedure a woman's right. It also permits abortion at up to 22 weeks if two doctors certify that the pregnancy poses a serious threat to the woman's life or health, as well as in cases of fetal impairment, and beyond 22 weeks in cases of severe fetal impairment. Previously, safe abortion was widely available in Spain, but was legal only to save the life of a woman, or to preserve her physical and mental health.

The expansion of legal access to abortion—which takes effect in June—is part of a comprehensive law aimed at improving universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and information, especially for young people. It grants 16- and 17-year-olds abortion access, but requires notification of at least one parent or legal guardian.

Spain's new law also requires that public policies related to health, education and social issues promote universal access to sexual and reproductive health services and programs—including family planning services—and makes comprehensive sexuality education mandatory in schools. Additionally, it requires public health facilities to provide pregnancy-related care and effective family planning methods to all women and their partners.

This legislative change echoes a global trend toward liberalizing abortion laws. Between 1997 and 2008, according to a [2009 report](#) by the Guttmacher Institute, 19 countries significantly liberalized their abortion laws, while only three substantially increased restrictions. Despite this trend, 40% of the world's women live in countries with highly restrictive abortion laws, virtually all of them in the developing world.

The report also showed that while the incidence of abortion is closely related to the rate of unintended pregnancy, it does not correlate with abortion's legal status. Indeed, abortion occurs at roughly equal rates in regions where it is broadly legal and in regions where it is highly restricted. The key difference between permissive and restrictive countries is safety—illegal, clandestine abortions cause significant harm to women, especially in developing countries.

Worldwide, unsafe abortion causes an estimated 70,000 deaths each year, and an additional five million women are treated annually for complications resulting from unsafe abortion. Approximately three million women who experience serious complications from unsafe procedures go untreated.

While increasing access to legal and safe abortion is a necessary step toward protecting women's health, a more integrated approach is needed to improve their lives. Addressing the unmet need for contraception, which remains very high in many parts of the world, is a critical step toward promoting the well-being of women and their families.

Click [here](#) for more information:

[Abortion Worldwide: A Decade of Uneven Progress](#)

[Facts on Abortion Worldwide](#)

The Guttmacher Institute works to advance sexual and reproductive health in the United States and worldwide through an interrelated program of social science research, policy analysis and public education designed to generate new ideas, encourage enlightened public debate, promote sound policy and program development, and, ultimately, inform individual decision making. Learn more at Guttmacher.org.

Show your support for sexual and reproductive health and rights—make your donation to the Guttmacher Institute on our [secure Web site](#).

Join us on Facebook and Twitter to learn more about our work. [Click here](#) to become a “fan” of the Guttmacher Institute on Facebook. Join the Guttmacher Facebook cause “[Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health Worldwide](#).” Follow us on [Twitter](#) for the latest information on important developments in the world of sexual and reproductive health. Use the buttons below to share this update with friends and colleagues.

If you need to change your e-mail address or no longer wish to receive these announcements, click on the “manage your subscription” link below.

[go to www.guttmacher.org](http://www.guttmacher.org)

[Guttmacher Institute privacy policy](#)

© copyright 2010, Guttmacher Institute

