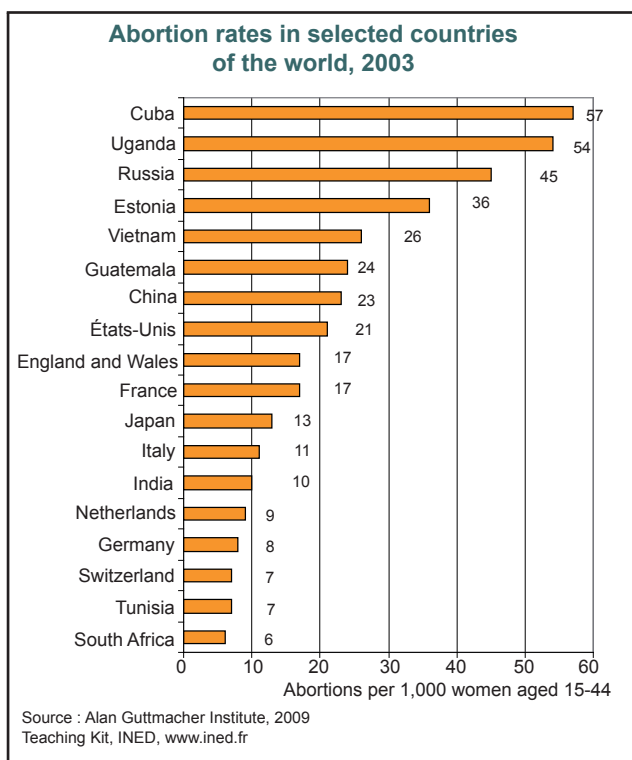


Abortion across the world

Around one pregnancy in four across the world is terminated by an elective abortion. This represents a total of around 40 million abortions each year

The right to abortion is still limited in three-quarters of all countries

In most countries, abortion is only legal under exceptional circumstances (in 2008), for example when the woman's life is in danger (98% of countries) or when the physical or mental health of the mother or child is under threat (68%). Only 56 countries (28%) authorize abortions for personal reasons, and in most cases there is a legal time limit (in France, for example, the deadline is 12 weeks of pregnancy).



A difficult counting exercise

The abortion rate is quite similar from one continent to another. In 2003, for a thousand women of childbearing age there were an estimated 28 abortions per year in Europe, 29 in Asia and Africa, 31 in South America, 21 in North America and 17 in Oceania. The rate may vary widely within a single continent however. In Europe, it ranges from 7 per 1,000 in Switzerland to 45 per 1,000 in Russia. The figures are uncertain however, especially in countries where abortion is illegal.

Inadequate contraception is behind most unwanted pregnancies

Non-use of contraception, or contraceptive failure are the main reasons for most abortions. In certain Asian countries where there is a strong preference for sons, women also abort if the foetus is a girl.

Twenty million high-risk abortions

In 2005, the WHO estimated that 48% of induced abortions (20 million) take place in unsafe conditions (absence of qualified personnel, poor hygiene, advanced pregnancy), resulting in almost 70,000

deaths and severe complications for many women. Almost 97% of these high-risk abortions take place in countries where abortion is illegal or severely restricted.

To find out more (www.ined.fr) :

[Contraception across the world](#) (Teaching Kit)

[The family game](#) (Animation)

[Why has the number of abortions not declined in France over the past 30 years?](#) (N. Bajos, C. Moreau, H. Leridon, M. Ferrand, *Population & Societies*, 407, December 2004)

[Fewer births, but a boy at all costs: selective female abortion in Asia](#) (G. Pison, *Population & Societies*, 404, september 2004)



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