

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL'S  
POLICY ON  
ABORTION  
KEY MESSAGES

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INTERNATIONAL



# Amnesty International's policy on abortion

## KEY MESSAGES

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**Right to abortion.** Amnesty International's updated abortion policy recognizes the right of every woman, girl or person who can become pregnant to abortion, provided in a manner that respects their rights, autonomy, dignity and needs in the context of their lived experiences, circumstances, aspirations and views.

**Full decriminalization of abortion and universal access.** The policy calls for full decriminalization of abortion (removing abortion from criminal laws and removing other laws, policies and practices that directly or indirectly punish people for seeking, obtaining, providing or assisting with securing and/or obtaining an abortion) and universal access to abortion as early as possible and as late as necessary, post-abortion care and evidence-based and non-biased abortion-related information, free of force, coercion, violence and discrimination.

**Principle-based approach.** Amnesty International's approach is derived from international human rights law and standards and longstanding human rights principles. The policy is based on the recognition that decisions around pregnancy and abortion directly impact the full spectrum of human rights of pregnant individuals.

**Human rights are universal, indivisible and interlinked.** The policy is underpinned by the foundational human rights principle that human rights are universal, indivisible and interlinked. In application, this means that sexual and reproductive rights, and individuals' ability to control their fertility and reproduction, including through abortion access, are fundamental to the full realisation of all other human rights.

**Abortion is a key component to the full realization of human rights.** Amnesty International no longer views abortion access in a silo, simply as a health issue, or as an issue that is only relevant to some people in certain circumstances. Rather, the organization recognizes that denying an individual abortion access can have a major impact on the realization of their full range of human rights, and hence is essential for achieving gender, social, reproductive and economic justice.

**Pregnant people at the centre.** The primary and foremost focus of Amnesty's updated abortion policy is pregnant people's reproductive autonomy and full range of human rights.

**Inclusive.** The updated abortion policy is inclusive. While the majority of personal experiences with abortion relate to cisgender women and girls (women and girls whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth), intersex people, transgender men and boys, and people with other gender identities may have the reproductive capacity to become pregnant and may need and have abortions too.

**Human rights start at birth.** The updated abortion policy recognises that human rights protections start at birth. In other words, international human rights law and standards do not recognize so-called foetal rights or human rights applications to fetuses, embryos, zygotes or gametes. While Amnesty does not take a position on when human life begins, as this is a moral and ethical question for individuals to decide for themselves, its policy is aligned with international human rights law and standards that confirm that human rights protections start at birth, not before.

**Beliefs around abortion.** Amnesty International acknowledges there are range of personal beliefs around abortion. The organization will not contribute to or promote judgement or disrespect of individuals' moral, ethical or religious beliefs around abortion.

**The policy also calls on governments to fulfil their international legal obligations around abortion including to:**

- **Fully decriminalize abortion**, which requires not only stopping punishment of women, girls and all pregnant people, healthcare providers and others for obtaining, assisting with or providing abortion services, but also removing abortion from criminal laws and all other punitive laws, policies and practices.
- **Regulate abortion as any other healthcare service**, integrating safe abortion within the provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services, and ensuring services are available, accessible and affordable, and provided without discrimination or coercion, and with respect to pregnant person's privacy, confidentiality and human rights.
- **Eliminate requirements that deny the autonomy and agency of women, girls and pregnant people**, such as spousal or parental consent, or authorisation by judges or medical panels.
- **Ensure that pregnant adolescents and children can make decisions about their pregnancies** in line with their evolving capacities and with the "best interest of the child" principle.
- **Ensure that people with disabilities** are provided with non-discriminatory access to services and not denied the right to make autonomous decisions about their pregnancies and provided with supported decision-making if necessary.
- **Eliminate barriers to lawful abortion services** including legal, policy, social, cultural and economic barriers.
- **Regulate refusals to provide lawful abortion services by healthcare providers** (including on grounds of conscience) in a manner that does not deny access to abortion to pregnant people who need or want it.
- **Create an enabling environment** for women, girls and all people who can become pregnant to make autonomous and informed decisions about their pregnancies and bodies, including by providing comprehensive sexuality education and tackling abortion-related stigma, as well as underlying harmful stereotypes and discrimination that underlie restrictive abortion laws and policies that deny individuals personal and bodily autonomy.
- **Fulfil economic and social rights of pregnant people** by promoting social, economic, and health policies that empower people and ensure that they can access health care, social security and means to obtain an adequate standard of living, which enable people to make autonomous decisions about their pregnancies and reproductive lives.
- **Address intersectional discrimination and historic and current oppression entrenched in societies and public institutions** that deny entire communities and individuals the right to make autonomous decisions over their reproductive lives and to exercise personal and bodily autonomy, confining them to stereotyped gender and social roles.
- **Ensure that women, girls and pregnant people can participate** in the formulation of abortion-related laws and policies that affect them and can **access justice and remedies** when their sexual and reproductive rights are violated.