

Ipas

*in Latin America
& the Caribbean*

Reproductive health in Latin America and the Caribbean

The Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region, which encompasses Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean archipelago, is home to the most restrictive abortion policies in the world. El Salvador, Chile and, most recently, Nicaragua, do not allow abortion under any circumstance, even when a pregnancy endangers a woman's life. Most other countries in Central and South America only allow abortion to save a woman's life, health or in cases of rape. In many cases, however, legal, judicial and medical obstacles make even these abortions impossible to obtain. Despite these restrictions, countries in this region report some of the highest rates of abortion worldwide. Most abortions performed in the region are unsafe, and unsafe abortions are responsible for one out of six maternal deaths in the region. South America is the continent with the highest rate of unsafe abortion worldwide.

Living conditions are vastly unequal in the LAC region. A small percentage of the population lives in extremely affluent conditions, while a much larger percentage live in extreme poverty, with little access to education, health services, political power or representation. In addition to denying millions of people their basic human rights, these conditions slow economic growth, reduce upward mobility and increase the proportion of people living in poverty. Violence against women is also a common and serious health risk in the LAC region. Sexual violence is associated with numerous health problems, including unwanted pregnancy and death due to unsafe abortion and suicide.

Ipas in LAC

In the LAC region, Ipas has offices in Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico and Nicaragua, where Ipas's Central America office serves Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Ipas's



work in Latin America varies by country, but generally focuses on:

- designing interventions to prevent maternal death and disability from unsafe abortion and distributing these materials to the public;
- disseminating information about the importance of access to safe, legal abortions and postabortion care (PAC) services to legislators, the media, health-care providers and other audiences;
- working with nursing and medical schools to update curricula to include new developments in sexual and reproductive health and rights, ensuring the training of a new generation of health-care providers to provide better reproductive health services;
- informing the media and public about the importance of providing safe and effective reproductive health care and protecting women's sexual and reproductive rights;
- providing technical assistance and consultation to government institutions, universities, women's organizations, the media and nongovernmental organizations on sexual and reproductive health and human rights;
- training doctors to safely provide PAC, a model of care that provides treatment for injuries or illnesses caused by women who have received abortions or experienced miscarriages.

Vital Statistics for Latin America and the Caribbean

Population: 567 million

Total fertility rate for women ages 15-49: 2.5

Percentage of women currently married or in a union using modern contraception, ages 15-49: 62%

Number of abortions each year: 4.1 million

Number of unsafe abortions each year: 3.9 million*

Maternal mortality ratio: 130/100,000 live births

* Almost all of the safe abortions performed in the LAC region are performed in the Caribbean.

Statistics of Interest

Almost one out of every four (23%) pregnancies in South America ends in abortion.

Bolivia has Latin America's highest maternal mortality ratio: 290 deaths for every 100,000 live births. This means that Bolivian women are approximately 26 times more likely to die during childbirth or from pregnancy-related complications than women in the United States. Unsafe abortions are a major contributor to maternal deaths in developing countries.

2,000 women in Latin America and the Caribbean die each year from complications related to unsafe abortion. Safe abortion services and access to quality medical care could easily prevent the majority of these deaths.

More than 98% of abortions performed in the LAC region are performed unsafely or under unsafe conditions.

Resources

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Protecting women's health
Advancing women's reproductive rights

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