

# Hold the line

Resisting frontline attacks on sexual  
and reproductive health and rights







## Global attacks on **sexual and reproductive health and rights**

In recent decades we've made significant advancements in sexual and reproductive health and rights, but all too often, globally connected and extremist anti-rights groups have tried to undermine this progress.

Groups opposing human rights and gender equality are more co-ordinated than ever before and are using new tactics, posing a threat to human rights, access to healthcare and the freedom to make choices about our bodies, relationships and futures.

Extreme views that were previously expressed at fringe events have entered the political and cultural mainstream. The rise of populist, nationalist and extremist policies have increasingly legitimised the anti-rights movement and supported their access to funding, with **sources tracing back to groups in the US, Russia, and Hungary, amongst other countries.**

Recent rollbacks in the US have emboldened anti-rights groups globally. After *Roe Vs. Wade* was overturned, revoking the constitutional right to abortion in America, we saw a rise in anti-abortion activity globally, and since Donald Trump has re-entered the White House, swift attacks on sexual and reproductive health and rights have followed suit.

To document the impact on access to frontline sexual and reproductive health and rights, we surveyed MSI Reproductive Choices' 36 country programmes. Across Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, our providers and advocates shared insights on the anti-rights opposition they are witnessing, from organisations, religious institutions, and authorities.

Their experiences paint a concerning picture, demonstrating that our hard-won rights can be easily lost, unless governments, donors and human rights defenders work together to protect them.

## A global picture

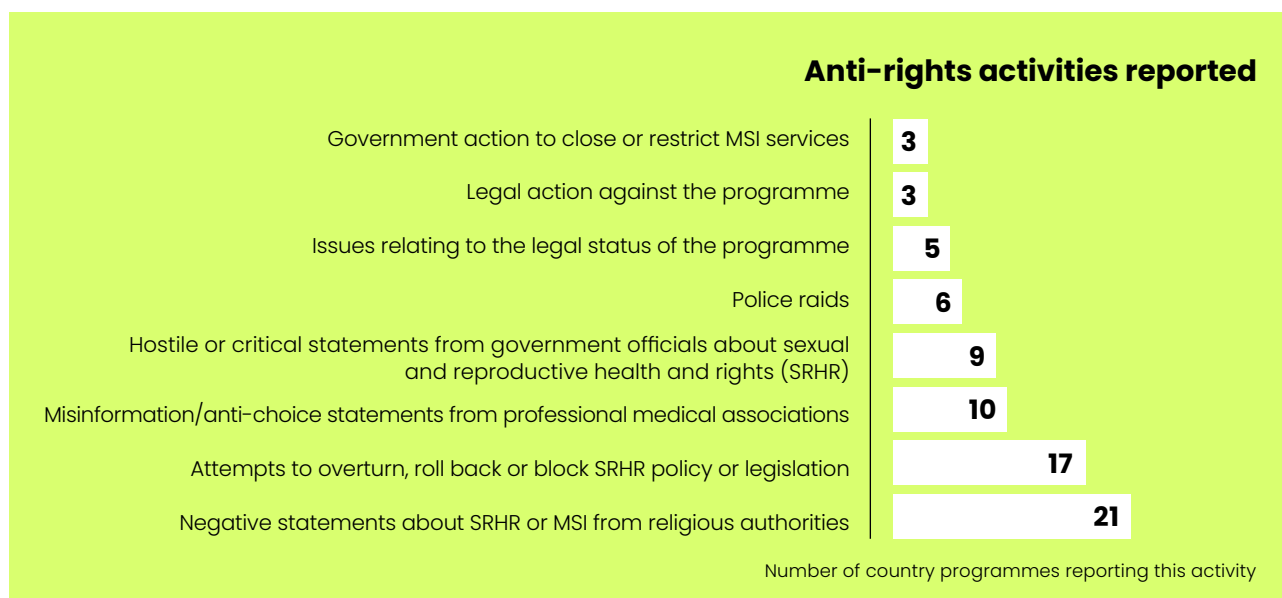
Of the 36 countries surveyed, 30 MSI country programmes reported that they have experienced active opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights in their country over the last two years. 19 countries reported a rise in anti-rights opposition between 2022 and 2024.

Our programmes reported anti-rights attacks from different groups and individuals, including the police, civil society organisations, the media, religious organisations and elected officials. 12% of programmes reported that over the past two years, their staff and/or clients had been harassed and intimidated by anti-rights groups.

Actions included: lawsuits intended to censor and intimidate; the spreading of disinformation stoking attacks on healthcare providers and clients;

police raids of clinics and other premises; hostile government statements; online attacks; and attempts to attack or block progress in policy or legislation, including on abortion, LGBTQIA+ rights, contraception for young people and comprehensive sex education in schools.

The influence of global actors is clear. Over the past two-years, our programmes reported a rise in Russian and Hungarian intervention, particularly in countries across the Sahel. Several programmes reported receiving direct attacks from US-based groups, and from local organisations that are funded by US organisations. Globally-connected groups have lobbied their politicians to roll back rights and provided funding and training to national offices and branches, often to replicate US tactics globally.





# Country Snapshots: Attacks we're seeing in MSI programmes

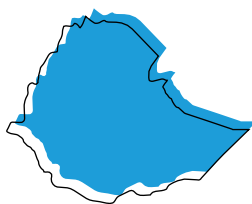


## United Kingdom

After Roe Vs. Wade was overturned in the US, there was a rise in anti-choice groups gathering outside UK abortion clinics, holding up scaremongering signs and distributing pamphlets full of false claims, which often come from US sources. The groups would harass people providing and accessing abortion, including calling people “murderers”, spitting at them, and even physically blocking access to clinics.

Fortunately, after intense advocacy efforts, ‘Safe Access Zones’ have now been introduced in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. These zones legally prevent anti-choice groups from standing right outside clinics to obstruct care or intimidate abortion seekers. Since coming into power, US Vice President, JD Vance, has attacked UK Safe Access Zones, claiming they infringe free speech, when in reality, anti-choice groups are only restricted from seeking to influence people directly outside clinics.

Meanwhile, the UK branch of the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a conservative Christian group that helped to overturn Roe Vs. Wade, has ramped up spending for anti-choice lobbying, doubling its spending in the UK between 2020 and 2022 alone. Last year, they lobbied MPs to restrict the abortion time limit, amongst other rollbacks on reproductive rights.



## Ethiopia

**Abortion was liberalised in Ethiopia in 2005, making it broadly accessible. This meant that the maternal mortality rate due to unsafe abortions has since dropped from 31% to 1%.**

However, anti-choice groups are now attempting to roll back this progress, targeting politicians, decision makers and providers to restrict access to abortion. Shortly after the overturning of Roe Vs. Wade, the Africa Director of the US Christian Right group Family Watch International, took to his YouTube channel, social media platforms and local TV to spread misinformation about abortion and to call on the Ethiopian government to follow in the footsteps of the US, arguing that if the ‘greatest democracy in the world’ doesn’t allow abortions then neither should Ethiopia.

In Addis Ababa, there is a vehicle stationed outside MSI’s clinic with the words “Pray to end abortion in Ethiopia” printed on it for all to see as they attend appointments. Since Trump has returned to the White House, the vehicle has been there daily.



## Mexico

As the Green Wave has swept through Mexico and more states have decriminalised abortion, anti-choice groups have become more sophisticated in their attempts to block progress. In some states where abortion is legal, anti-choice groups have made false claims to local authorities, in an attempt to block MSI clinics from opening.

Members of 40 Days for Life, a US-based organisation that campaigns against abortion, are present outside several MSI Mexico clinics daily.

**They harass team members and anyone accessing care all the way to the clinic door and have held Mass outside clinics.**

Online, anti-choice groups have [provided women with medical disinformation](#) to dissuade them from accessing an abortion.

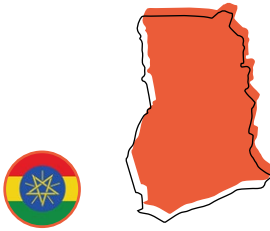


### Democratic Republic of Congo

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, whilst abortion is permitted under certain circumstances, some abortion providers have been arrested and detained for days for providing legally permitted healthcare, before being released without charge.

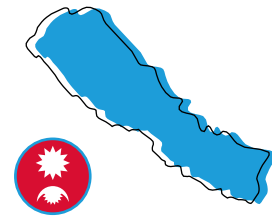
**The extent of the opposition has made abortion providers fearful of coming into work.**

Healthcare workers do not know who will report them or publicly shame them for providing legal care to those who need it.



### Ghana

In Ghana, a Bill that would roll back the rights and autonomy of LGBTQIA+ people, by criminalising LGBTQIA+ relationships and identities, received cross-party support in their previous parliament. The Bill's progress was heavily influenced by two US-based anti-choice and anti-rights groups, Family Watch International and the World Congress of Families. With Ghana's new government in place, the Bill will soon return to Parliament and is expected to be swiftly signed into law, opening the floodgates to a wider rollback of sexual and reproductive rights.

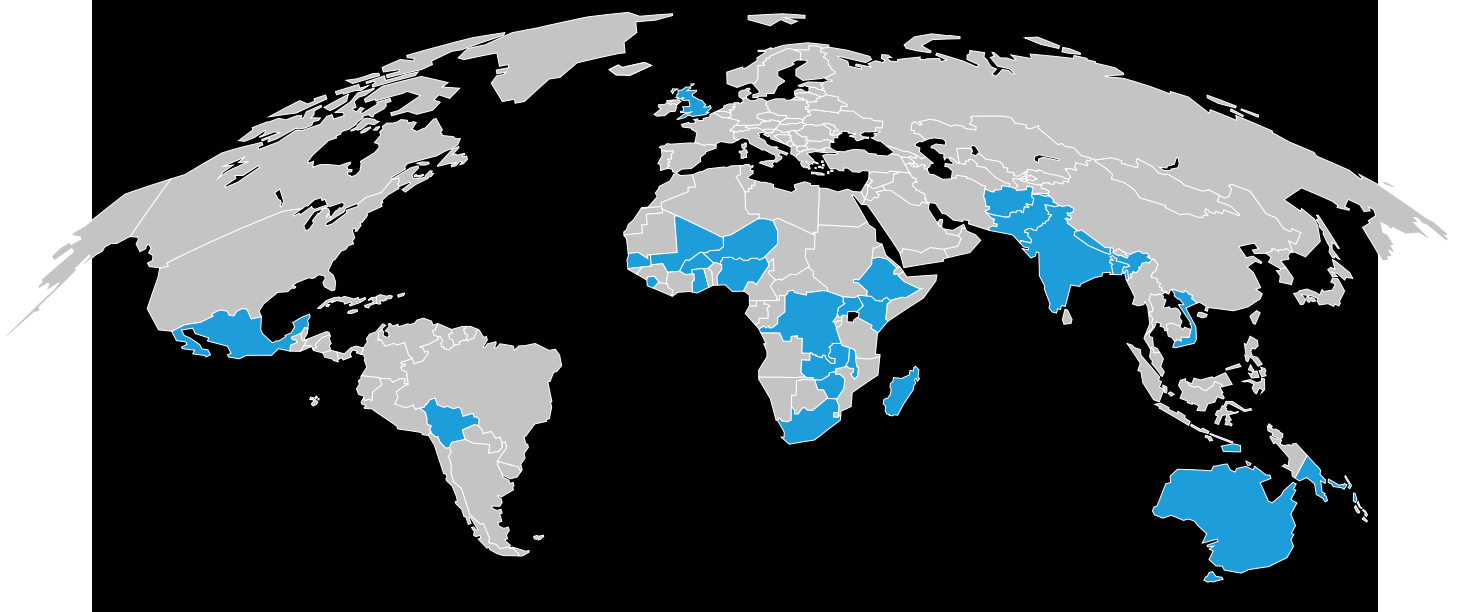


### Nepal

Anti-abortion groups are becoming more prominent in Nepal, particularly after the US election last year. Abortion has been legal in the country since 2002, but many people are still unaware of their rights. Anti-abortion groups are capitalising on this and stoking stigma through religious messaging.

**With Trump back in the White House, providers are concerned that these groups will be further emboldened.**

**30 of MSI's country programmes reported co-ordinated attacks on sexual and reproductive health and rights**



## How can we hold the line on reproductive rights?

**The experiences shared by our frontline teams serve as an important reminder that our rights cannot be taken for granted, and ongoing advocacy and partnerships are needed to protect them.**

With partners, MSI is building a network of allies and champions that are working together to build resilience to withstand anti-rights attacks. These include sexual and reproductive health and rights organisations, LGBTQIA+ communities and feminist movements, as well as partners within the public and private sectors, and religious champions – finding commonalities and removing silos separating our sectors. Together, we can be bolder in our defence of rights, and scenario plan for political changes and attacks, to [defend our human rights defenders](#).

Within MSI, we are focused on building institutional resilience to protect frontline providers and services from threats and attacks. This requires a positive, pro-choice working environment,

where team members feel supported and valued, and committed to their work to advance abortion access, while identifying where our services are exposed to outside attacks. With support from donors, we launched the MSI Fight Fund, offering emergency legal support for work that advances and defends sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Globally, more people than at any other time in human history now have the right to bodily autonomy, and gender and LGBTQIA+ rights are better respected, and protected. But as MSI's frontline colleagues share, these freedoms are increasingly threatened, and with the recent collapse of USAID and catastrophic withdrawal of US funding for global health programmes, we expect anti-choice actors to be emboldened. In this current global climate, facing political polarisation and 'culture wars', women's organisations and healthcare workers are on the frontlines.





**5 ways** MSI is proactively protecting our programmes:

**1**

Ongoing Values Clarification for Action and Transformation (VCAT) training for staff to maintain a pro-choice culture.

**2**

Ensuring providers and teams are legally literate on the rights and entitlements for sexual and reproductive health and rights in their local legal context.

**3**

Providing emotional and legal support, and ensuring frontline providers are supported in the face of harassment and stigma.

**4**

Building wider community support and champions for sexual and reproductive health and rights across parliamentarians, decision makers, community leaders, the media and police.

**5**

Strong safeguarding and client data protocols to protect clients and providers.



**Our rights are hard-won, but together with our partners we will do everything in our power to defend them. Until everyone has the freedom to make decisions about their bodies, their relationships and their futures.**

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