

Adolescent abortions across countries: levels and access to safe services

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Background

- Adolescent pregnancies associated with adverse social and economic outcomes
- In developing countries, maternal morbidity and mortality are higher among adolescents than among women in their 20s and 30s
- Adolescents who seek to terminate their pregnancies are more likely than older women to have an unsafe abortion

Background

- The only prior comparisons of adolescent pregnancy and abortion rates across countries were conducted in the mid-1990s
 - To estimate pregnancy rates, must have data on births, abortions and miscarriages
 - Estimates were not available for developing countries in Africa or Latin America because of lack of data on abortions

Objectives

- To examine current adolescent pregnancy and abortion levels across all countries with reliable data
- To examine the evidence on adolescent women's abortion experiences in selected developing countries

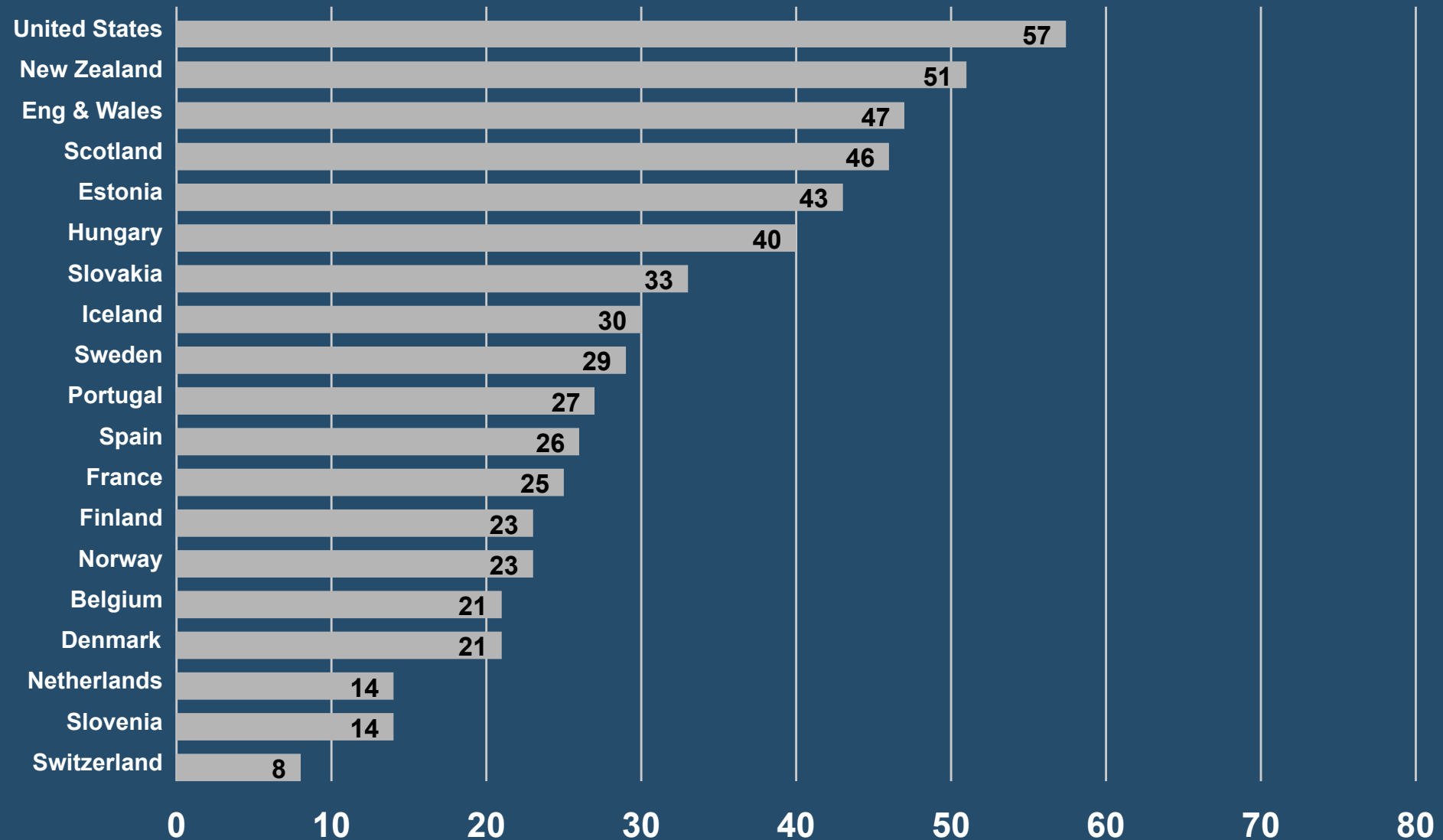
Data sources

- Pregnancy and abortion rates:
 - Country reports
 - UN Demographic Yearbook
 - UN Population Prospects
 - Country studies by Guttmacher & partners
- Abortion experiences and barriers to care:
 - Review of literature

What are the levels of adolescent pregnancy and abortion across countries?

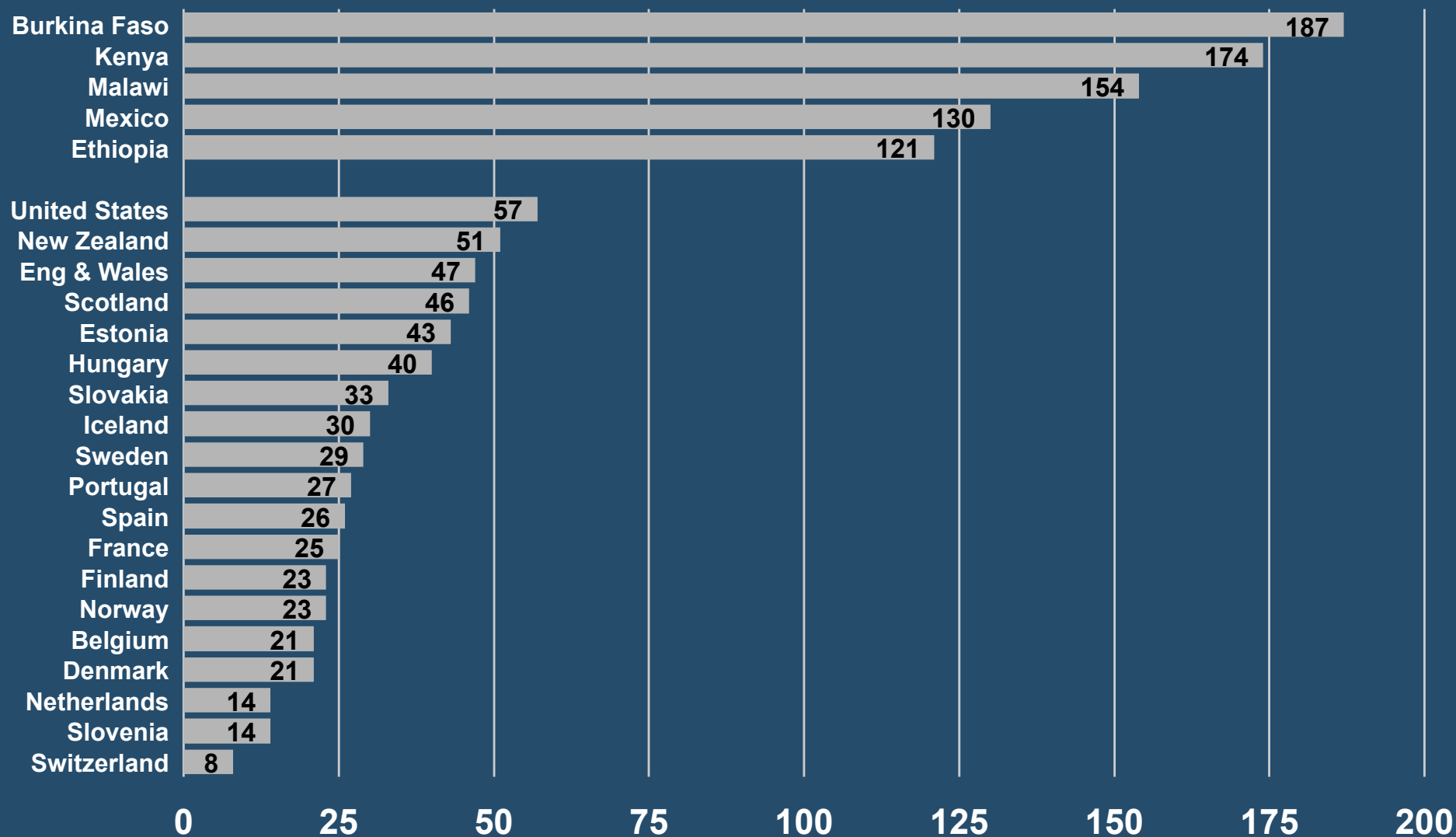
The adolescent *pregnancy* rate is higher in the US than in other developed countries

Pregnancies per 1,000 females 15-19



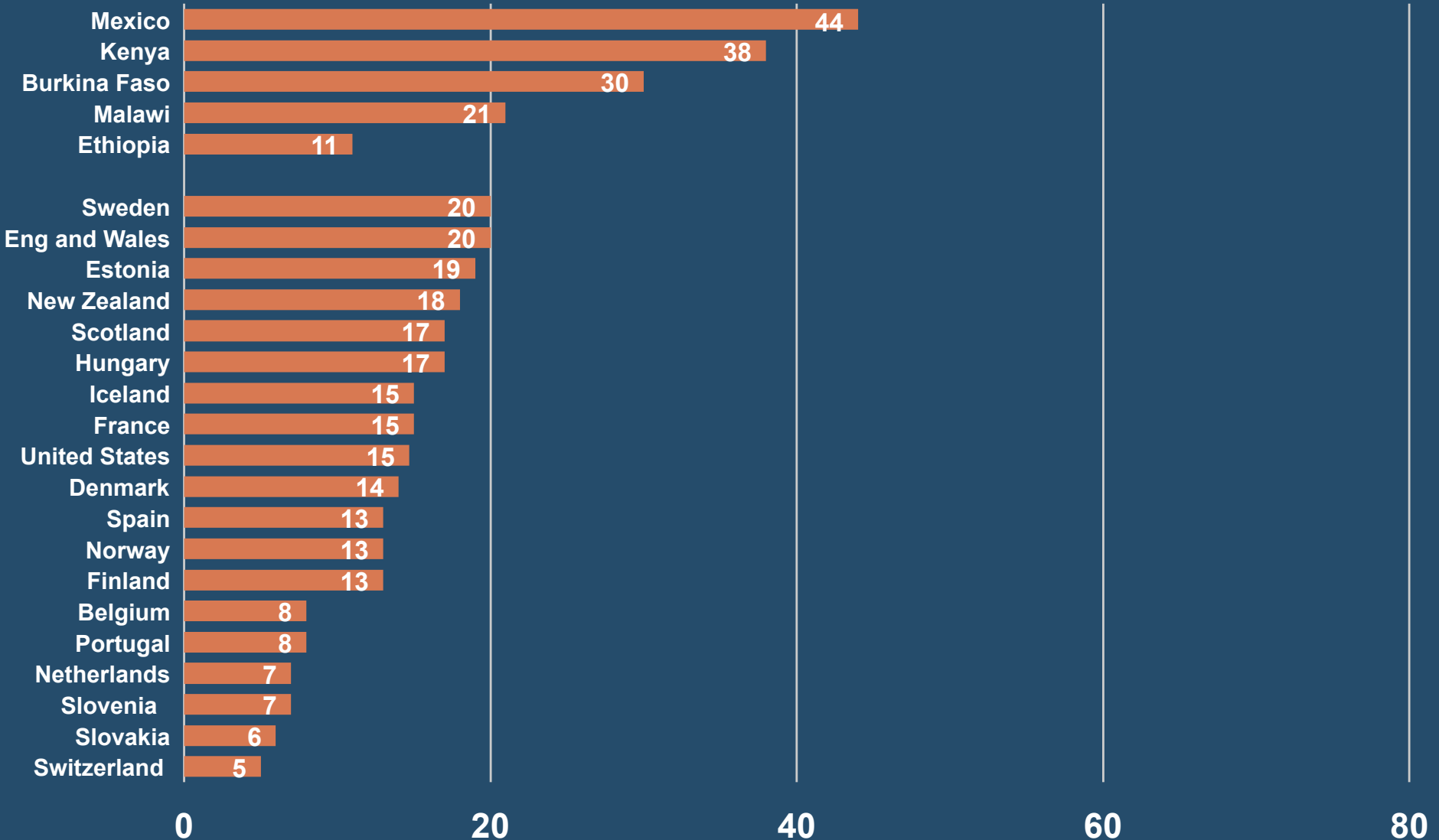
Adolescent pregnancy rates in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America are highest of all countries in this review

Pregnancies per 1,000 females 15-19



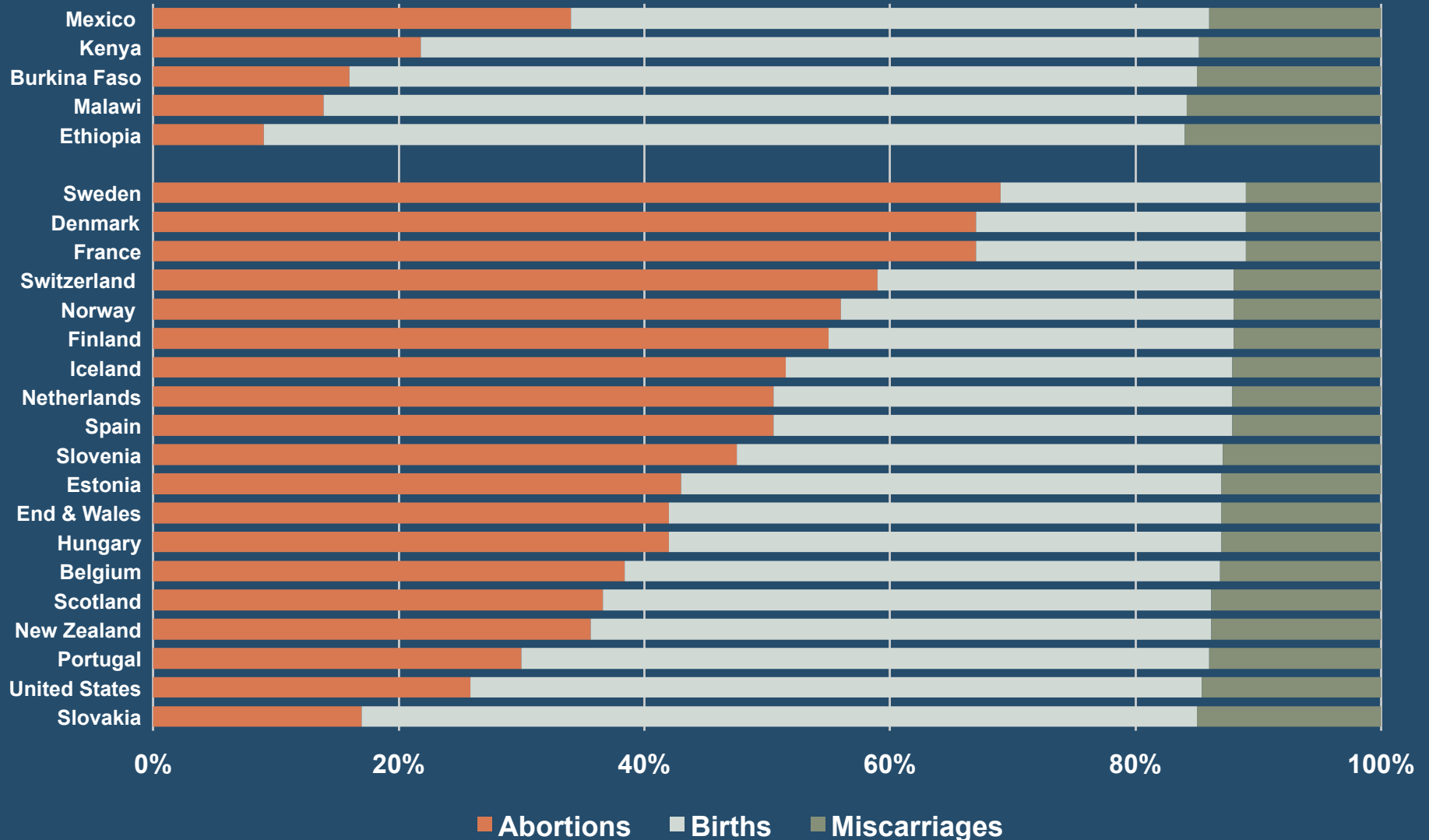
Adolescent *abortion* rates vary widely across the countries with restrictive abortion laws

Abortions per 1,000 females 15-19



Proportions of adolescent pregnancies ending in abortion are low in developing countries

Distribution of adolescent pregnancies by outcome



**What are the experiences of
adolescents seeking an abortion
in developing countries?**

Traditional practitioners are often a first resort for adolescents seeking abortion

- Methods used to induce abortions among adolescents include:
 - teas and herbal solutions
 - quinine or other malaria drugs
 - the insertion of sharpened sticks into the cervix
 - D&C without proper equipment in unhygienic conditions

Many adolescent women with an unintended pregnancy attempt a self-induced abortion

- Methods documented for use to attempt self-induced abortion include:
 - caffeine pills
 - painkillers
 - laundry detergent
 - overdoses of malaria drugs
 - large doses of oral contraceptive pills
 - misoprostol

Adolescent women face a range of barriers to accessing safe abortion services

- Delay in finding out they are pregnant
- Poor knowledge of sources of safe abortion
- Costs that are out of reach
- Stigma attached to premarital sexual activity
- (Anticipated) poor treatment by providers

Conclusions and Implications

- Adolescent abortion rates vary widely across countries
- Restrictive abortion laws are not directly associated with low adolescent abortion rates
- Adolescents need access to family planning and safe abortion services

Thank you

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