



DECRIMINALISE
SUICIDE
WORLDWIDE

FACT SHEETS

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1. There are [25 countries in the world](#) where suicide remains a crime:

Afghanistan	Grenada	Myanmar	Saudi Arabia	Tonga
Bahamas	Jordan	Nigeria	Sierra Leone	Trinidad & Tobago
Bangladesh	Kenya	Papua New Guinea	Somalia	Uganda
Brunei Darussalam	Malawi	Qatar	South Sudan	United Arab Emirates
Gambia (Republic of The)	Maldives	Saint Lucia	Sudan	United Republic of Tanzania

2. These countries have a total population of more than **850,000** people.
3. There are more than **35,000 annual deaths by suicide** in these countries.
4. The **population in need of support per year**, based on the WHO statement that for every death by suicide, there is an estimated 20 attempts, is more than **708,000** people.
5. In addition, there are 27 countries where the legal status of suicide as a crime remains unclear, representing a further population of **370,000**.
6. Combined, a total population of more than **1.2 billion** people live in jurisdictions where suicide is a crime – or its legal status unclear – all of which inhibits help seeking that can save lives.
7. [LifeLine International](#) is launching a groundbreaking campaign, 'Decriminalise Suicide Worldwide', to end the criminalisation of suicide.
8. In the 25 countries where suicide is a crime, LifeLine International will advocate for legislative change. **Nigeria and Malawi** have been identified as **focus countries for decriminalisation campaign support** in the initial stage.
9. It was [estimated in 2019](#) that **77% of suicides occurred in low- and middle-income countries**.
10. The WHO African region is home to six of the 10 countries with the highest suicide rates worldwide.
11. The [average suicide rate](#) in the African Region is the highest in the world, estimated at 11.2 per 100,000 population in 2019 (age-standardised).
12. The WHO African Region [male suicide rate](#) is the highest of all regions at 18 per 100,000 population, (age-standardised).
13. In the 27 countries with unclear legal frameworks, LifeLine International will engage with governments and civil society organisations to seek clarity and request the removal of barriers preventing people from seeking help. The ambiguity comes from a lack of consistency in the respective legal systems.
14. This campaign leverages two primary digital platforms to reach its goals.



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15. www.25crimes.org functions as a community campaign platform for supporters of change. It empowers individuals with the resources and information they need to advocate for the decriminalisation of suicide on a global scale.
16. www.suicide-decrim.network serves as a Knowledge Management Platform for actors for change. LifeLine International will work with actors in the countries where suicide remains a crime, or where the laws are unclear, to support national movements for legislative change and enhanced suicide prevention resources.

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Priority countries for decriminalisation campaign support

NIGERIA

- **Population:** 225.1 million
- **Suicide deaths per year:** 7,881
- **Population in need of support per year:** 157,626 (based on the WHO statement that for every death by suicide, there is an estimated 20 attempts)
- Suicide remains illegal in Nigeria, with different rules for its 17 southern states under Section 327 of the Criminal Code - and its 19 northern states (including the Federal Capital Territory) following Section 231 of the Penal Code. Both regions prescribe a one-year jail term - with northern states having the option to impose fines in addition to imprisonment.
- Nigeria's federal structure allows state governments some autonomy in interpreting and applying federal laws, including penalties for suicide attempts. For instance, Jigawa, a northern state, imposes a five-year punishment for attempted suicide under Subsection 231 of its Penal Code Law. In contrast, Lagos, a southern state, treats attempted suicide as a "simple offence" and authorises courts to order hospitalisation under its 2011 Criminal Law. This initiative was led by then State Commissioner for Public Health Dr Jide Idris, whose support for suicide prevention also saw Lagos launch suicide helplines.
- Early 2022 also saw the introduction of a bill into the Nigerian Parliament to amend section 327 of the Criminal Code Act. The bill sought to change the punishment for attempted suicide under the Criminal Code from one year in prison to "six months of community service and counselling."
- The proposed changes were opposed by Suicide Is No Solution, a local anti-suicide charity, which "emphasised that the proposed six months community service is still a punishment for persons with underlying mental and psychological disorders."
- As of 3 March 2022, the bill had "passed for the second reading" in the House of Representatives. There have been no significant updates on the bill since this occurred.

More information: <https://www.suicide-decrim.network/countries/nigeria>

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MALAWI

- **Population:** 21 million
- **Suicide deaths per year:** 1,138
- **Population in need of support per year:** 22,757 (based on the WHO statement that for every death by suicide, there is an estimated 20 attempts)
- Suicide remains illegal in Malawi under Section 229 of the Penal Code.
- Section 229 of the Malawi Penal Code criminalises suicide attempts, stating: “Any person who attempts to kill himself shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.”
- A misdemeanour is defined in section 4 of the Code as “any offence which is not a penalty”.
- Section 34 of the Penal Code describes the penalty for misdemeanours: “When in this Code no punishment is specially provided for any misdemeanour, it shall be punishable with a fine or with imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or with both.”
- Historically, mental health has been overlooked in Malawi. In 2017, a significant report called "[Out of Sight, Out of Mind](#)" highlighted mental health service delivery issues and injustices against patients in the Central Region.
- In 2021, the Malawi Human Rights Commission expressed concerns about the government's inadequate investment in mental health when it announced the drafting of a Mental Health Bill by the Ministry of Justice. The bill was to be presented in February 2022 but has stalled at the cabinet level.
- Unfortunately, the Mental Health Bill was drafted before a surge in suicides in the country and doesn't adequately address suicide prevention. Dr. Michael Udedi, the former Assistant Director of Clinical Services for Mental Health, had unsuccessfully advocated for decriminalising suicide, a movement supported by various stakeholders in the health sector.

More information: <https://www.suicide-decrim.network/countries/malawi>

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Countries where suicide was recently decriminalised

Suicide was recently decriminalised in Ghana, Guyana, Malaysia, Pakistan and Singapore. Detailed information regarding each of these case studies can be found below.

GHANA

- Population: 32.8 million
- Suicide deaths per year: 2,362
- Population in need of support per year: 47,250 (based on the WHO statement that for every death by suicide, there is an estimated 20 attempts)
- In March 2023, a landmark parliamentary amendment to Ghana's Criminal and Other Offences Act of 1960 sought to decriminalise suicide, reviving the debate on how a legacy of colonial thinking delayed recognition of suicidal behaviour as something that requires understanding rather than punishment.
- The decision to decriminalise suicide marked a significant victory in the drive for mental health recognition and support.
- The legislative reform inspired policy changes, mental health care improvements, crisis support expansion, and community acceptance.
- The amendment to decriminalise suicide in Ghana prompted a shift in policies, focusing on mental health care and support for those with suicidal tendencies. The government is considering initiatives like a national suicide prevention policy and expanding mental health helplines.
- Advocates believe that decriminalisation has opened the door to better mental health care in Ghana. There are efforts to improve logistics, facilities, and resources for mental health support. The Ghana Association for Suicide Prevention is working on programs, and awareness campaigns target teachers and the general public.
- The change in legislation has led to the expansion of crisis response teams and helplines. Mental health organisations are receiving funding from the mental health budget to bolster community-based services.
- More information: <https://www.suicide-decrim.network/countries/Ghana>

GUYANA

- Population: 0.8 million
- Suicide deaths per year: 329
- Population in need of support per year: 6,571 (based on the WHO statement that for every death by suicide, there is an estimated 20 attempts)

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- The comprehensive Suicide Prevention Bill in Guyana represented a significant move towards improving mental health care across the country.
- Historical colonial-era laws were replaced by legislation that focused on suicide prevention services, support for survivors, and the establishment of a National Suicide Prevention Commission.
- The bill introduced measures for suicide prevention services, support for survivors, and the establishment of a National Suicide Prevention Commission. This commission would play an advisory role in shaping legislation and regulations concerning suicide prevention and mental health support. It would also oversee the preparation of a National Suicide Prevention Plan, public programs, sensitisation and awareness campaigns, and the establishment of Suicide Prevention Centres throughout Guyana.
- Advocacy efforts and collaborative initiatives paved the way for a more compassionate and empathetic approach to mental health.
- More information: <https://www.suicide-decrim.network/countries/guyana>

MALAYSIA

- Population: 34.4 million
- Suicide deaths per year: 1,961
- Population in need of support per year: 39,219 (based on the WHO statement that for every death by suicide, there is an estimated 20 attempts)
- A transformative moment occurred in 2023 when Malaysia's parliament passed three bills aimed at decriminalising suicide attempts. The first bill focused on abolishing Section 309, which had previously punished suicide attempts with imprisonment or fines. The second bill addressed the abetment of suicide, particularly concerning children and incapacitated individuals under Section 305 and Section 306, respectively. The third bill, known as the Mental Health (Amendment) Bill 2023, empowered crisis intervention officers to assist individuals attempting suicide.
- Malaysia's journey towards decriminalisation highlighted the need for a collaborative approach involving international experts, mental health advocacy groups, government officials, and healthcare professionals.
- The legislative reforms not only abolished outdated colonial-era laws but also demonstrated a commitment to prioritising crisis intervention, treatment, rehabilitation, and support over punishment.
- In the wake of successful decriminalisation, Malaysia plans to introduce amendments to the Mental Health Act. These amendments will clarify the powers and responsibilities of crisis intervention officers, improving the response to mental health crises and safeguarding individuals in distress.
- More information: <https://www.suicide-decrim.network/countries/malaysia>

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PAKISTAN

- Population: 240.4 million
- Suicide deaths per year: 21,403
- Population in need of support per year: 428,064 (based on the WHO statement that for every death by suicide, there is an estimated 20 attempts)
- President Arif Alvi's approval of the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill 2022, abolishing the punishment for attempted suicide in Pakistan, (officially the Islamic Republic of Pakistan,) signified a crucial step towards addressing mental health and suicide prevention in the country.
- This legislative reform not only eliminates colonial-era laws but also demonstrates a commitment to prioritising mental health support over punishment. By fostering a more compassionate environment, Pakistan seeks to reduce stigma, promote help-seeking behaviour, and build a more robust mental health support network.
- The decriminalisation of suicide in Pakistan was not an isolated event but rather the result of concerted efforts by various stakeholders and advocacy groups. These entities played a pivotal role in raising awareness about the necessity of this reform and in driving legislative change. These included Savaira, the Aga Khan University, Saaya Health, the British Asian Trust, IRD Pakistan, Sehat Kahani and Taskeen Health Initiative, amongst others.
- The reforms opened the door to policy improvements, amendments to mental health acts, crisis support expansion, and a shift towards a more compassionate and empathetic society.
- More information: <https://www.suicide-decrim.network/countries/pakistan>

SINGAPORE

- Population: 6 million
- Suicide deaths per year: 675
- Population in need of support per year: 13,495 (based on the WHO statement that for every death by suicide, there is an estimated 20 attempts)
- In January 2020, Singapore ushered in a new era by decriminalising suicide, effectively ending the punitive approach towards those who had attempted suicide. This legislative reform represented a profound shift, not only in the law but also in societal attitudes towards mental health and emotional well-being.
- Advocacy groups like Silver Ribbon Singapore, AWARE, and the Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) played instrumental roles in raising awareness and dismantling stigma.



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- By providing comprehensive crisis support systems and resources, Singapore is now better equipped to assist individuals with suicidal ideation on their path to recovery. Collaborative efforts across different sectors continue to address the multifaceted issue of suicide, ensuring a more empathetic and supportive environment for all.
- More information: <https://www.suicide-decrim.network/countries/singapore>