

Reforming Abortion Law in the UK

An agenda for change at Westminster

Introduction

One in three British women will have an abortion in their lifetime, and a record **87% of Britons believe in a woman's right to choose**. Together, our coalition of leading medical bodies, abortion care providers, women and girls rights organisations, Violence Against Women and Girls groups, and Trade Unions will be fighting throughout this parliament to **protect, defend, and advance abortion rights across the UK**.

As an MP, you will be asked throughout your term to **take your own position of conscience** on matters of abortion law. We are asking that when forming your position, you listen to the qualified and evidence-based positions laid out by experts who are committed to women's rights.

This briefing is designed as a short introduction to the urgent need for pro-choice progress in Parliament in the coming months and years – to **remove women from the criminal law related to abortion**, to **bring safe access zones into force now**, and to **allow parliamentary time for wider reform of abortion law**.

Overview

- Abortion is safe, legal, and free to access across the UK.
- Westminster Parliament governs abortion law in England and Wales – and is required to approve any changes to the regulations which govern abortion law in Northern Ireland. Abortion law is devolved to Scotland.
- Abortion provision in England and Wales is still governed by the criminal law – the Abortion Act 1967, the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, and the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929.
- 90% of abortions take place in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy.
- 75% of all abortions involve medication being taken at home in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy, and women self-managing a procedure very similar to an early miscarriage.
- The time limit for most abortion across the UK is 24 weeks. After this point women can only access abortion if their life or health is at serious risk, or if a serious fetal anomaly has been diagnosed.
- Across the world abortion rights are coming under attack with a large amount of anti-abortion money and US-founded groups increasingly active across the UK.

Protecting access to abortion care

For more than 50 years, abortion law remained relatively unchanged across the UK despite clear increases in support, improvements in medical care, and challenges to access. In recent years, there has been a growing momentum for change – as a result, the last five years have been the most productive for abortion rights since 1967. Since 2019, together we have worked to:

- ✓ **Reform abortion law in Northern Ireland** – making it legal and accessible for the first time in history
- ✓ **Enshrine the right to telemedical abortion care in law** – enabling women to choose to access safe, effective abortion care as simply as possible without the legal requirement for clinically-unnecessary attendance at hospitals and clinics
- ✓ **Ban the harassment of women and medical professionals outside abortion clinics** - passing a law in Westminster in May 2023 which has still not been brought into force, and following up with a similar law in Holyrood in June 2024

Defending abortion rights

Anti-abortion groups are small but vocal, and regularly use unproven allegations and medical falsehoods to attempt to roll back hard-won rights. We **strongly oppose their efforts to:**

- ✗ **Reduce the abortion time limit** – [hundreds of experts wrote to MPs](#) before the election to make clear there is no evidence that reducing the time limit is justified, and that all it will do is harm women's ability to make informed choices about their pregnancy
- ✗ **Ban sex-selective abortion** – The UK Government has [found no evidence](#) that women from some cultural backgrounds are ending pregnancies if they are expecting a girl. If there ever is a situation where vulnerable women are coerced into ending a pregnancy because of its sex, then they should not be criminalised for it
- ✗ **Ban telemedical abortion care** – this was enshrined in law in 2022 after extensive debate and review. [Telemedicine is safe, effective, and preferred by women](#) – this proposal would simply make it harder for women in the most vulnerable of circumstances to access abortion care

Our agenda to advance reproductive rights

Building on our recent successes, we believe that three fundamental changes are necessary in the coming months and years to protect women's rights and deliver an abortion law fit for the future.

We hope you will support us in our efforts to achieve our three goals for the coming parliament:

- ✓ **Remove women from the criminal law on abortion** – stop arrests and prosecutions of vulnerable women under a law dating to 1861 and ensure they get the care and support they need
- ✓ **Introduce safe access zones now** – we have been waiting more than a year for government to enact safe access zones, and all the while clinics have been targeted by anti-abortion protesters. The law needs to come into force now.
- ✓ **Guaranteed parliamentary time for a modernised abortion law** – the Abortion Act 1967 has served us well, but it's more than 50 years old and it's time to update the law to give women the right to access the best medical care possible.