

UNITED KINGDOM

England blames record abortions on economic crisis

LIFE AND BIOETHICS

26_01_2026

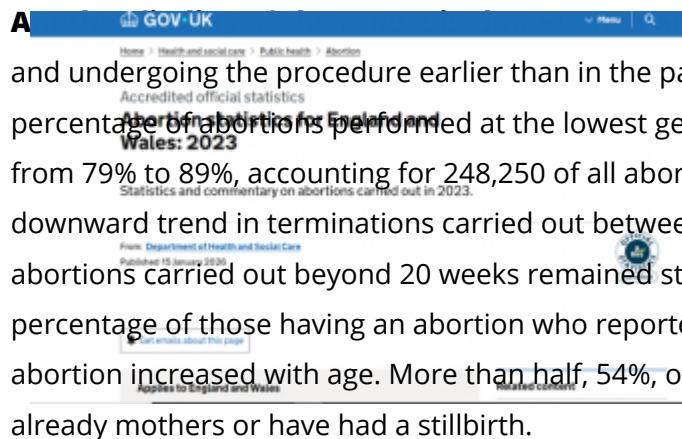
*Patricia
Gooding-
Williams*



277,970 abortions in 2023: the highest number recorded in England and Wales since the Abortion Act was introduced in 1967. This figure also sets a new annual record marking an 11% increase (26,593 abortions) on the previous year. This is what emerged recently

from the latest [government abortion statistics](#). The report comes amid concerns across the political spectrum about Britain's declining fertility rate, with fewer workers paying tax to fund public services, as well as expectations that deaths will outnumber births in 2026. Paradoxically, the only real investment in fertility in Britain in recent years has been in more efficient telemedicine services for accessing speedy DIY home abortions.

If the UK government's investment in abortion services was intended to increase abortion rates, it has been highly successful. The abortion rate per 1,000 women increased from 21.5 in 2022 to 23.4 in 2023. The [fertility rate in England and Wales](#) is down to 1.49 babies per woman, well below the 2.1 needed to keep a population steady. Notably, women over 35 continue to drive this increase. In recent years, older women have had twice as many abortions as younger women. Between 2013 and 2023, the number of abortions among women over 35 increased by 88%. In 2013, 27,327 women aged 35 and over had an abortion. By 2023, this figure had risen to a new record high of 51,595, exceeding 50,000 for the first time. The only negative trend of the last decade is among under-16s, whose number fell by 42.3% in the same period.

 **The trend is tending to have an abortion** and undergoing the procedure earlier than in the past. Over the past decade, the percentage of abortions performed at the lowest gestation (2 to 9 weeks) increased from 79% to 89%, accounting for 248,250 of all abortions in 2023. There was a downward trend in terminations carried out between 10 and 19 weeks. The number of abortions carried out beyond 20 weeks remained stable at between 1% and 2%. The percentage of those having an abortion who reported already having had at least one abortion increased with age. More than half, 54%, of women having abortions are already mothers or have had a stillbirth.

The record-high abortion statistics have sparked polarised reactions in the UK. Pro-choice groups emphasise the need for greater access to abortion and for it to be considered an essential part of healthcare. Conversely, pro-life groups are concerned about the rising rates and suggest they may be an indicator of societal pressure.

As for the causes of the increase in abortions, many observers point to economic reasons. Dr Alison Wright, the president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said: "There is likely to be a range of factors behind the rise in abortion rates over recent years. Economic pressure and the rising cost of living are shaping women's reproductive choices, with many choosing to delay or have smaller families".

In fact, the rising cost-of-living was the main reason given by women for having an abortion.

In 2022, the UK became the **most expensive developed country for childcare**. A typical dual-income family in the UK spends between 30% and 75% of their household income on childcare which is the highest proportion in Europe. This prompted thousands of people to protest in cities across the country in an event that became known as the "**March of the Mummies**". Many women stated they would have kept their baby if it wasn't for the costs.

However, the government response continues to be easier access to abortion and inadequate funding for childcare. Not only has the UK broken its own abortion record, it also ranks first among European countries where access to at-home medication abortion and telemedicine services is more restricted than in the UK.

In reality, it has never been easier to obtain an abortion in the UK. Thanks to legislation introduced at the start of the pandemic, which permits abortion medication to be dispatched by post, **at-home abortions** accounted for 72% of all terminations in 2023. Interestingly, patient satisfaction with the NHS has reached an **all-time low** of 21%, whereas a study found that **96.9% of patients were satisfied or very satisfied** with telemedicine (at-home) abortion services.

In response to the report, Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, director of March for Life UK, told the *Daily Compass*: "These huge figures have been largely enabled by 'at home' abortions which are becoming more and more common with scant regard for the terrible dangers to women".

"Statistics have shown in the past that over 50% of women presenting for abortion were using contraception. Girls and women are sold the lie that as long as you use 'protection' you are safe. It takes only one occasion for the contraception to go wrong and there is a baby who is automatically viewed as a product of something that's gone wrong rather than a gift. Unless we celebrate the value of each and every human, there will be little impact on these horrific figures", added Vaughan-Spruce.

Madeleine Page of Right to Life UK, also points the finger at pills by post: "These figures represent only England and Wales but if we add the abortion figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland, the figure reaches 300,000 abortions in Britain in one year. It's the equivalent of wiping out the entire population of Nottingham".

In his message to the March for Life in Washington on 23 January, Pope Leo said, 'A society is truly healthy and progressive only when it safeguards the sanctity of human life and actively works to promote it.'

Ironically, Vaughan-Spruce has a court hearing on 29 January to set the date for her trial, which relates to charges of violating the Birmingham buffer zone by praying silently. The police claim that her presence alone constitutes an attempt to influence women using the nearby clinic.

Hopefully, the shocking results of this latest government report will prompt serious, albeit belated, action. A good place to start would be to remove the buffer zones around abortion clinics and stop prosecuting pro-lifers who previously offered vulnerable women free financial and practical support at a critical moment in their lives.

Crying over the falling fertility rate while supporting abortion is nothing more than crocodile tears and does not constitute genuine reflection.