# Scotland’s exclusion of expert surgeons raises concerns over later-term abortion care access



Scotland's approach to later-term abortion access has come under scrutiny following revelations that the Task and Finish group convened to address this issue excluded the nation’s only two fully qualified surgeons capable of performing procedures up to the legal limit of 24 weeks. Documents obtained by The Herald revealed that despite eagerness from these experts to participate, their absence raises significant concerns about the efficacy of the discussions aimed at expanding access to abortion services during critical gestations.

The Scottish women's health minister, Jenni Minto, informed The Herald that NHS chief executives had selected "local representatives from relevant services" for membership in this group. However, many have questioned whether these representatives possess the necessary expertise to address the nuances of later-stage abortion care. One of the excluded surgeons expressed to The Herald a hope that their presence could significantly inform the group's decisions, highlighting a collective confusion surrounding their exclusion. Ed Dorman, a seasoned abortion provider with over four decades of experience in England, emphasised that the two Scottish surgeons were the most qualified individuals to develop a new service model for later-stage abortions, terming their absence "mystifying."

Currently, the situation is stark: Scottish women require travel to England to access later-term abortion care, with the latest figures indicating some are forced to make the journey every four days to receive such services. Health boards in Scotland only offer procedures post-20 weeks under stringent conditions, such as severe foetal abnormalities or threats to the woman’s health. The consequence of excluding qualified personnel from policy-making discussions could lead to a reluctance to expand surgical abortion services, with concerns rooted in a significant drop in surgical procedures from 22% in 2014 to just 1.9% in 2024.

Dorman pointed out that the rise of telemedical abortion options during the COVID-19 pandemic may have led to fewer surgical abortions being performed, but this shift has inadvertently limited options for women needing care at later gestations. He voiced a prevailing worry that the absence of surgical expertise in the Task and Finish group could prompt a preference for medical over surgical abortions, which many women find traumatic. He highlighted that, especially for individuals with previous uterine surgeries, surgical abortions may be the safer option.

The Scottish Government’s Women’s Health Plan, established in 2021, promised an accessible framework for women to make informed choices about their abortion care. Despite commitments from the Scottish National Party to make abortion services available up to the 24-week legal gestation limit, glaring gaps in service provision persist. Recently, Minto signalled her intent to evoke change by urging the Task and Finish group to report back within six months while also providing funding for clinician training in later-stage abortion provision.

Notably, the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) reported alarming increases in the number of women travelling from Scotland to England for abortion services, noting that 65 women made the journey in 2022, with indications that the figure could rise to 85 by the end of 2023. Campaigners have voiced strong condemnation of the Scottish Government's inability to establish adequate services domestically, stressing the distress experienced by women forced into long journeys for care, often exacerbated by factors such as domestic violence or socio-economic challenges.

As discussions evolve within the Task and Finish group, the Scottish Government's commitment to addressing this pressing issue remains critical. The potential establishment of comprehensive and equitable abortion services within Scotland must be a priority to ensure that all women, irrespective of their circumstances, receive the care they need close to home and without undue suffering.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25198511.abortion-working-group-contains-no-one-trained-legal-limit/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/21/scottish-government-failing-women-who-cant-access-later-term-abortions-campaigners-say)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25198511.abortion-working-group-contains-no-one-trained-legal-limit/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/21/scottish-government-failing-women-who-cant-access-later-term-abortions-campaigners-say), [[3]](https://www.bpas.org/about-bpas/press-office/press-releases/bpas-reveals-new-figures-showing-scores-of-women-each-year-are-forced-to-travel-from-scotland-for-abortion-care/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bpas.org/about-bpas/press-office/press-releases/bpas-reveals-new-figures-showing-scores-of-women-each-year-are-forced-to-travel-from-scotland-for-abortion-care/), [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/health/left-in-agony-why-scottish-women-are-being-forced-to-travel-to-england-for-abortion-healthcare-4663700)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25198511.abortion-working-group-contains-no-one-trained-legal-limit/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/21/scottish-government-failing-women-who-cant-access-later-term-abortions-campaigners-say), [[4]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/womens-health-plan-2021-2024-final-report/pages/5/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.bpas.org/about-bpas/press-office/press-releases/bpas-reveals-new-figures-showing-scores-of-women-each-year-are-forced-to-travel-from-scotland-for-abortion-care/), [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/health/left-in-agony-why-scottish-women-are-being-forced-to-travel-to-england-for-abortion-healthcare-4663700)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/21/scottish-government-failing-women-who-cant-access-later-term-abortions-campaigners-say), [[3]](https://www.bpas.org/about-bpas/press-office/press-releases/bpas-reveals-new-figures-showing-scores-of-women-each-year-are-forced-to-travel-from-scotland-for-abortion-care/), [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/health/left-in-agony-why-scottish-women-are-being-forced-to-travel-to-england-for-abortion-healthcare-4663700)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25198511.abortion-working-group-contains-no-one-trained-legal-limit/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://www.bpas.org/about-bpas/press-office/press-releases/bpas-reveals-new-figures-showing-scores-of-women-each-year-are-forced-to-travel-from-scotland-for-abortion-care/), [[4]](https://www.gov.scot/publications/womens-health-plan-2021-2024-final-report/pages/5/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25198511.abortion-working-group-contains-no-one-trained-legal-limit/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/21/scottish-government-failing-women-who-cant-access-later-term-abortions-campaigners-say> - Campaigners have accused Scottish ministers of failing to provide adequate access to later-term abortions, with women having to travel hundreds of miles to England for procedures not available in Scotland. Despite the legal limit being 24 weeks, no Scottish health board offers abortion care after 20 weeks, except in specific cases. The Scottish Government has acknowledged the issue and is working to improve services, but progress has been slower than desired.
3. <https://www.bpas.org/about-bpas/press-office/press-releases/bpas-reveals-new-figures-showing-scores-of-women-each-year-are-forced-to-travel-from-scotland-for-abortion-care/> - The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) has reported that in 2022, 65 women travelled from Scotland to England for abortion care not provided within Scotland, marking a 55% increase from 2021. Between January and May 2023, BPAS saw 35 clients from Scotland, indicating a potential rise to 85 women for the year. BPAS is calling for the Scottish Government to urgently establish a centrally commissioned service for abortion care up to the legal limit within Scotland.
4. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/womens-health-plan-2021-2024-final-report/pages/5/> - The Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan outlines actions to improve abortion services, including providing mid-trimester abortion care locally or regionally for all indications. In June 2022, the government requested all mainland health boards to offer abortions up to at least 20 weeks gestation, with the aim of providing services at later gestations where possible. A short-life working group has been established to consider options for a later stage abortion service in Scotland.
5. <https://www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-our-patient-information/abortion-care/> - The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) provides information on abortion laws in the UK. Under the Abortion Act 1967, abortions are legal up to 23 weeks and 6 days of pregnancy if two doctors agree. Abortions can also be performed at any stage if two doctors agree that the pregnancy poses a risk to the woman's life or health, or if there is a high chance the baby would be born with a serious disability.
6. <https://www.scotsman.com/health/left-in-agony-why-scottish-women-are-being-forced-to-travel-to-england-for-abortion-healthcare-4663700> - In 2023, 68 women travelled from Scotland to England for second-trimester abortions, up from 42 in 2021 and 65 in 2022. A BPAS spokesperson stated that having to cross the border for abortion within the legal time limit is unacceptable, especially for women who are victims of domestic or sexual abuse, or those with severe learning disabilities. The spokesperson highlighted the distress and sense of shame these women experience when seeking care beyond the time limit that could be provided locally.
7. <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/s6/abortion-services-safe-access-zones-scotland-bill> - The Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Bill, introduced by Gillian Mackay MSP on 5 October 2023, aims to create safe access zones around premises providing abortion services in Scotland. The bill received Royal Assent on 22 July 2024, becoming the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Act (Scotland) 2024. The act establishes 200-metre safe access zones around abortion clinics to protect patients and staff from harassment and intimidation.