# Labour pushes for abortion decriminalisation amid rising prosecutions in the UK



The recent amendments tabled by Labour MPs Stella Creasy and Tonia Antoniazzi to decriminalise abortion in the UK mark a crucial moment in the long-running campaign to disentangle abortion from criminal law. These proposed changes, which are set to be voted on in Parliament, aim to remove the threat of legal punishment for those who undergo or provide pregnancy terminations without altering existing provisions for abortion care. Backed by 177 cross-party MPs alongside leading medical bodies such as the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the British Medical Association, the amendments respond to mounting concerns over the criminalisation of abortion and its repercussions on vulnerable women.

Abortion in England, Scotland, and Wales is regulated under the Abortion Act of 1967, which permits terminations up to 24 weeks if two doctors agree that continuing the pregnancy poses a greater risk to the physical or mental health of the woman than ending it. Beyond this gestational limit, abortions are only lawful in restrictive circumstances such as risk to the mother's life or severe fetal abnormalities. However, the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act criminalises abortion outside these conditions and, technically, women who self-manage their abortions or access care without medical authorisation could face imprisonment—a provision rarely enforced but a chilling possibility. These laws, rooted in a Victorian era when public executions and dangerous child labour were realities, now feel archaic and out of step with modern healthcare practices.

Supporters of decriminalisation argue that such reform is not only overdue but essential in a climate where anti-abortion movements, both in the UK and internationally, have gained fresh momentum, particularly after the US Supreme Court’s overturning of Roe v Wade. This landmark American decision has emboldened anti-abortion groups in Britain, increasing the risk of criminal investigations into women who access abortions outside regulated frameworks. According to figures from the UK's largest abortion service providers, police inquiries into women's abortions have surged, with at least 100 investigations over the past five years. This legal vulnerability forces many women to navigate their reproductive choices under the threat of prosecution, compounding the emotional and physical challenges they face.

Medical experts stress that criminalisation disproportionately harms women who are already vulnerable—those with mental health challenges, young people subject to parental opposition, or survivors of domestic abuse. Sarah Salkeld, deputy medical director at an abortion provider, emphasized in an interview that prosecuting women in desperate circumstances serves no public interest and only deters them from seeking safe care. She highlighted the ongoing global battle over reproductive rights and urged UK lawmakers to join the progressive ‘green wave’ advancing gender equality by ensuring abortion healthcare is delivered safely, confidentially, and free from criminal sanctions.

Public sentiment appears largely supportive of such reforms. Campaign debates anticipate a free vote on abortion decriminalisation among MPs, reflecting broad societal approval for women's reproductive rights. Comparisons with other countries like Ireland, France, Canada, and Australia—where abortion has already been decriminalised and integrated into standard healthcare—underscore how the UK remains an outlier with its penal laws still entwined in medical care. Critics from groups such as Right To Life UK warn that decriminalisation could prompt an increase in non-medical abortions, but proponents counter that reform focuses on safeguarding rights and reducing harm, not expanding abortion access beyond existing legal frameworks.

The urgency of reform has been amplified by recent high-profile cases illustrating the human cost of criminalised abortion. For example, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) condemned the imprisonment of a mother-of-three sentenced to 28 months for using abortion medication without medical authorisation. This case exemplifies the threat women face under current law and strengthens calls for a legislative overhaul that respects reproductive rights and protects individuals from prosecution. Increasing police investigations and prosecutions illustrate that the issue is not hypothetical but a pressing reality affecting real lives.

The current abortion law in the UK allows safe access to abortion services within regulated parameters but continues to operate under a penal code that criminalises women and healthcare providers outside those parameters. Reform advocates argue that removing abortion from criminal law is necessary to align healthcare practices with respect for human rights, reduce stigma, and eliminate the fear of legal consequences that can turn a medical experience into a traumatic ordeal. The combination of outdated statutes, growing anti-abortion activism, and the emboldening effect of international events makes this moment critical for meaningful change.

Reflecting on personal experiences shared by women who have undergone abortions, it becomes clear that barriers such as overwhelmed services and restrictive timelines often exacerbate the distress surrounding abortion care. The risk of forced surgical procedures due to delays, alongside the looming possibility of criminal sanctions, intensifies the hardships faced by those seeking abortions. Decriminalisation promises to ease these burdens by prioritising care and support rather than punitive measures. For many, this reform could transform abortion from a legal minefield to a healthcare issue governed by compassion and evidence-based practice.

In conclusion, the debate on abortion decriminalisation in the UK is not merely about law but about dignity, health, and human rights. As MPs prepare to vote, the pressure mounts for legislation that aligns with modern values and medical standards. Decriminalisation would represent a decisive step towards removing stigma, protecting vulnerable individuals, and ensuring that abortion care is treated as the healthcare service it truly is—safe, legal, and accessible without fear of criminal punishment.

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/decriminalise-abortion-vote-mps-stella-creasy-b2770990.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/4135e2ae-330c-471a-bb08-a80d69524773)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/decriminalise-abortion-vote-mps-stella-creasy-b2770990.html), [[4]](https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/humanities-and-social-sciences/news/articles/woman-jailed-over-abortion-an-explainer-on-what-uk-law-actually-says), [[5]](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/87/1999-07-01/data.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/decriminalise-abortion-vote-mps-stella-creasy-b2770990.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/4135e2ae-330c-471a-bb08-a80d69524773)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/decriminalise-abortion-vote-mps-stella-creasy-b2770990.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/decriminalise-abortion-vote-mps-stella-creasy-b2770990.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/4135e2ae-330c-471a-bb08-a80d69524773), [[4]](https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/humanities-and-social-sciences/news/articles/woman-jailed-over-abortion-an-explainer-on-what-uk-law-actually-says)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/decriminalise-abortion-vote-mps-stella-creasy-b2770990.html), [[3]](https://www.ippf.org/media-center/ippf-demands-reform-uk-abortion-act-1967-decriminalize-abortion), [[6]](https://www.ippf.org/media-center/ippf-demands-reform-uk-abortion-act-1967-decriminalize-abortion)
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* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/decriminalise-abortion-vote-mps-stella-creasy-b2770990.html), [[3]](https://www.ippf.org/media-center/ippf-demands-reform-uk-abortion-act-1967-decriminalize-abortion), [[4]](https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/humanities-and-social-sciences/news/articles/woman-jailed-over-abortion-an-explainer-on-what-uk-law-actually-says), [[6]](https://www.ippf.org/media-center/ippf-demands-reform-uk-abortion-act-1967-decriminalize-abortion)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/decriminalise-abortion-vote-mps-stella-creasy-b2770990.html)
* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/decriminalise-abortion-vote-mps-stella-creasy-b2770990.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/decriminalise-abortion-vote-mps-stella-creasy-b2770990.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/4135e2ae-330c-471a-bb08-a80d69524773> - This article discusses the growing optimism among campaigners in England and Wales regarding the decriminalisation of abortion. It highlights proposed amendments to the criminal justice bill aimed at decriminalising abortion, with at least one amendment expected to receive a free vote. The piece also notes the high public support for women's abortion rights and compares the UK's situation to countries like France, Ireland, Canada, and Australia, where abortion is decriminalised. Critics, such as Right To Life UK, express concerns that decriminalisation could lead to more abortions for non-medical reasons. The UK government has stated that any change will be a matter of conscience for individual MPs. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/4135e2ae-330c-471a-bb08-a80d69524773?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.ippf.org/media-center/ippf-demands-reform-uk-abortion-act-1967-decriminalize-abortion> - The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) has called for the decriminalisation of abortion in the UK following the sentencing of a mother-of-three to 28 months in prison for using abortion medication to end her pregnancy. The IPPF views this sentencing as a violation of human rights and underscores the urgent need for legislative reform to allow women and pregnant individuals to exercise their reproductive rights without the threat of criminal prosecution. The article also highlights the increasing number of women facing police investigations and potential prison sentences under current abortion laws over the past three years. ([ippf.org](https://www.ippf.org/media-center/ippf-demands-reform-uk-abortion-act-1967-decriminalize-abortion?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/humanities-and-social-sciences/news/articles/woman-jailed-over-abortion-an-explainer-on-what-uk-law-actually-says> - This article provides an analysis of the UK abortion law following the sentencing of a woman to 28 months in prison for aiding an abortion seeker. It explains that in England and Wales, abortion is legal when performed by a registered medical practitioner, authorised by two doctors, and meets certain conditions, such as risk to physical or mental health or risk of fetal anomaly. The piece also discusses the historical context of the 1967 Abortion Act and the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, which criminalises abortion without medical authorisation. The article concludes by emphasising the need for legal reform to decriminalise abortion and protect women's rights. ([liverpool.ac.uk](https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/humanities-and-social-sciences/news/articles/woman-jailed-over-abortion-an-explainer-on-what-uk-law-actually-says?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/87/1999-07-01/data.html> - The Abortion Act 1967 is a UK law that legalised abortion under certain conditions. It permits abortions up to the 24th week of pregnancy if two registered medical practitioners agree that continuing the pregnancy would involve a risk greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, or if there is a substantial risk that the child would be born with serious physical or mental abnormalities. The Act also allows abortions after the 24th week if there is a risk to the life of the pregnant woman or if there is a substantial risk of serious physical or mental abnormalities in the child. The Act applies to England, Wales, and Scotland but does not extend to Northern Ireland. ([legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/87/1999-07-01/data.html?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.ippf.org/media-center/ippf-demands-reform-uk-abortion-act-1967-decriminalize-abortion> - The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) has called for the decriminalisation of abortion in the UK following the sentencing of a mother-of-three to 28 months in prison for using abortion medication to end her pregnancy. The IPPF views this sentencing as a violation of human rights and underscores the urgent need for legislative reform to allow women and pregnant individuals to exercise their reproductive rights without the threat of criminal prosecution. The article also highlights the increasing number of women facing police investigations and potential prison sentences under current abortion laws over the past three years. ([ippf.org](https://www.ippf.org/media-center/ippf-demands-reform-uk-abortion-act-1967-decriminalize-abortion?utm_source=openai))