

UK fertility decline

Within the United Kingdom, fertility in all the jurisdictions has fallen below replacement level since the 1970s and in Scotland it has fallen most. Lately Scotland declined to 47,000 live births in 2022 that is 1,000 fewer than 2021 and 19% fewer than in 2012. [1]

Decline greatest in Scotland

The Scottish government has recognised this as a serious threat to Scotland. An official report called for Scotland to be “more family friendly”. [2] In a scheme SBBS launched in 2017, Baby Boxes containing useful items for baby care (value £160 with the box also useful as a cradle) were distributed by the Scottish government to new parents. By 2019 takeup was over 95%.

While Scotland has some limited power to vary taxes, the UK tax and benefit regimes that apply throughout the UK, have tended to be

more family unfriendly recently. There is a cap on Child Benefit paid only for 2 children and there are no income tax allowances for children. So far the Scottish initiatives to encourage more children have had little measurable effect. Most recently in the COVID era the birth rate has continued to decline to TFR, Total Fertility Rate 1.28 in 2022[1] while the TAR: Total Abortion Rate has increased to 0.5 in 2022. Figure 1 shows these trends.

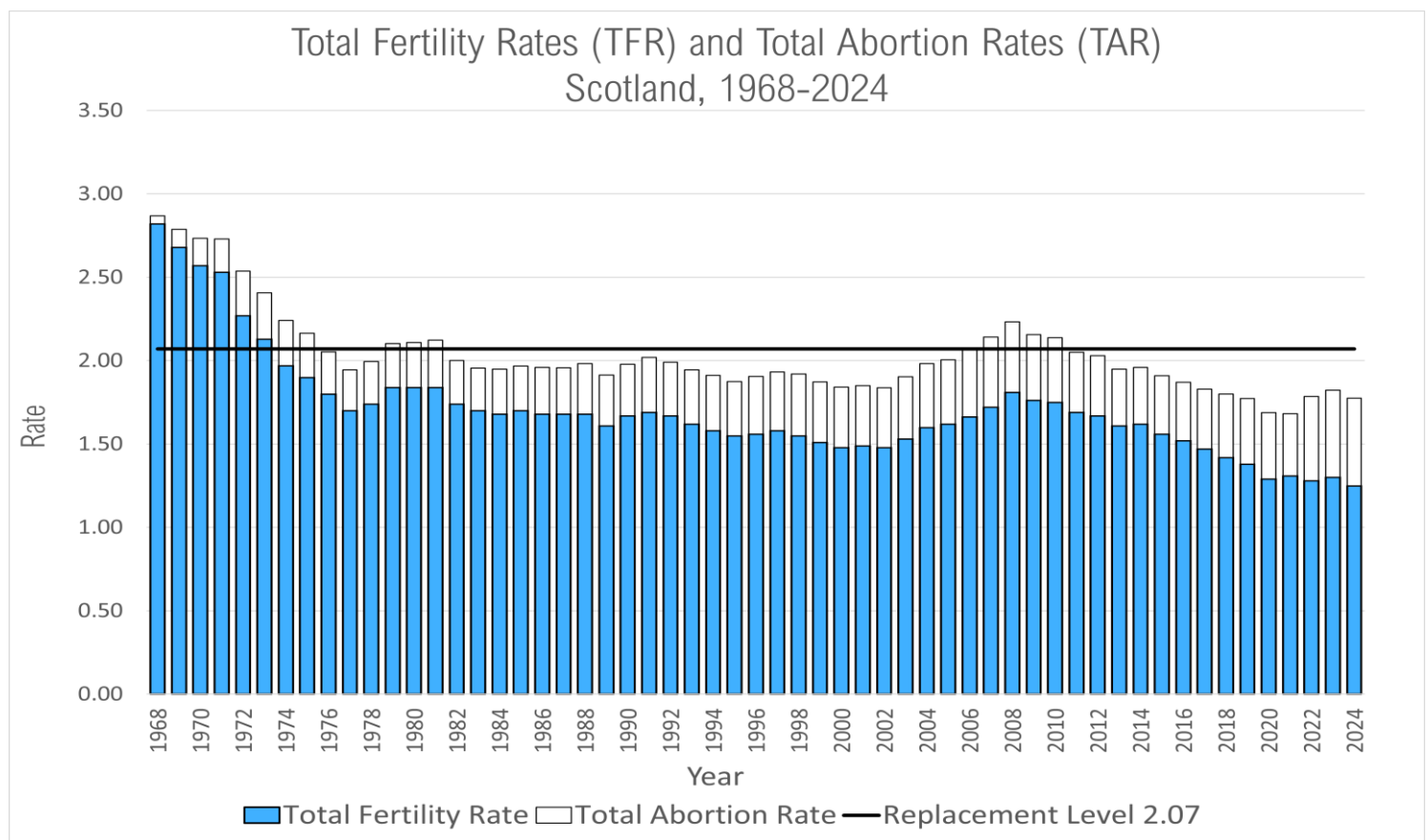


Figure 1

England and Wales

Scotland started the epoch with a higher birth rate than England & Wales but now has a much lower birth rate. The greater decline over this epoch in Scotland than in England & Wales, much the largest population in the UK, can be explained by the greater impact of the decline of traditional industries in Scotland, which had enabled men to earn a wage that could support a family and by the privatisation of social housing under a “right to buy” scheme which has exposed more young couples to the financial strains of house purchase.[3] Traditional industries like coal mining and shipbuilding had enabled young men to marry and support families. There is now less social housing suitable for children which deters parity progression within this social sector.

Decline least in Northern Ireland

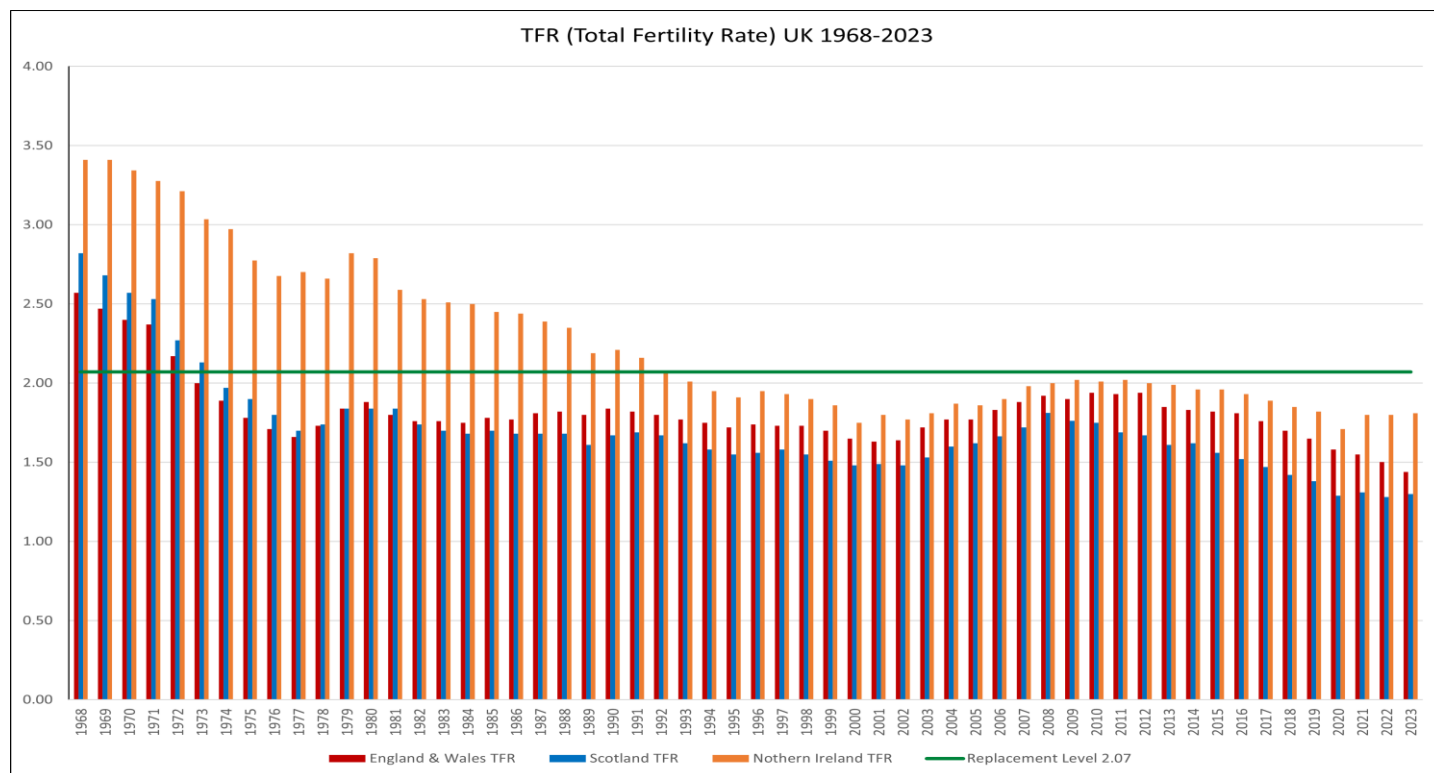


Figure 2

Figure 2 shows how these trends in Scotland compare with England & Wales and Northern Ireland, the other jurisdictions within the UK. In all UK jurisdictions the advent in 1968 of legally induced abortion, except in Northern Ireland, and in the 1970s throughout the UK of government sponsored contraception is manifest in the subsequent decline in fertility. The TFR for Scotland fell further in 2024 to 1.25, while the number of abortions increased further to 18,710.

The contrast between Scotland and Northern Ireland is striking. The birth rate continues at a much higher rate nearer to replacement level in Northern Ireland and the Abortion Rate is much lower. Until recently abortion has been legally restricted and rare in Northern Ireland.[2] It continues to be rare within Northern Ireland with fewer than 100 reported for 2021. There had been over a 1,000 a year of women resident in Northern Ireland coming to England for abortions.

These comparisons within the UK can be made with some precision. The same tax and benefit regimes that affect families apply throughout the UK. And the same systems of private housing and social housing and housing finance that affect families are UK wide. And the provision of contraceptives, free of charge, through our National Health Service is the same throughout the UK.

Reproductive Health Issues linked with Fertility

The decline in the birth rate since the 1970s, largely attributable to the advent of government provision, taxpayer funded of all forms of birth control, abortion and contraception through our NHS National Health Service, continues. But the adverse impact on the health of women is not investigated using NHS data and is largely unacknowledged. Abortion providers make their claim to gain properly the consent of their patients by acknowledging some risks e.g. the risk of death. But as to longer term risks NHS records are not used to determine e.g. how many of the women registered with Breast Cancer have previously had abortions nor what their usage of hormonal contraceptives has been. The heavy usage of anti-depressant pills among women likewise could be investigated using NHS data linkage with abortions and contraceptive use but is not. British Abortions are medically approved, with two doctors' signatures required on the abortion notification forms, usually for reasons of mental health. There is supposed to be a health gain from British abortions. The heading "Therapeutic abortions" has appeared annually on Scottish Abortion Statistics. The myths continue to prevail that legally induced abortions are safe and that the health of women is best served by free provision of all forms of contraception.

NOTES 1. Total Fertility Rates are as published by the national statistical offices. Total Abortion Rates are derived from age specific numbers of abortions as published annually by the national offices and from official midyear population estimates.

REFERENCES:

1. Carroll, P., Utshudiema J. & Rodrigues J. The Breast Cancer Epidemic: Trends, Patterns, Risks Factors, and Forecasting. Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons Volume 22 number 11 Spring 2017 pp1-8. <http://jpands.org/vol22no1/carroll.pdf>
2. Ireland's Gain. Patrick Carroll. PAPRI 2011 ISBN 0951453238.
3. The Decline of Fertility in Scotland compared with England. Patrick Carroll. International Congress of Actuaries. Paris. 2006 <http://www.ica2006.com/3071.html>

