



LABOUR WOMEN

SAFE FUND 2026-2029

**safe
fund** 
SAFETY NEEDS FUNDING

*Labour
Women* 





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Labour Women's proposal for a €3m, three-year pilot support fund for survivors of domestic abuse to meet essential, immediate needs.

Summary

Labour Women is calling for the establishment of a €3 million Safe Fund to provide non-means tested, once off financial support payments for victim survivors of domestic violence to provide support when an urgent need arises either to leave abusive environments, or to help cover the costs of essential needs when they must remain in their home.

Background and Context

Domestic violence is a widespread and deeply rooted issue across Ireland, affecting people of all ages, backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses. Evidence from frontline organisations demonstrates that many survivors face significant barriers when attempting to leave abusive relationships.

A critical barrier in exiting domestic violence situations is financial insecurity, particularly in situations involving financial abuse and coercive control, where access to personal income or shared resources is restricted. Even survivors who are employed or appear financially stable on paper may be unable to safely access funds.

Existing supports, including emergency accommodation, social welfare payments, and legal aid, are essential but are often:

- Subject to means-testing
- Delayed due to administrative processes
- Difficult to navigate during crisis situations

Evidence from other jurisdictions, including the UK, demonstrates that rapid, low-barrier financial assistance can play a decisive role in enabling victim survivors to escape abuse safely.

Compared with Ireland's charity-led model, both the United Kingdom and New Zealand rely more heavily on direct public expenditure. However, the UK response focuses primarily on short-term emergency accommodation and crisis support, whereas New Zealand's approach places greater emphasis on long-term system capacity, prevention, and sector reform.

Our Call: Establishment of a Safe Fund

We are calling for a national 'Safe Fund' to support survivors and victims of domestic violence.

This would be a €3 million, three-year pilot programme providing a non means tested financial assistance payment to survivors of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence including those affected by financial abuse.

This fund would:

- Provide immediate, unrestricted, non means-tested payments
- Be accessible without means-testing at the point of crisis
- Cover essential costs such as (but not limited to):
 - o Transport and fuel
 - o Food and clothing
 - o Childcare
 - o Legal or documentation costs

What is the need for a Safe Fund?

No victim survivor should be forced to remain in an abusive situation due to lack of financial means.

People aged 16 and over who are experiencing domestic abuse, including those who may not have access to public funds, should be able to receive a non-means-tested payment through a recognised support service.

To effectively support victim survivors at the point of crisis, financial assistance must be immediate, easy to access, trauma - informed and unrestricted.

A non-means-tested 'Safe Fund' would provide emergency financial support at the critical moment when a victim survivor decides to leave, or when they need to access funds in a safe manner. This would complement existing services rather than replace them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland, domestic violence services established emergency financial support to assist women and children fleeing abusive situations, particularly as public health restrictions increased isolation and reduced refuge capacity.



Women's Aid established a donations-based emergency fund that was administered to provide direct support to survivors of domestic abuse.

In 2020, Safe Ireland launched the Survivor Fund with an initial contribution of €350,000 from Airbnb, alongside additional support from the Community Foundation Ireland, the RTÉ Toy Show Appeal, and private donors. The fund provided emergency financial assistance for essential needs, including groceries, utility bills, transport, phone credit, deposits for safe accommodation, and other practical supports.

These funds are no longer in operation and services report that the impact is significant. This proposed publicly funded Safe Fund would seek to fill the gap that has emerged.

What are the aims?

The introduction of a Safe Fund would:

- Enable more victim survivors to leave abusive situations safely and earlier.
- Reduce the risk of homelessness and economic destitution faced by people leaving violent domestic situations.
- Improve long-term recovery outcomes.
- Strengthen Ireland's response to domestic and gender-based violence.

Access and administration

The Safe Fund should be delivered through trusted frontline services, including domestic violence refuges, community-based support organisations, and advocacy services.

Our proposal is that this fund would be administered by Women's Aid, along the same model as the fund previously operated, in consultation with front line services.

Trauma informed design

This scheme should be designed in consultation with victim survivors, ensuring lived experience informs application processes, payment structures and accessibility criteria

Ideally, access should be fast-tracked, with minimal paperwork. It should be available nationwide, including in rural and underserved areas, and flexible enough to respond to individual circumstances at short notice.

The fund must operate on a trust-based model, recognising the urgency and risk involved in abuse, and the impact of trauma on decision-making and administrative capacity.

Requirements should be minimal and avoid:

- Requirements for extensive documentation.
- The need to travel to access the funding.
- The need to schedule specific times to request access to the funding.
- Re-traumatising verification processes.

Resourcing and awareness

Government must ensure:

- Sufficient and sustained funding to meet demand.
- Annual review mechanisms to assess adequacy and impact.
- Duration: 3-year first phase of the scheme.
- Total Budget: €3 million.
- Annual Allocation: €1 million per annum.
- Geographic Scope: Nationwide.
- Statistical data gathering is facilitated, collated, and made available to advocacy services, stakeholders, and policy makers as appropriate.

When the fund is launched it should be accompanied by a national awareness campaign to inform survivors of their rights, the supports available and how to access them.

The campaign should also ensure professionals (e.g. healthcare workers, Gardaí, social workers, EAP providers) can signpost effectively.

Integration with existing supports

The Safe Fund should complement, not replace, existing services, including social protection payments, Community Welfare Officer funds, access to housing supports, legal aid, counselling and recovery services, and refuge accommodation

Coordination across departments (Justice, Social Protection, Housing, Health) will be essential to ensure a holistic support pathway.



Conclusion

A non-means-tested Safe Fund represents a practical, immediate intervention that addresses one of the most critical barriers to safety: access to money at the moment of crisis. By adopting this policy, Ireland can take a significant step toward ensuring that no survivor is forced to choose between safety and financial survival.

This policy proposal should be read in conjunction with existing Labour Party and Labour Women policy proposals focused on eliminating gender-based violence, including the below costings from our Alternative Budget 2026.

From our Alternative Budget 2026: DOMESTIC, SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Labour would increase the budget for CUAN, to provide for more awareness and prevention campaigns, provide a 10% increase in funding for DSGBV services including refuges and Rape Crisis Centres, and a multiannual funding commitment. To meet the Istanbul Convention recommendation of one family refuge place for every 10,000 of population, Ireland would need well over 500 places. The current government strategy is to double provision to 282 places and based on 1 unit per 10,000 women rather than one place per 10,000 population. That means Ireland would still need at least 250 places, and our population continues to grow. A more ambitious five-year plan is necessary, and Labour would fund a further 50 emergency accommodation places every year above current plans, providing €8.75m for operating costs, and €28m in capital funding in 2026, and roll this provision forward in the years after that.

We provide funding for the calls in our July 2024 Dáil motion on Gender Based Violence including the introduction of a Commissioner to act as an independent advocate and voice for victims and survivors, the provision of effective training for legal professionals working in the area, and the speedier development of a comprehensive database of sentencing decisions.

- Funding for additional 50 refuge places towards meeting commitments under the Istanbul Convention (€28m Capital). €36.8m
- 10% funding increase for CUAN funded DSGBV services including Rape Crisis Centres and refuges to cover cost pressures. €6.1m
- Establish a Victims Commissioner, resource the sentencing database and guidelines, with training for legal professionals. €2.5m
- CUAN core funding for awareness & prevention campaigns. €1.2m

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