

Labour Party Response to the End Violence Against Women Coalition

If elected, how would your Government ensure that every woman and girl at risk of, or who has survived abuse, can access a high quality support service, whether it be crisis accommodation, counselling for abuse that happened many years ago or legal advocacy and advice? And, given the known funding crisis facing many of these local, independent and women-led services, will you consider new laws or provisions to enforce commissioning guidelines which hold local commissioners to account for the decisions they make?

When Theresa May's government impose efficiencies on local government and non-profit organisations providing women-led services – it has a human cost. Lives of vulnerable women depend on these vital services providing comprehensive frontline services to woman and girls. Yet under the Conservatives over a third of all local authority funding to domestic and sexual violence was already cut by 2012.

A Labour government will appoint a new commissioner to enforce minimum standards in tackling domestic and sexual violence. A Violence Against Women Commissioner would also provide stable central funding for refuges and rape crisis centres and coordinate best practice across local authorities so no community is left without these vital services.

Survivors of abuse may require psychological treatment and or tailored therapeutic services and we are acutely aware that such services have been severely limited as a direct result of this government's long-standing imposition of austerity. We will end the Conservative cuts to mental health services since 2010 and will work to reverse the damage by ring fencing mental health budgets so that funding reaches frontline services.

If elected, would your Government continue to make changes to the criminal justice system to ensure that survivors have access to justice and perpetrators are held to account for these very serious crimes? This means urgently acting to stop the use of victim-blaming sexual history and other evidence used to undermine rape survivors. It means ensuring all women have access to legal aid and advocacy for as long as they need it. And it means instructing local areas not to roll out restorative justice for these crimes unless women's organisations are confident it is being done in a way which will not harm survivors.

Labour takes violence against women and girls seriously. We will stand up for victims of domestic violence and strengthen legislation so that more offenders are brought to justice; we will also ban the use of community resolutions for domestic and sexual violence.

If elected, would your Government make it a priority for all public services, especially the health service, schools and the welfare system, to play their part in tackling abuse? This means health workers being trained not to miss abuse. It means welfare policy which doesn't stigmatise women or minimise the impact of abuse. It means schools delivering high quality Relationships and Sex Education which is accompanied by better school policies and training in detecting and responding to abuse. And, it means asylum and immigration systems which do not deter women from seeking protection.

The next Labour government will immediately scrap the shameful 'rape clause' which this Conservative government have devised to restrict child tax credits. No one should have to suffer indignity nor revisit trauma in order to be forced to disclose details of rape to qualify for financial support.

Labour will ensure that age appropriate sex and relationship education is a compulsory part of the national curriculum so that young people are taught about respectful relationships from the outset and sign-posted to report abuse to prevent violence and abuse haunting our future generations. Labour is comprehensively committed to eliminating abuse and we will work harder to ensure children are safe from online abuse.

Labour will also scrap the abhorrent requirement for victims of domestic abuse to pay a fee to doctors for certification of their injuries. At the same time we will legislate to ban the cross-examination of victims of domestic abuse by their abuser in certain circumstances.

Our commitment to eliminating abuse will extend to women fleeing conflict, we will make sure that women who have risked their lives are treated fairly when they arrive. This means ensuring that local authorities have adequate resources to provide survivors of torture or rape the support they need.

Labour in government will take real action to promote women's safety by appointing a new Commissioner to set minimum standards in tackling domestic and sexual violence and make sure that every part of government is trained and resourced in playing its part.

If elected, would your Government ensure that women and girls' rights are protected in any negotiations to leave the EU? This means that the many advances in equality and human rights law which benefit women in the UK are protected and there is no slip backwards because of Brexit.

Whatever our new relationship with the EU, Labour is determined to maintain and enhance cross-border collaboration to protect women's hard won advancements. Labour will work tirelessly to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and to tackle discrimination and inequality wherever it exists, at home or abroad. A Labour Government would keep the Human Rights Act and the UK's signature to the European

Convention on Human Rights. These are vital to ensure the rights of every UK citizen regardless of gender, ethnicity, faith, disability or age.

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