



# LAWA

latin american  
women's aid

▶ Annual Report  
2017-2018



Latin American and other Black and Minority Ethnic women  
and their children working together to end violence and  
achieve self – determination





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## Trustees report

Since 1986 LAWA has supported Latin American and other Black and Minority Ethnic women and children and provided the only safe refuge for the Latin American community in the UK. Founded by two brave political refugees it sought to give a voice to the unheard, to make the invisible visible, to integrate the most isolated and, ultimately, to save thousands of lives.

Inspired by this vision and legacy, the board, which consists of a group of Latin American professionals - each with a diverse field of knowledge and experience, has been devising more strategic ways for the long-term sustainability of the organisation. Our priority is to protect the refuge, and make sure women and children are able to receive the support they need.

This year our main objectives have been: 1) Forming the finance committee to build towards the long-term sustainability of LAWA; 2) To review our constitution in light of new reforms; 3) The establishment of networks and partnerships, so that we can build community cohesion and create spaces that will enable us to become sustainable.

The board is particularly proud that amidst a tough climate of austerity, where BME organisations have had 40% of their

refuge funding cut, we have been able to sustain and strengthen our life-saving services, which includes opening our second refuge, consolidating our Change-makers Programme and beginning a new project with young people in schools.

The perseverance and resilience of the organization is in part due to the relentless support and dedication of LAWA staff and those involved with the organization. Our wrap-around service provides in-house support that is compassionate, trustworthy, personal and empowering.

LAWA has an overwhelming spirit of sisterhood that seeps through the whole organization. We are all driven by one common goal: to end violence against women and girls and achieve self-determination. The stronger our community, the stronger our message becomes to end violence against women and girls.

## Management report

It is with great pride and feeling of accomplishment that I present this year's LAWA's annual report. Despite all the financial difficulties and government's cuts that we have been facing since 2015, 2017 was a year of major achievements for our organisation which was marked as incredibly active. I am proud to celebrate these achievements and continue to progress in the pursuit of improved programs, building our team, and consolidating knowledge for our community.

After 30 years, working in partnership with Family Mosaic housing association and with the support of our funders, LAWA was able to set up the opening of our new refuge dedicated to Latin American and other BME women and their children in the UK. To open

a new refuge has been a historic mile stone for us but also for the BME women's sector, especially considering that since 2005, 50% of BME refuges in the country have been forced to close due to the current financial and political agenda of the UK government.

2017 has been a year of consolidating our team who are composed of great, invaluable women who share LAWA's ethos and intersectional feminist values. We have been able to consolidate a BME consortium with other BME sister's organisations, working towards gender equality and political representation of BME women.

**Yenny Tovar- Aude**  
Director

# Who we are and our impact

Latin American Women's Aid is a specialist gender-based violence organisation working to end violence against Black and Minority ethnic women and girls. We run the only two refuges by and for Latin American women and children in the UK, our organisation and community is made up of other Black and Minority Ethnic women and we are proud to be trans-inclusive.

Our service is holistic and intersectional, which means that we provide everything a woman needs to recover and empower themselves. What we offer goes beyond refuge emergency accommodation, and includes advice and practical support, counselling, English classes and our change-maker empowerment program.

This year we have carried out a total of **2609 interventions** with women and children in the different areas of our work.

**95%**

Women we supported said they felt more confident

**90%**

Women we supported said they increased their knowledge about domestic violence, the justice system and legal options

**93%**

Women we supported said it made a difference that support was available in a Latin American, Black and minority ethnic led women's organisation

**96%**

Women we supported felt that workers who supported them understood their experiences and identities

*"I primarily went to LAWA to seek legal help. I knew I had rights as an immigrant but I didn't know what they were, so LAWA helped me with that. I also needed to go to tribunal, so a member of the LAWA staff spent the day with me there, and was there from start to finish. The team offered me both moral and legal support the whole way." Antonia, from Bolivia*

*"I learnt to be more independent and self-dependent, and not have to rely on my husband so much. I felt more confident to make my own decisions." Carolina, Brazilian survivor*

*"I received lots of advice, support and understanding. LAWA was the first place I approached, I didn't know about any other ONGs neither felt comfortable nor confident in seeking out help. I was very lost at the start of my journey with LAWA." Mili, Colombian survivor*

# Highlights of LAWA's Year

## LAWA's 30th Anniversary Gala

This year we celebrated 30 years of saving lives and empowering women by throwing an unforgettable Gala at Andaz Hotel. It was a great opportunity to reflect on our achievements and learnings whilst thanking our users, supporters, funders and dedicated staff team and board of trustees. In the best Latin American style the programme included a three course dinner, a Mariachi band, Salsa and tango performances and a lot of dancing. We also received honour guests: the MP for Brent & Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities, Dawn Butler, the MP for Islington & Leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn and Laura Alvarez, his wife and a fellow Latin American.



## LAWA's set up of a new Refuge home

This year we have received the keys of our new refuge, the Chia House. This is a very important milestone in the history of LAWA since after 31 years we are finally able to open another house to provide a unique safe space to Latin American women and children fleeing violence. The new refuge will open its doors in the upcoming year and will double our capacity to receive women and children fleeing violence.

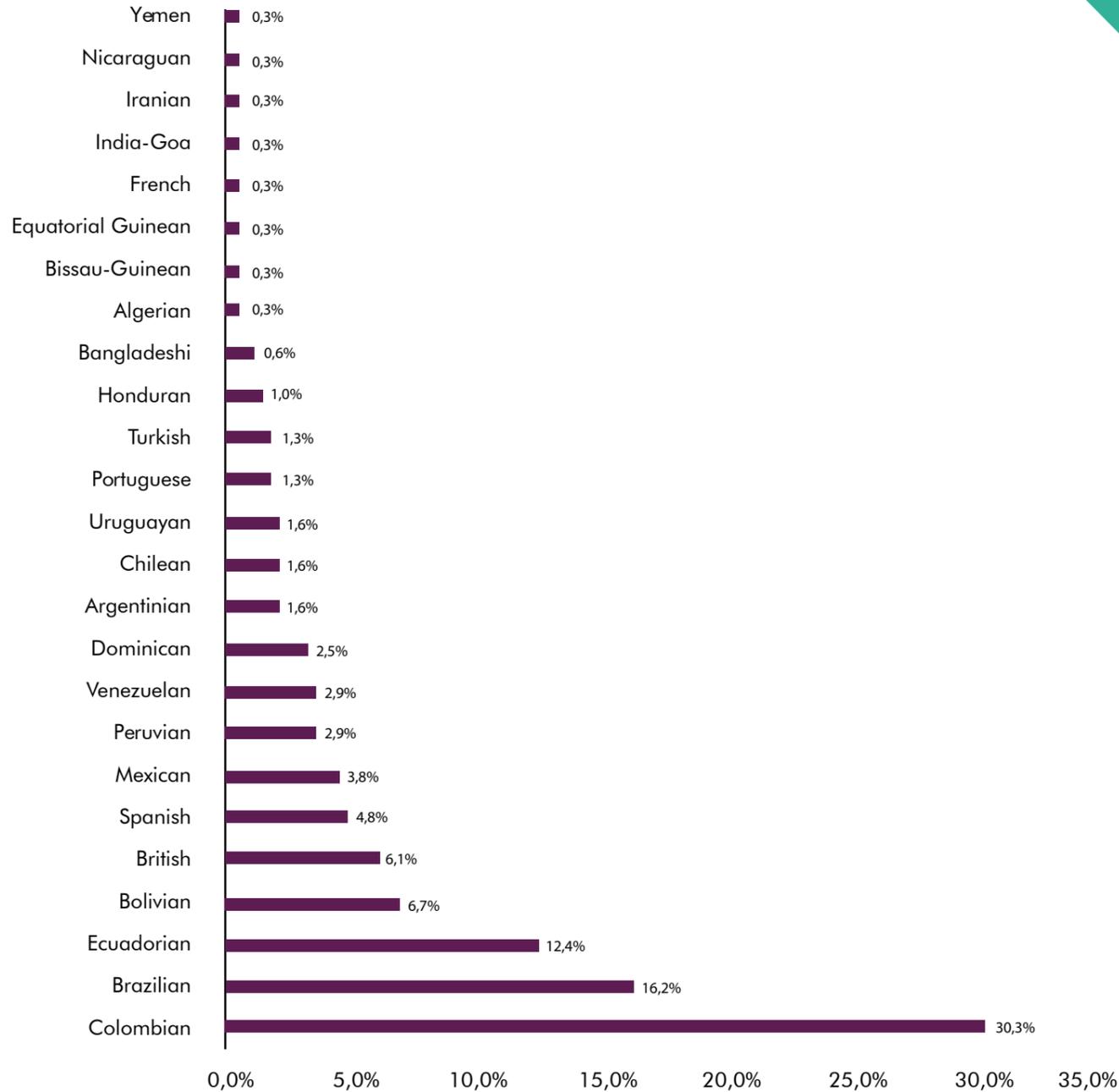


# LAWA's Service Users' Profile

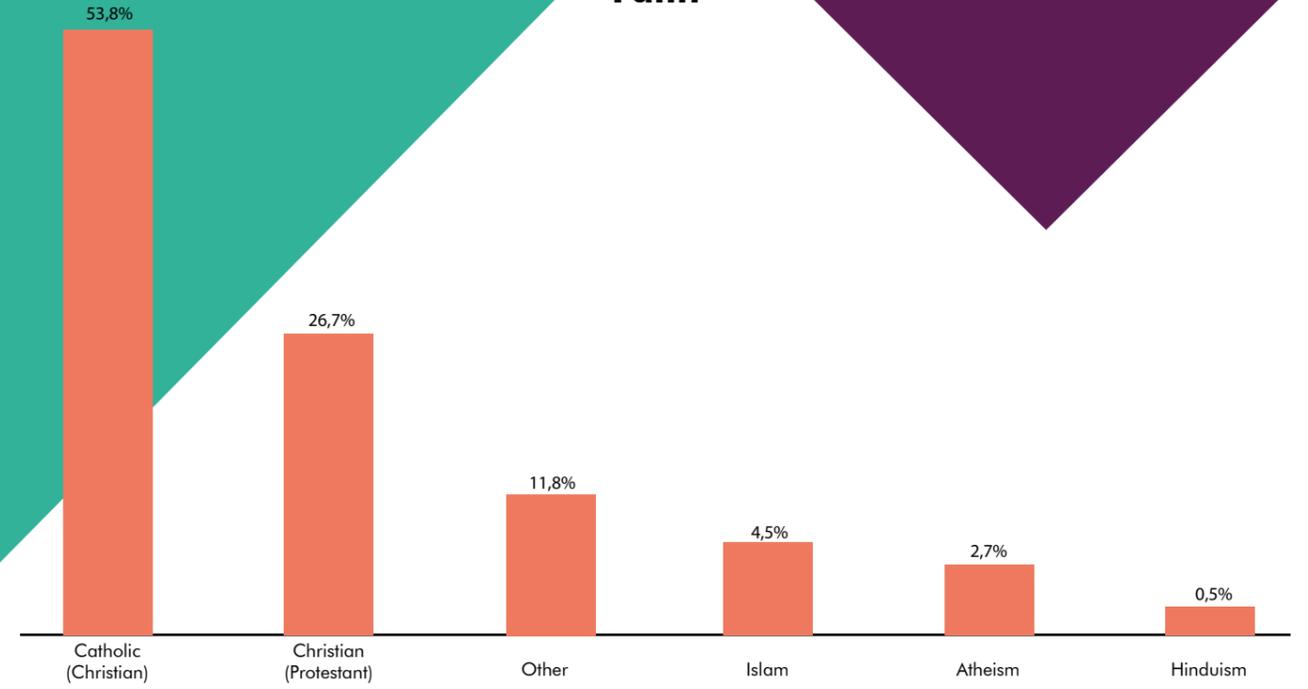
The general profile of LAWA's users reflects the diversity of the Latin American and BME population in the UK as well as the challenges encountered by migrant women. This year, we have noticed that the majority of women accessing our services were Colombians (30.3%), followed by Brazilians (16.2%), Ecuadorians (12.4%) and Bolivians (6.7%).

Women accessing LAWA were mostly Christians, Catholic (53.8%) or Protestant (26.7%), a few of them were disabled (7.2%); whilst the vast majority of them did not have access to public funds due to their immigration status (68%). The age range of our users were mostly 35-50 years (44%); but we also worked with younger women (27%), whilst children and young people made up 30% of our users.

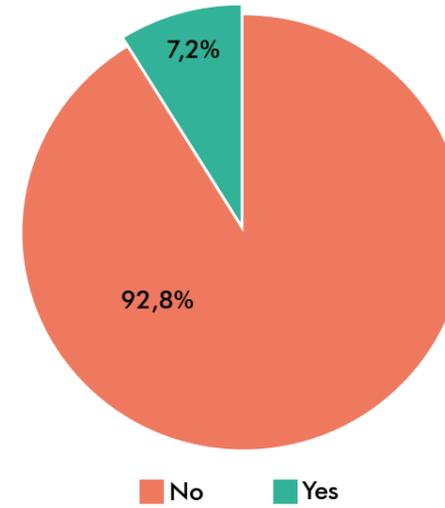
## Nationality



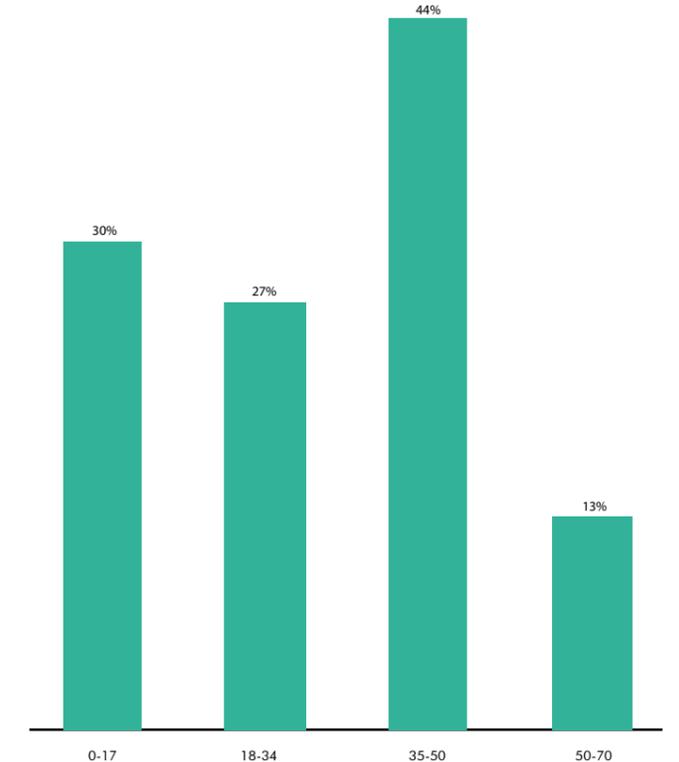
## Faith



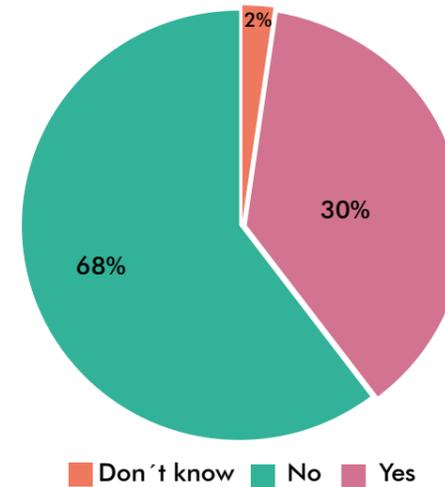
## Disability



## Age



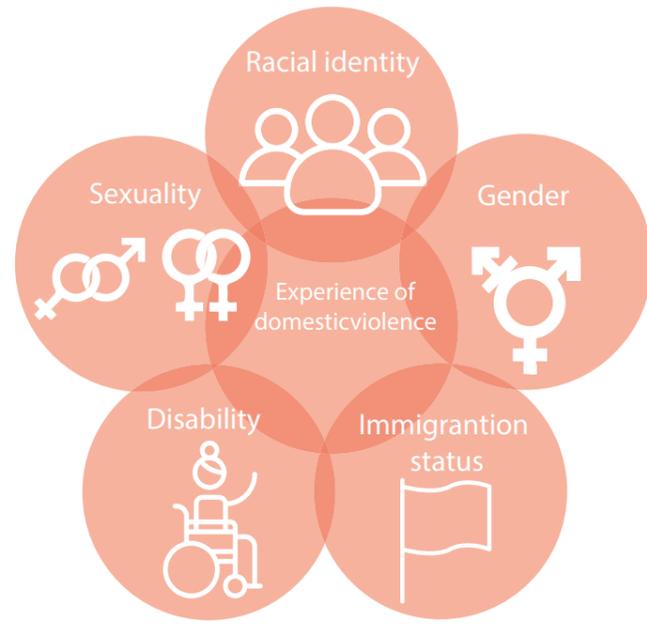
## Recourse to Public Funds



# Intersecting Violences

At LAWA we support Latin American and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women and children who experience gender-based violence, including domestic abuse, forced prostitution and trafficking. Violence against women is a cause and consequence of gender inequalities and intersects with other forms of oppressions, such as racism, immigration control, ableism, lesbophobia, transphobia or classism. This means that Latin American and other BME survivors of violence are often presented with more complex and intersecting needs arising from their identities and experiences.

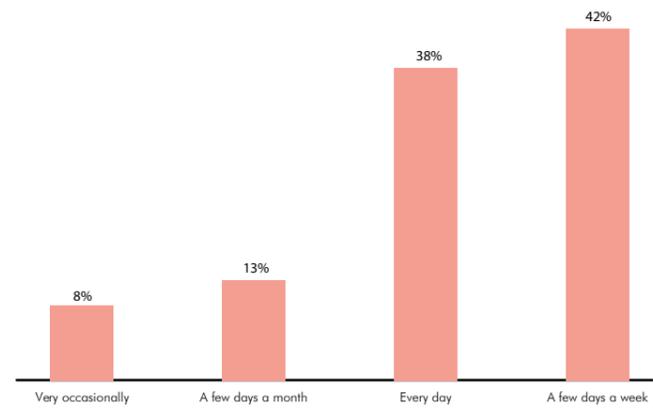
This year, in average, 68% of women accessing our services were No Recourse to Public Funds due to their immigration status, and in particular, out of all women who disclosed violence, 80% reported mental health symptoms, whilst over half of them could not speak English (55%) and experienced financial hardships (55%). As a result, given the lack of expertise to deal with their complex needs, we have received a high number of referrals from generic organisations or service users directly approaching us after leaving a generic service, making up 30% of all our users seeking support due to violence.



The intersecting nature of violence is evident in the ways in which women accessing our services experience abuse and additional barriers to seek safety and support. This year 86% of our users reporting violence have experienced two or more forms of abuse. The most prevalent types of abuse were Emotional and Psychological abuse (75%); Verbal (70%); Coercive control (60%); Physical (49%) and Financial Abuse (41%).

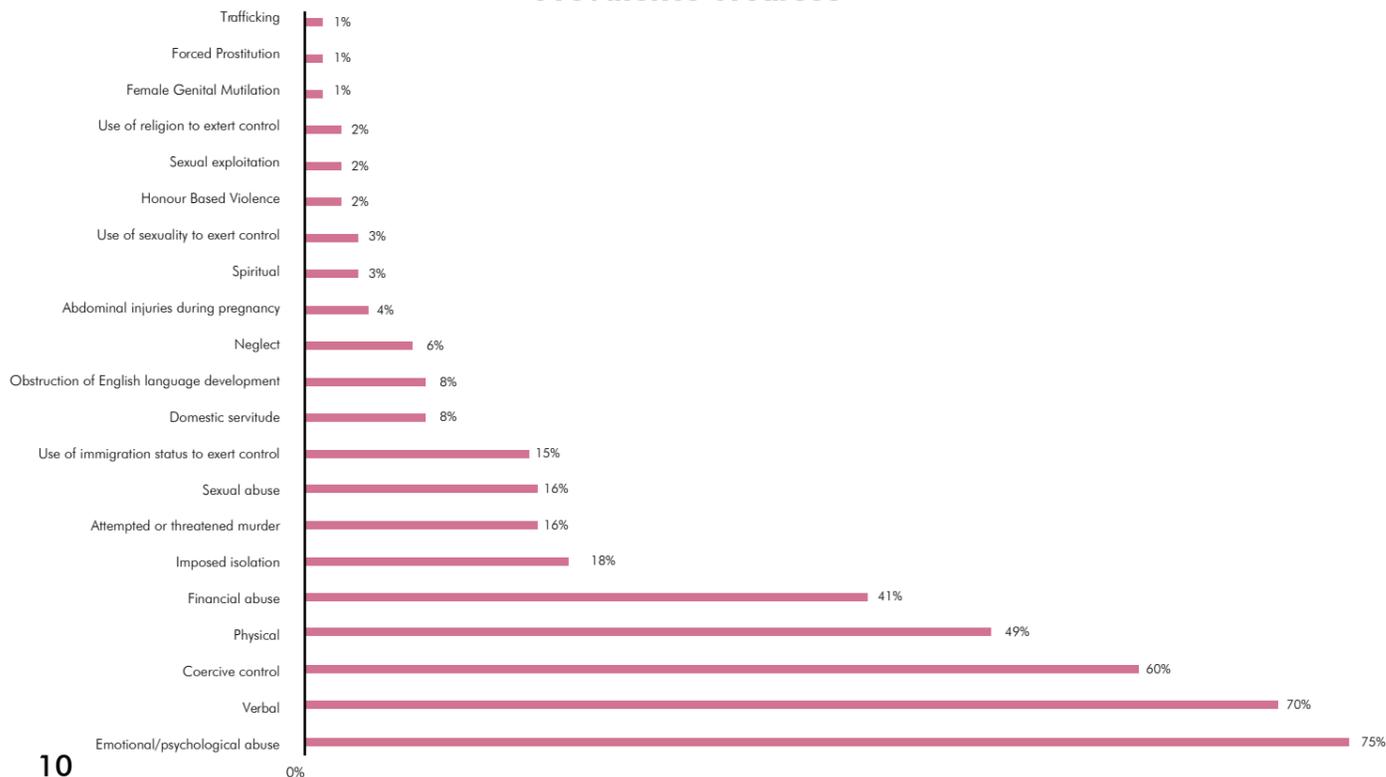
Such abuse has often intersected in complex ways with more specific types of violence and oppression experienced by BME and migrant women. For example, some users reported that their immigration status was used by perpetrators to exert control (15%); some were also obstructed by perpetrators from developing their English language skills (8%); whilst others experienced imposed isolation (18%); Honour Base Violence (2%); use of religion to exert control (2%); and Female Genital Mutilation (1%).

**Frequency of Abuse**

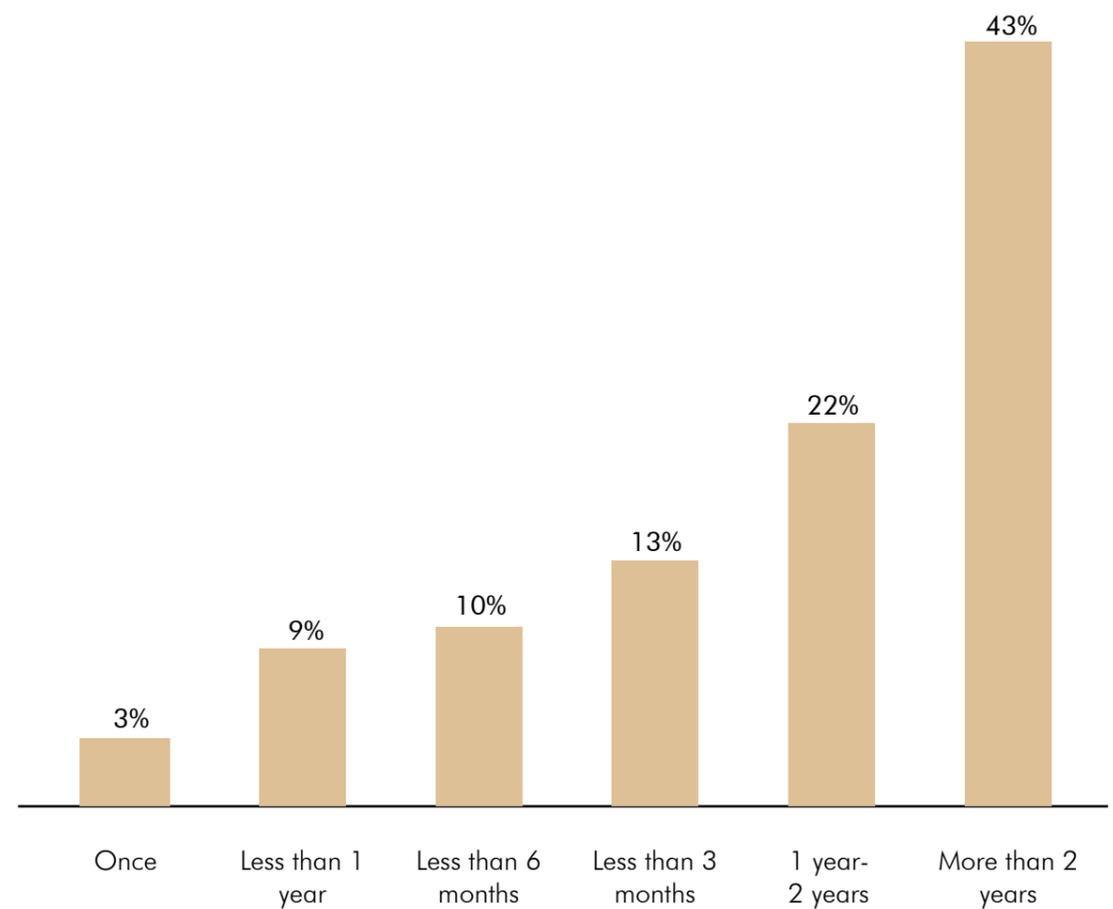


BME women tend to experience abuse for lengthy period of times, and this reality is also reflected among our users, some having experienced violence for decades. This year, we identified that 43% of our users who reported violence have experienced it for at more than 2 years. In addition, the frequency of the abuse experienced by our users tended to be very high with the majority of them experiencing abuse a few days a week (42%) or every day (38%).

**Prevalence of Abuse**



**Length of time abuse experienced**

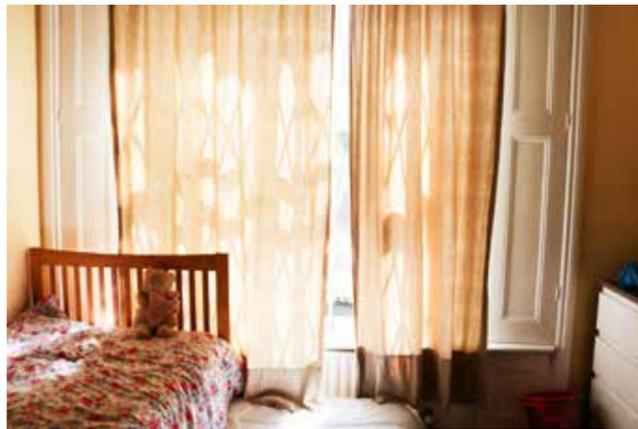


# LAWA's Refuge

Established in 1987 as our first service, LAWA's refuge is a safe home for Latin American, and other Black and Minority Ethnic women and children who are fleeing gender violence, in particular domestic violence.

Through a holistic and person-centred approach we offer individually tailored emotional and practical support plans according to each woman and child's intersectional needs. Our refuges are spaces for new beginnings, hope and healing.

This year apart from case work support received at LAWA's refuge, the majority of our residents also accessed LAWA's in-house counselling, attended to our ESOL classes and some Change Makers workshops. We offered specialised services for BME children and young people living at the refuge, such as weekly activities to encourage their recovery and the reestablishment of the relationship with their mothers after living or witnessing traumatic violent experiences. This year we launched a new service providing specialized counselling for children, young people and their mothers.



## What residents said after leaving LAWA's refuge:

**100%**  
Women said they felt safe and secure whilst living there

**90%**  
Women said they would never consider going back with the perpetrator

**80%**  
Women said they felt the accommodation they moved to after LAWA's refuge was safe

*"The time I spent at the refuge was very peaceful, I felt safe and secure. It allowed me to think about myself and my daughter, in our future and what I would do after leaving the refuge. It also really encouraged me and helped me to come out of my shell. I now feel more confident and realise that I can do anything I want."*

*"I couldn't afford to pay for somewhere to stay before going to LAWA's refuge, but the staff helped me to access my rights, and apply for benefits. At the end thanks to their help I was able to leave the refuge and move together with my son into a safe house only for ourselves."*

# Rafaela's Journey to Safety...

Rafaela is a 28 years old Brazilian woman who has two children, Dandara and João, both of them are under five years old. She was referred to LAWA by a generic women's organisation given her language and immigration needs.

Rafaela moved to the UK after she married a British-Brazilian man in Brazil. During the first year of the marriage they had a lovely relationship and he was very supporting of her, however, things changed when she got pregnant with her first child. Her husband wanted her to terminate the pregnancy and began to abuse her both emotionally and physically. He denied her contact with friends and relatives and he would call her several times while she was out to check on her whereabouts.

Rafaela's husband regularly threatened her with further violence and even suggested ringing the home office to deport her without her children if she ever disclosed the abuse. On more than one occasion their children witnessed the violence.

When Rafaela attended her first appointment at LAWA she was very scared of being deported and losing her children for her abusive husband. At LAWA, we explained to Rafaela about her rights, risk assessed her and made a safety plan together. With the support of LAWA applied for the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession, which was successful and soon Rafaela started receiving benefits that guaranteed her financial independence until an application for Independent Leave to Remain as a victim of domestic violence was made. Thanks to that, Rafaela soon was able to move with her children to LAWA's refuge.

Rafaela is currently living at LAWA's refuge, she is receiving psychological support from LAWA's counselling and attending English classes. Her children are also being supported by our Child's counsellor and Children and Family support worker, who are regularly in touch with Children Social services. Rafaela feels much safer now since apart from living in a safe and confidential location she has also secured a non-molestation order prohibiting the perpetrator to contact her or get close to her.

Rafaela has recently been granted leave to remain in the UK. With the support of LAWA, Rafaela

has made a homelessness application and is waiting to be provided with a move on accommodation by the Council so that she can start a new life in a home only for her and her children whilst still being able to access some of our services.

In her own words, Rafaela expressed:

*"I'm very fortunate to have LAWA's support. My support worker is meeting other people with similar stories with even bigger problems than mine helped processing my experiences in a different way."*



# Advice and Support Centre



Our advice and support centre offer information, advocacy and support to Latin American and BME women, in particular but not limited to survivors of gender based violence. Through one-to-one appointments, Drop-in days, telephone advice, in-house surgeries and outreach points we offer advice and support in a wide range of areas. This includes domestic violence and other gendered forms of violence; immigration and family law; welfare benefits advice; housing and emergency accommodation; child support; career and employment advice; skills development and community integration; and ESOL classes.

Apart from running monthly legal surgeries and weekly Drop In sessions to give ad hoc advice and support, we also offered close support plans to a number of women experiencing Domestic Violence. This year we have continued to feel the further impact of austerity cuts and reduction in public services to survivors, which has meant a direct increase in demand for our services and lengthier periods of support to each individual case. In particular, we received a variety of complex and high risk domestic

violence cases being referred to us by statutory services and generic women's organisations.

In addition to support offered in-house, as part of the Samira project we run outreach surgeries at the Candi College and Holborn Police Station every fortnightly in partnership with two other BME specialist organisations, IMECE and KMEWO. Together we also organised BAMER forums at Islington Town Hall for BME workers and survivors and an international women's day celebration.

**88%**

Women we supported said they increased their knowledge about how to enter paid work, access welfare benefits or manage their debts

**90%**

Women we supported said they increased their knowledge about domestic violence, the justice system and legal options

# Counselling

LAWA's in house counselling service provides psychotherapy support in Portuguese, Spanish and English. We adopt a culturally sensitive, trauma focused approach that supports Latin American and BME survivors of gender-violence to recover their mental and emotional health. Our counselling provides a safe, confidential, non-judgmental environment for survivors to express and reflect on their traumas, ultimately empowering women to recover their self-confidence and take control over their own lives.

This year our counselling has run with increasing demand. We offered a package of 15 one-to-one free sessions as well as a pilot group drama therapy program.



## What LAWA's users say after completing therapy...

**77%**

Women we supported said they felt good or very good

**100%**

Women we supported said therapy helped them understand their problems and experiences

**100%**

Women we supported said they always felt listened by their therapists

*"LAWA's counselling made a big difference to my life. I was taught how to find a more positive way to look at what happened to me in the past, what is happening now, and what may happen in the future."*

*"Therapy has been extremely useful. During the process I noticed improvements not only regarding the main issue - the reason why I began therapy - but also regarding general problems. I now carry invaluable tools with me that will help me to continue down my path of recovery and progress."*

*"I don't feel so alone, frustrated or anxious anymore. I'm now more aware of how to protect myself and I've learnt how to act in risky situations and not just leave it to chance."*



## Liliana's Journey of Recovery...

Liliana worked as an economist in Ecuador, but given her lack of English and her irregular migration status, when she arrived to London she started working as a cleaner in the City. Her work hours started very early at 5AM, as she had to clean various offices before workers arrived. One day, on her way to work, whilst walking to the station, a man attacked her with a knife and raped her.

After the attack, Liliana did not know what to do or where to go, especially since she did not speak English and did not have information on how the system worked and what support was available. A friend told her about LAWA and she decided to come to one of our Drop-in sessions. LAWA supported her in the whole process, she was referred and assessed for counselling and started receiving one-to-one psychotherapy sessions. When Liliana arrived at LAWA she was experiencing severe Post-traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms: flashbacks, hyperarousal, insomnia, intrusive thoughts and panic attacks.

By request of Liliana, LAWA's counsellor contacted her GP and together with Liliana it was agreed that it would be useful for her to take a medication to help deal with her anxiety. Additionally, LAWA's counsellor offered some grounding and stabilization techniques to enable her to better manage her dissociative symptoms, these techniques helped Liliana to stay in the present moment. Liliana was also encouraged to keep a diary that allowed her to identify the specific events that triggered her panic attacks.

After 15 sessions, Liliana managed to decrease the frequency and intensity of her panic attacks and slowly became able to anticipate places, moments and people that contributed to triggering them. By explaining to Liliana the brain mechanisms behind her symptoms she learnt that they were a normal response to the traumatic experience she lived. Such understanding contributed in decreasing Liliana's symptoms and she now feels better able to cope with life.



## Change Maker



Our Change Maker Programme is an inter-sectional and intergenerational feminist space for Latin Americans and BME women to meet, learn and grow together.

The first Change Maker Program cohort graduated in December 2017 and LAWA organised a ceremony and celebration for the graduates and their friends. We shared food, music and dance. Testimonies were given by change makers, a Latin American musical choir performed and a portrait exhibition was displayed by a Venezuelan photographer, Betty Zapata, who took portraits of some of our Change Makers displayed with powerful quotes by them as to why they are Change Makers.

Some of the main accomplishments of the first year of the Change Maker program was the co-production of a collective diary of change in the form of a fanzine and a Change Maker video narrating their journey. Change Makers graduating have reported that they were able to learn more about feminism and their identity as Latin American migrant women,

created connections between themselves, becoming more confident and stronger and learning to value themselves and explore their gender and sexual identities. They believed that the space allowed them to create a sisterhood where they could speak freely without judgement.



# LAWA Volunteer Program



In March 2018 we kicked off the second cycle of the Change Maker program to a great start by attending to the Million women Rise march in London with our change makers and staff team.



The program also showed to have a multiplying effect, participants said they were multiplying their learnings and changes in different ways, for example, many women were part of other groups where they are now disseminating their learnings, some were mothers and are passing on what they learned to their children, some became a volunteer at LAWA and other organisations, whilst others started facilitating similar workshops in other organisations and schools or are planning to do so back in their home countries.

## What Change Makers said about the program...

**82%**

Rated the program as excellent

**91%**

Said the Change Maker program substantially increased their sense of confidence and empowerment

**100%**

Said that being part of the Change Maker program contributed to increase their knowledge and awareness about Gender Based Violence and intersectionality



We are led by and for women of our community, therefore, our volunteer programme is exclusively for Latin American and Black and Minority Ethnic women. This year, our organisation was supported by a team of 21 amazing volunteers who made a huge difference to our work whilst also having the opportunity to gain experience, build a community network and learn about violence against women and our intersectional feminist approach.

**84%**

of LAWA's volunteers said they became more involved in Latin American community and expanded their network as a result of volunteering with us

**100%**

of LAWA's volunteers said they developed new job-related skills as a result of volunteering with us

*"Personally, it was a very important experience to work with Latin-American women at LAWA whilst living in London, to be able to contribute to a counselling space that addresses the effects of violence and trauma. I also learnt a lot about the intersectional approach."*

*"When I started volunteering at LAWA I knew very little about the importance of specialist refuges and services. Learning about the work LAWA does and contributing to it shed a new light to my activism."*

*"I learnt a great deal about intersectional feminism and political issues regarding immigration and women's refuges. I've become more politically and socially aware."*

# LAWA thanks to...



The continuous hard-work, commitment and passion of our volunteers, staff and members of the Board of Trustee.

We also thank our funders for believing in and supporting our work:



To survive the Borderlands, you must live sin fronteras, be a crossroads

**Gloria E. Anzaldúa**

The image features a large teal diagonal shape on the left side, extending from the top-left corner towards the bottom-right. In the bottom-left corner, there is a complex geometric pattern composed of various colored triangles in shades of pink, purple, orange, and teal. The text is centered in the white space on the right side of the page.

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