



**LATIN
AMERICAN
WOMEN'S
AID**

**ANNUAL REPORT
2024 - 2025**

LAWA

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025



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INTRODUCTION



MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

“(…) respeto radical a valores, metas y perspectivas culturales diferentes y, más aún, al esfuerzo por parte de los pueblos, por retomar los hilos de tramas históricas por algún tiempo abandonadas”

Rita Segato.

Over the last year we have seen an increased hostile environment towards migrants, racist and dehumanising narratives permeating the political and social landscape, a more weaning environment for women to exercise their rights, a housing crisis and increased cost of living. In such a difficult and painful context, I am deeply proud that LAWA has remained a lifeline for women and children’s survivors of gender-based violence and a space for healing and solidarity.

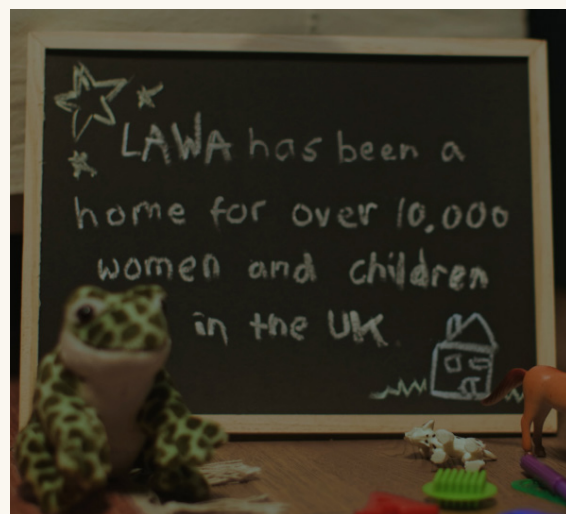
Our team has consistently supported over 1,100 women and children with over 6,000 interventions including access to safe and emergency accommodation; legal advice (including housing, immigration and domestic violence); emotional and practical support; housing advice; immigration advice; LBTQ+ specialist advice; family support work; counselling; and community engagement. We provided culturally sensitive and trauma-informed services that responded to the increase complex needs that women are experiencing due to the intersecting barriers that they face when seeking support.

The landscape next year remains deeply concerning. We continue to witness campaigns against migrants’ rights and women’s rights taking wider political platforms. Far rights movements continue spreading hate and misinformation targeting and dehumanising black and minoritised communities with increased violence and attacks. Social services continue being overstretched and still facing reductions in budgets, and an increased economic crisis. This reality place immense pressure on our staff and services, yet LAWA has shown year after year that it can adapt, advocate, and continue supporting the increased needs of our community and we will continue doing so.

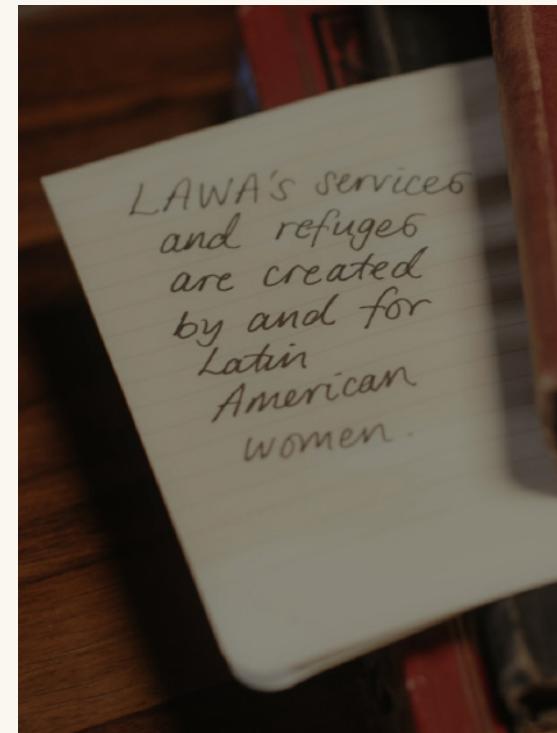
We would not have been able to achieve this, despite the difficult environment in which we operate, without the extraordinary dedication of our staff and volunteers, who embed the organisational values not only in the work they do, but also how they do it: with care, commitment, solidarity and a deep and profound respect for the agency of the people we are aiming to serve because our services users are at the centre of LAWA. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I extend our gratitude to each of them—and to our partners, funders, and supporters who make this work possible.

As we look ahead, we remain focused in our mission. We will continue to amplify the voices of the people we serve, and work collectively towards a future where all women can be safe, supported, and free from violence.

Susana Klien



MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR



This past year has highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by migrant and racialised communities across the UK. Sadly, we continue witnessing a rise in far-right activity and targeted hostility, including national demonstrations, attacks on places of worship, asylum accommodation, and migrant support services. These incidents reflect broader systemic issues rooted in racist and exclusionary policies and public narratives that continue to marginalise vulnerable groups.

Despite some shifts in government priorities, significant legislative barriers remain. Laws such as the Illegal Migration Act continue to restrict access to safety and justice for survivors of gender-based violence. Data-sharing between law enforcement and immigration authorities further discourages women from seeking support, while limited access to housing and legal aid increases their vulnerability.

At LAWA, we continue seeing a notable increase in the complexity of the cases we support. As shown in the report, women from Latin American and other racialised backgrounds face multiple, intersecting challenges—including insecure immigration status, poverty, and systemic discrimination. These factors contribute to ongoing cycles of abuse and exclusion, deepened by the ongoing dismantling of statutory services.

Our holistic approach—combining refuge accommodation, counselling, immigration and housing advice, and advocacy—remains essential in addressing these needs. We also continue to deliver culturally responsive outreach programs that strengthen community ties and promote long-term resilience.

This Annual Report outlines the incredible work of our staff, the impact of our work and the growing demand for our services. It also highlights the need for sustained investment and policy reform to ensure that all survivors, regardless of immigration status, can access safety, support, and achieve social justice.

In 2026, we will continue to stand alongside racialised women and children, working to end VAWG and support their path toward safety, healing, and self-determination.

Angie Herrera

“O feminismo deve contemplar todas as mulheres, é necessário perceber que não dá pra lutar contra uma opressão e alimentar outra”

Djamila Ribeiro.

LAWA AND OUR IMPACT DURING THE LAST YEAR

We are a Latin American by and for organisation with over 36 years of experience supporting Latin American women and women from other Global Majorities survivors of gender-based violence through specialist, culturally and trauma informed services. At LAWA, we proudly run the only refuges in the UK and Europe for Latin American women where we provide safety to those fleeing domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence.

Alongside our refuge accommodation, we offer a comprehensive range of services including our Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Advice Centre; counselling services in Portuguese; Spanish and English; and run community-based programmes for women and their children. We also advocate for systemic change, focusing on the intersection of homelessness and domestic violence to ensure Latin American women's voices are represented in policy and decision-making.

Last year we directly supported 1,116 women and children through over 5,900 interventions from the Latin American community and from other global majorities. We are widely recognised within the community that we serve, and we are always looking for ways to improve and support our service users with their needs as best as we can. The voices of our service users shape our service and showcase the importance of our work. From the feedback form last year, we have collected the following information:

98.1% of the women who answer the form said it made a difference that the service was available in a Latin American/black and minority ethnic led women's organisation.

93% of women stated that the advice provided helped them increase their knowledge about their rights, options and services in the UK.

93% of women said they feel more confident.

100% women said they felt supported by their therapist.

91% of the women said they would never consider going back to their previous, abusive relationship.

100% of women felt safe and secure in LAWA's refuge.

20% of our service users went to a generic service before arriving at LAWA and highlight the importance of a service that is trauma informed and culturally appropriate.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN AT LAWA: WHO ARE THEY AND WHAT ARE THEIR INTERSECTING NEEDS?

Our service users are women who face additional challenges when seeking support, mainly due to the intersecting disadvantages they experience. The *overlap of different aspects of their identity* – such as race, ethnicity, immigration status, language, and economic situation – creates multiple layers that can severely limit their access to support.

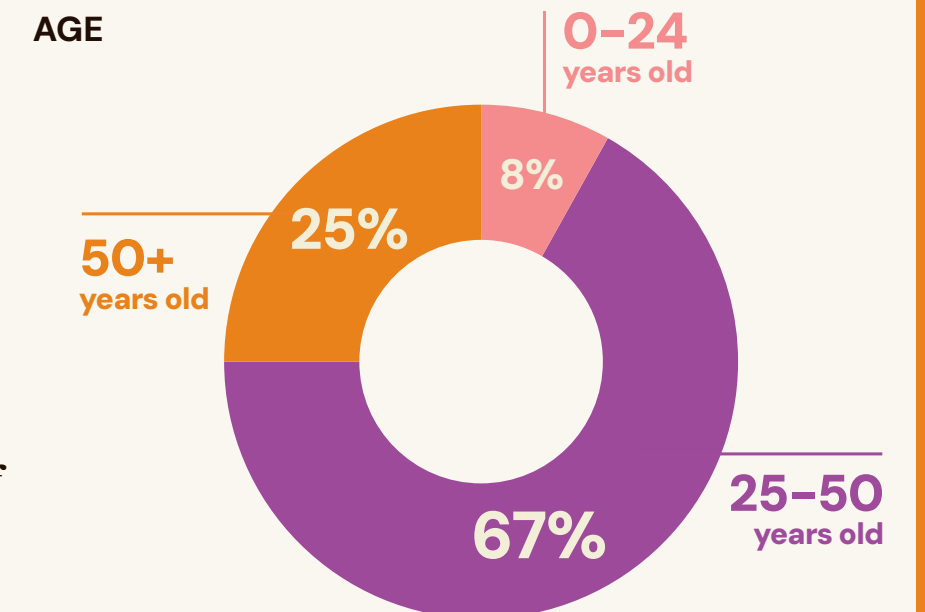
Over the past year, we have witnessed a lack of support for interpretation services, alongside a hostile anti-immigration climate and a sharp rise in the cost of living. This crisis has left many women increasingly dependent on their perpetrators, while the violence dynamics of coercive control is still largely ignored by those in power and often prevent women from accessing education or employment. These intersecting forms of discrimination, rooted in racist and patriarchal structures, continue to intensify survivor's vulnerability and complicate their situations. As a result, countless women are forced to remain in unsafe environments, further entrenching institutional violence.

The data we collected highlights the epidemic of domestic violence and sheds light on the experiences of Latin American women and women from the global majority whose cases are often overlooked or insufficiently recognised by mainstream services. This underscores the need for specialist, trauma-informed responses that acknowledge the compounded impact of financial abuse, migration status, and systemic exclusion, amongst other. Our commitment is to ensure that LAWA remains a safe and inclusive space, free from judgement, where women and children can access the support they need.

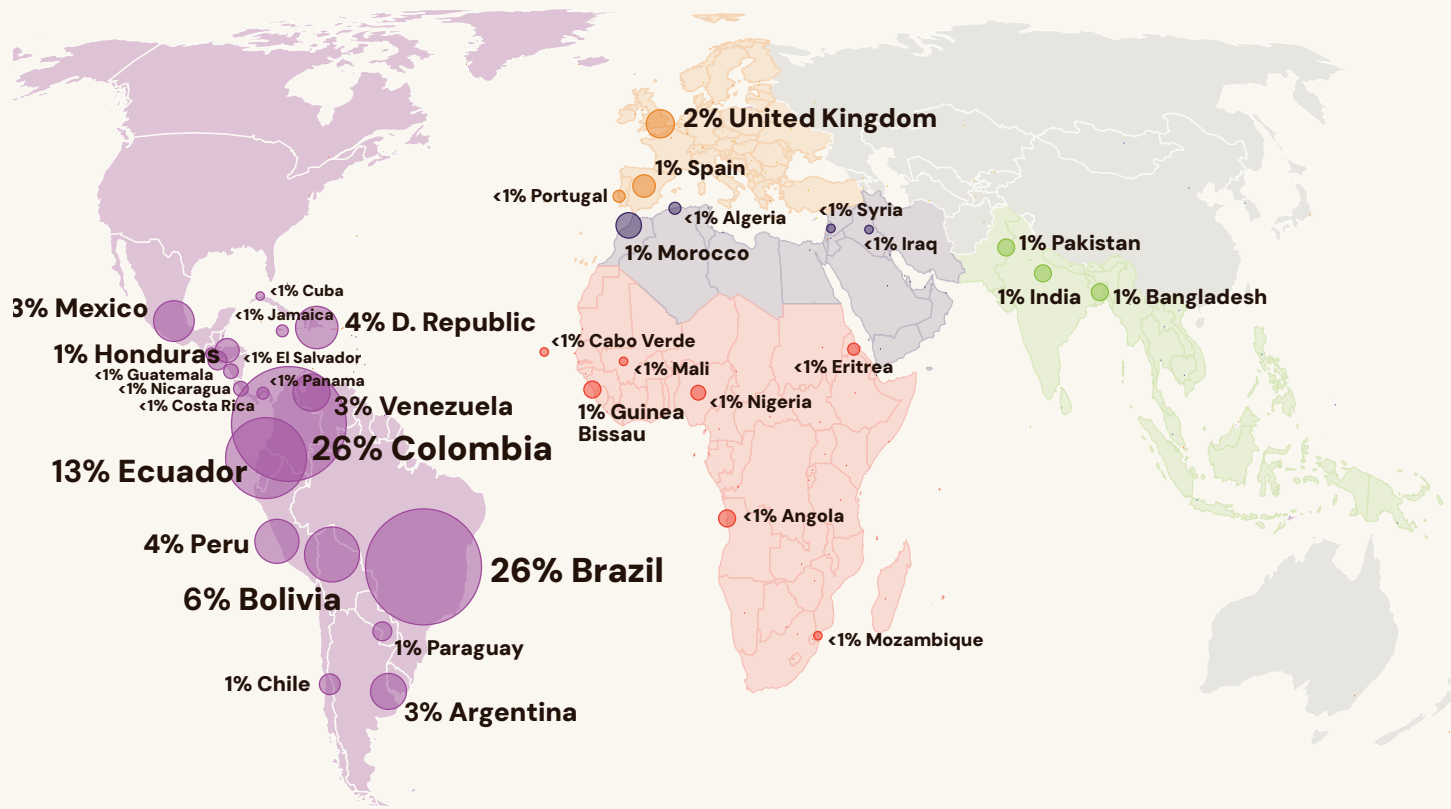
OUR SERVICE USERS

Over the past year, women from over 20 countries accessed our services, most of them were from *Brazil* (26%) and *Colombia* (26%), followed by *Ecuador* (13%).

The majority were aged between 25 and 50 (67%), and an increasing number of over 50 participation (25%).



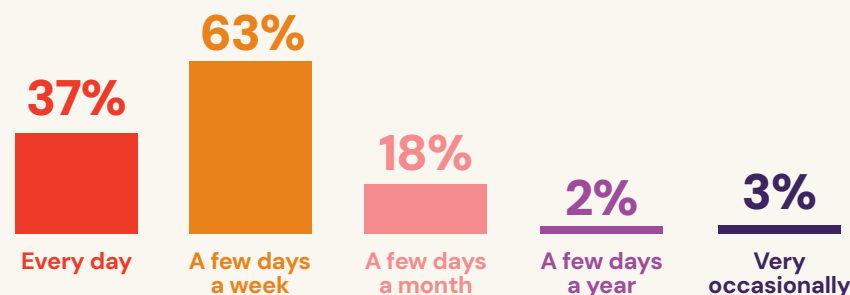
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



EXPERIENCES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Throughout their journey at LAWA, survivors learn about the different types of abuse and how these can manifest. As their confidence grows, victims begin to open up more, often recognising other forms of abuse in their relationships, eventually additional details and experiences of abuse also come to surface. 99% of the women that arrive at LAWA experienced more than one type of abuse, most of them as often as shockingly few days a week (63%) or even daily (37%).

FREQUENCY OF ABUSE

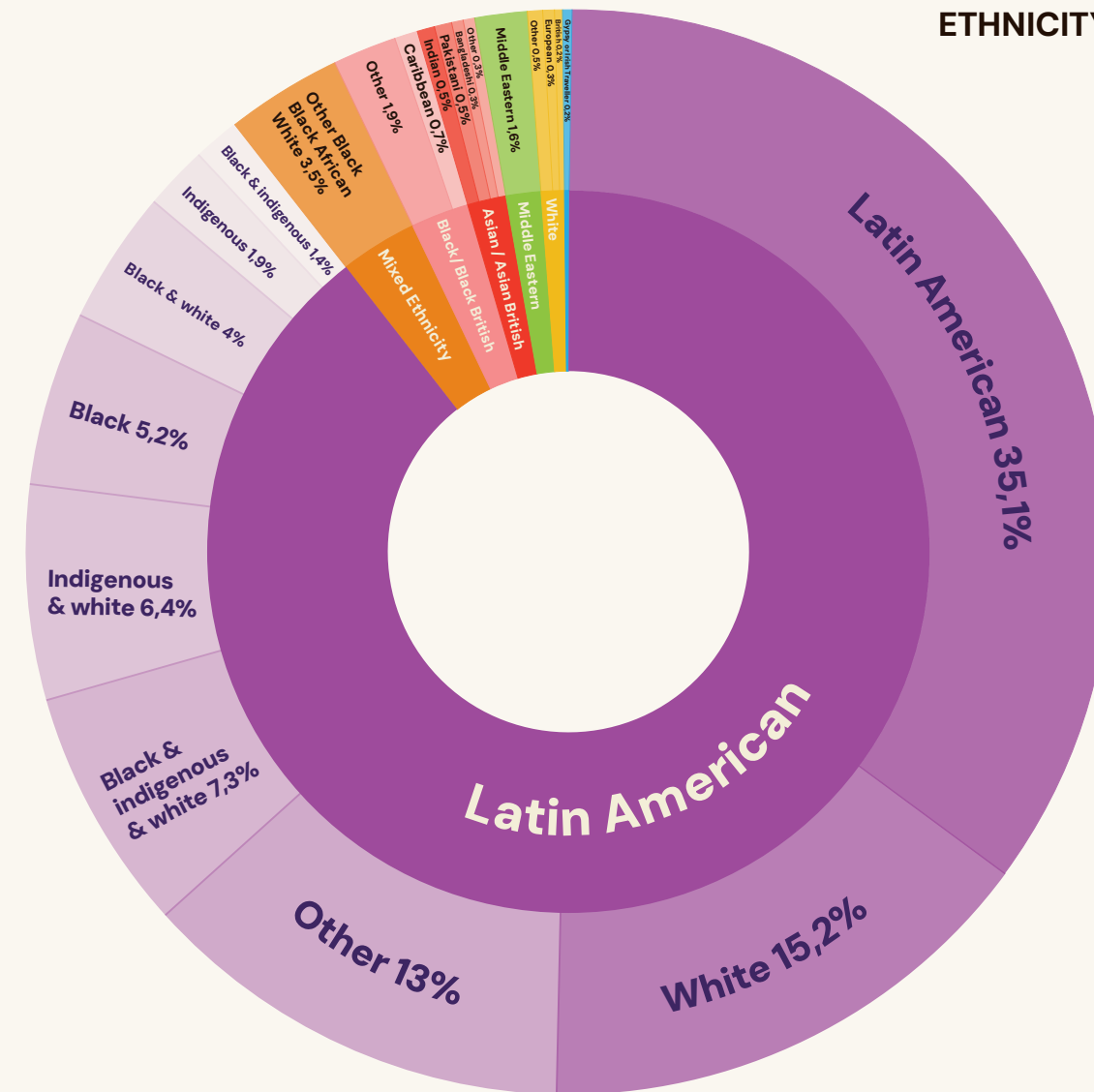


Verbal and Emotional/psychological abuse were reported by all the victims answering the feedback form. These are also the most frequently reported type of abuse suffered by the victims: Verbal abuse was reported by 55% of the victims, followed by Emotional/ psychological (46%) and physical abuse (36%).

The dynamic of gender-based violence includes Coercive control –reported by 30% of the survivors. It is one of the most difficult forms of abuse to identify, which often prolongs the experience of abuse. Coercive control makes hard for the victim to access further education or employment, trapping them in a cycle of violence and unable to get help.

When it comes to identity, in addition to Latin American women, we supported women from other global majority identities, including Black, Indigenous, White, Asian, and mixed identities. The majority of the women who came to LAWA self-identified as Latin American (84%) –35% of them identified solely as Latin American, while others specified their Black, Indigenous, White, or mixed identities-. In addition, LAWA also welcomed women from other minoritised ethnicities, such as Asian, Black, Gypsy, or Middle Eastern backgrounds (16%).

ETHNICITY



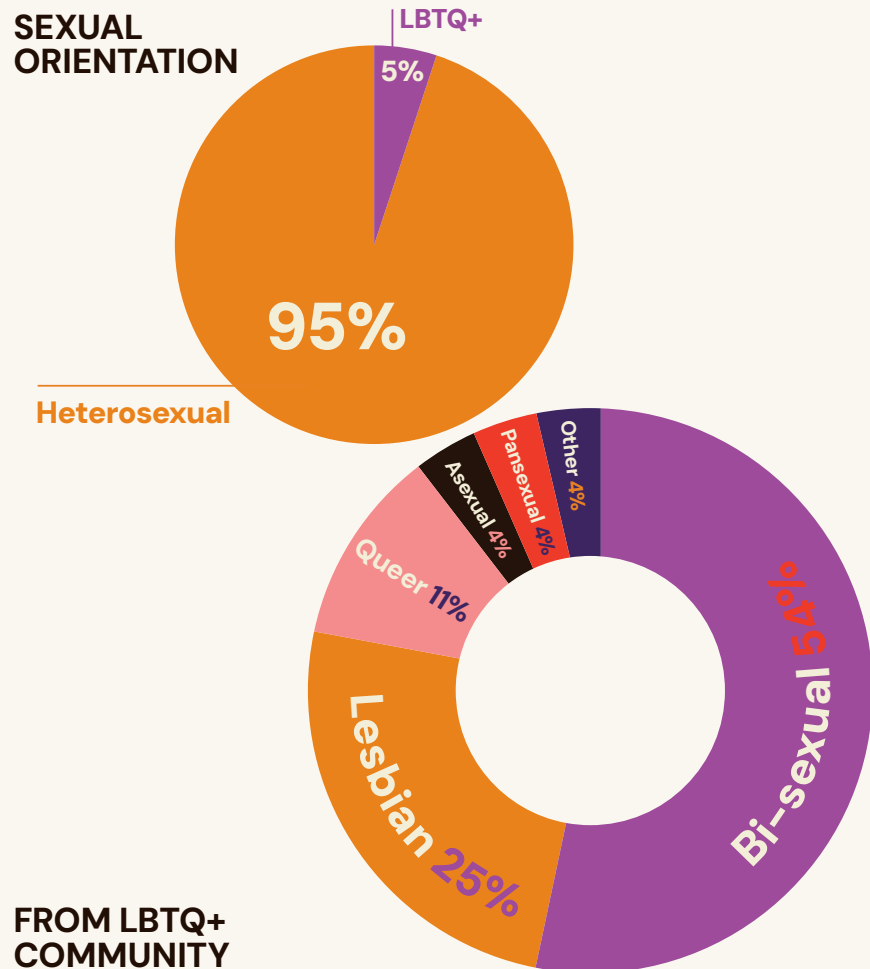
TYPE OF VIOLENCE	%
Verbal	55%
Emotional/ psychological abuse	46%
Physical	36%
Financial abuse	34%
Coercive control	30%
Imposed isolation	21%
Sexual abuse	18%
Use of immigration status to exert control	17%
Attempted or threatened murder	13%
Neglect	9%
Stalking	8%
Domestic servitude	6%
Use of sexuality to exert control	6%
Honour Based Violence	6%
Food deprivation	4%
Obstruction of English language development	4%
Online/digital abuse	4%
Use of religion to exert control	4%
Sexual harassment	3%
Spiritual	3%
Imprisonment	2%
Sexual exploitation	2%
Trafficking	1%
Abdominal injuries during pregnancy	1%
Miscarriage/ still birth as a consequence of abuse	1%
Forced Marriage Gang related abuse	1%
Female Genital Mutilation	0.4%
Forced abortion	0.4%
Use of transgender identity/ perceived identity to exert control	0.4%
Prostitution	0.2%

CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS

One common form of coercive control is financial abuse. This year, the financial vulnerability of the women arriving at LAWA remains deeply concerning, about 1 each 3 (34%) women were financially dependent of the abuser. 78% of women reported to be economically struggling when they came to us. In addition, 51% of our service users had no recourse to public funds (NRPF), meaning they were excluded from vital state support at a time of urgent need.

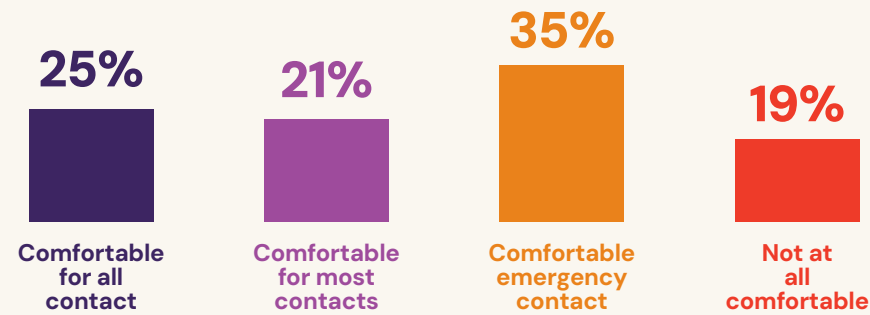
These financial pressures are not separate from the violence the survivors experience, in fact, they are part of what keeps women trapped in abusive situations. Without income, housing, or access to benefits, many are forced to remain with their perpetrators out of fear of destitution.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

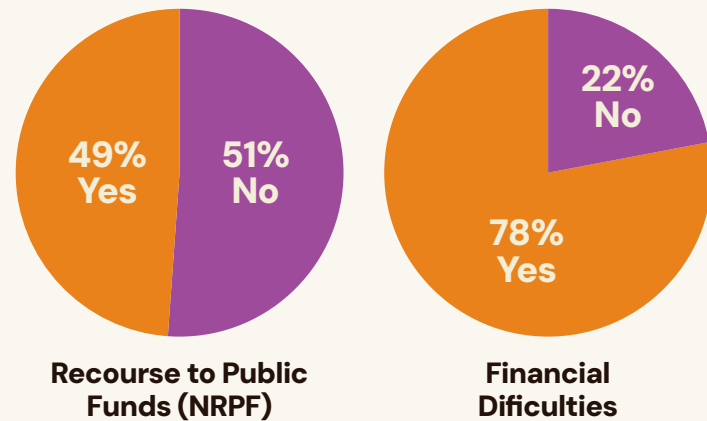


FROM LBTQ+ COMMUNITY

CONFORTABLE WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE



FINANCIAL HARDSHIP



SEXUAL ORIENTATION DIVERSITY

While the vast majority of LAWA's service users identify themselves as heterosexual, this year, 6% of the women we supported were from the LBTQ+ community, out of which the majority were transwomen. This highlights the importance of recognizing that gender-based violence exist within the community, and that LBTQ+ women often face additional layers of structural discrimination and social stigma, which can further isolate them from support services.

In response, LAWA has continued to develop its LBTQ+ specialist services and strengthen outreach efforts. By participating in community events and raising awareness about our support, we aim to build trust and ensure LBTQ+ women feel safe, seen, and understood.

PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY



WOMEN AGAINST HOMELESSNESS AND ABUSE (WAHA)

Through its specialist housing advice and advocacy service, WAHA has continued to establish itself as a leading voice at the intersection of Housing and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in the UK. In the past year, we provided direct support to 105 women through 353 interventions, and indirectly impacted over 300 women. This work has not only expanded access to housing for survivors but also increased the visibility of Global Majority women's needs within the housing and the VAWG sectors at both local and national levels. We have actively influenced a range of stakeholders, ensuring that the voices of the women from our community are central to policy and service design.

WAHA Case study

Migrant survivors of domestic violence often face systemic barriers in accessing housing, largely driven by misinformation and bias. Rubia, a 48-year-old woman from Ecuador, experienced this firsthand when she and her four-year-old daughter were left without safe housing for nearly a month due to repeated failures by local authorities.

Although Rubia was receiving Universal Credit, she was wrongly told she might not qualify for support, and her immigration status was questioned multiple times. With limited literacy and no English, she was offered no interpreter, which delayed her assessment. We submitted a homelessness application and made frequent calls on her behalf, but emergency accommodation was consistently denied. In the meantime, Rubia and her

daughter were forced to spend nights in shopping centres, snack bars, and police stations. It took three weeks, two formal complaints, and nearly 20 calls before the council finally recognised their situation and provided appropriate support. Today, Rubia and her daughter are in temporary housing. She is studying, and her daughter is thriving at school. Yet, the trauma remains. As Rubia said, they were "treated with such contempt by those who should have protected my daughter."

As part of our commitment to sector-wide knowledge sharing, we launched Intersectionality as a Practice: LAWA's roadmap to address Black and Minoritised survivors' housing needs. This resource outlines our housing work and provides strategies for securing housing that supports healing and long-term recovery. The publication received strong recognition across the sector and was featured at the AWRC Housing Conference in March 2025, where LAWA was invited to participate alongside the Domestic Abuse commissioner to discuss alternatives for survivors to access safe housing.

This is why domestic violence must be recognised as a housing issue. Most women in these situations are forced to leave their homes, and healing cannot begin without a safe, stable place to rebuild. With better information about immigration rights and a trauma-informed approach, local authorities could offer survivors the dignity and protection they deserve.

Visit WAHA site for more information.



OUR SERVICES



REFUGE AND EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

This year, we supported a total of **68 women to access safe emergency accommodation** in our three refuges across London. In anticipation of a significant LAWA milestone, acquiring our own refuge, we scaled our operations this year to three sites. **Amongst these 68 cases, we completed 875 interventions.**

Specialist 'by and for' services like LAWA fill critical and systematic gaps left by under-resourced statutory systems, especially for racially minoritised and migrant women. However, the growing inadequacy of these systems has increased pressure on our team, requiring more complex and intensive support. It highlights both the critical role that specialist services play and the urgent need for sustained investment in culturally appropriate, community-led provision.

This trend has caused an increase in overall time in refuge to 7-9 months, which is typically 1-3 months longer than usual. Some of this has been related to poor mental health service provision, where our SU's don't meet the threshold for a Care Coordinator or other supported accommodation specialized in mental health, but have also been left too ill affected by the abuse they've suffered that they are struggling greatly to live independently or with less support than that of the refuge. Alongside long waiting lists for appropriate services like trauma therapies, this means longer stays and more impact on our work.

Evidence of the good service that our team has given to these women is in that 100% of them stated that they felt supported by the case worker which was assigned to them. Additionally, 100% of them felt safe and secure in the refuge.

The opening of our new refuge, which is wholly owned by LAWA, marks a major step in our commitment to supporting Latin American and other minoritised women. It expands our capacity to provide safe, culturally sensitive, and trauma-informed support to more women and children fleeing domestic violence, while strengthening our role as a vital 'by and for' service responding to rising demand.

FAMILY SUPPORT WORK

Our family support work service saw **42 cases this year, completing a total of 301 interventions.** Alongside our refuge caseworkers, our CYP service provides an essential support to mums and children, helping them to process their experiences of violence and ensuring they heal as a collective, as a family unit.

There has also been additional pressure on this service, with cases of Child Sexual Abuse being more common in the refuges this year. The severity and complexity of these cases have driven us to explore innovative ways of working and invest in the continuous development of our staff's knowledge and skills. Additionally, we've experienced a rise in cases involving neurodivergence and non-verbal communication, emphasizing the importance of expanding our expertise in these areas.

In our sessions with the children, our CYP workers employ a variety of techniques tailored to the needs of each child. Drawing from play therapy tools, storytelling,

art and movement therapy, sand box, and other psychological methods, we provide a nurturing environment for children to navigate complex emotions that are often perceived as "difficult" or "negative". Our workers also utilize projective psychological tests to determine the most effective approach for each individual case. Recognizing that every child's experience with violence and trauma is different, we prioritize an individualized focus, creating adaptable support plans designed to evolve as the child's needs change. This personalized approach ensures that each child receives relevant support for their specific circumstances. 100% of the women who stayed with children manifested their children felt comfortable with the family support worker, and that it was a valuable learning experience for them.

Case study

Linda is a 34-year-old Dominican woman who has two children, Alice and Francisco. Whilst visiting her cousin in the UK, although living in Spain, she met a mutual friend. After some months of talking and visiting one another, she moved to the UK to properly start a relationship. At the time, he was living with flatmates, and he would prohibit her from speaking to any of them and began getting very jealous of anything she did.

She convinced him to move somewhere on their own and was able to bring her son, Francisco who at the time was still in Spain. He began bullying Francisco and behaving very differently within a month. He verbally abused both Linda and Francisco – going from this to outright racist remarks towards both. Linda was coerced into stopping her contraceptives and fell pregnant. The verbal abuse got worse at this time and after Alice was born, he put cameras in the house to control her and track her. Alice was diagnosed with Autism, and he would blame Linda for this. The abuse towards Francisco got so bad that Linda sent Francisco back to Spain to protect him as his mental health was deteriorating.

Linda fled her house twice during the relationship, but thought she had no options to move forward and ended up returning. The abuse began escalating and he would drink alcohol which made the abuse worse, she had to call the police. She fled a third time, and he started harassing her and either love bombing her or verbally abusing her. She contacted LAWA and was quickly assessed and accepted for a refuge space.

Linda's ex was committing digital abuse, trying to track her whereabouts and get into her accounts by any means necessary, so her location was compromised. LAWA staff acted quickly and moved her to a different refuge for safety. She was also supported to secure her digital safety, including emails, banking, and phone account. Given the increased risk, she was also supported to apply for a Non-Molestation Order, where our support workers acted as her McKenzie friend to do a without notice application. She was then supported to access Legal Aid and a solicitor who could help her continue with this legal process. She was supported to maximize her benefits and gain an understanding of how the system works, as previously the perpetrator did everything on behalf of the family, leaving Linda in the dark about her own information.

She was also given a lot of emotional support, as she was incredibly anxious and fearful of being found due to all these experiences. For further emotional support, she was also referred to our counselling service. Her daughter Alice had sessions with our CYP worker as did Linda, and there was a clear change in the child's anxiety of being without mum, her development of language skills as Alice is up to now non-verbal, and her comfort with others.

Linda is a resourceful and strong woman and shortly after achieving these things, realised she was ready for the next step. We supported her in making a homeless application and she made plans for her son to come back to the UK, so she could be reunited with her whole family unit. After she went to Temporary Accommodation, she was supported to settle into her new household and apply for necessary bills, grants, and transfer of services. Linda stated that being in the refuge was "the best experience she's been through in her life" and that she feels calm and ready for what's next.



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS ADVICE CENTRE

Over the past year, *the Advice Centre supported 417 women survivors of gender-based violence through 2,887 interventions, showing a slight decrease from last year as we see that cases of migrant women have growing complex needs and demand more case time for successful outcomes.*

Migrant women continue to face increasing challenges after fleeing abusive relationships, such as longer waits for emergency accommodation, access to benefits, and inadequate support from statutory services. Commonly, women fleeing GBV are in unsuitable accommodation that require our caseworkers to advocate for adequate living conditions. The lack of supporting bridging language needs from councils and the police make women unaware of their process, being distress and needing LAWA to fulfil those needs. Social services often provide incorrect advice, especially in cases involving NRPf (No Recourse to Public Funds), pushing women toward unsuitable services to avoid financial responsibility, pushing them for insecure immigration pathways that could lead for their removal of the country. The Advice Centre team has increased number of complaints to statutory services due to their continuous systemic failures and the need of community solicitor's interventions. As a result, there is a constant eroding trust in support services for migrant women. Sadly, women located in hotels are in fear of accessing that type of accommodation due to past riots.

In recent weeks, several emerging cases of modern slavery have been identified, primarily involving women exploited in domestic work, sex work, and elderly care, this highlights the vulnerability of migrant women in informal caregiving roles.

Recent interactions with housing services have raised serious concerns about the lack of trauma-informed approaches when supporting women fleeing domestic violence. There is a knowledge gap from council to understand the financial and systemic barriers faced by destitute migrants survivors of domestic violence, which can further traumatise vulnerable women seeking safety and support.

Despite challenges, there have been positive developments: police response time have improved, and domestic violence cases are being processed more efficiently through the CPS in Court, showing that crimes related to GBV are finally starting to be taken slightly more seriously by the police.

The general advice drop-in service supported 312 individuals through 596 interventions, addressing a wide range of needs. Key areas of support included pension and benefits assistance, help with utility billing issues, and guidance for those facing eviction under Section 21. The team also partner with IRMO in order to provide support for E-Visa applications, navigating challenges such as tight deadlines, and limited access to in-person or language-specific assistance from other services.



IMMIGRATION

The Immigration Service continues to provide immigration support to migrant women who are victims of domestic abuse, helping them access their legal right to remain in the UK independently of their abusive partners or spouses. Under the UK's immigration rules, we have secured settlement for many survivors of domestic violence and their dependent children. Similarly, under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), we have secured retained rights of residence and access to welfare benefits for women who arrived in the UK as joining family members. We continue to offer advice and information to the broader Latin American community through our immigration appointment booking service.

LBTQ+ SPECIALIST SUPPORT

This year, we had a growing number of lesbian women fleeing domestic abuse from family members. Most of them being young lesbians, starting to navigate their sexuality and having to endure lesbophobia in their houses. We noticed that harmful practices rooted in religious beliefs and honour in our community are strong in these cases and play a big part on the dynamic of violence endured by our clients. Bisexual women accessing our services are all fleeing violence from heterosexual relationships, and male violence, and we noticed that our services users are becoming more comfortable in sharing their sexuality with us due to our Outreach project, to ensure that LBTQ+ women are aware of our 'by and for' service.

This year we were able to deliver a LBTQ+ Awareness training to partner organisations and Local Authority as part of our

commitment to ensure safe spaces and appropriate responses. We reached an average of 400 people by attending events at Consulates and Conferences focused on LBTQ+ Domestic Abuse, panel discussions with the community, Black Pride UK and partnering up with community events focused on our LBTQ+ community as well as more broader community events. Through this work we keep breaking stigmas around the realities and intersections of being a LBTQ+ Migrant, we advocate for more safe spaces and professional awareness, specific risks and for the freedom to be who we are. At LAWA, we are proud to be a safe space for LBTQ+ Latinas.

Case study

Lucía, a young lesbian woman from Panama, fled her family home after disclosing her sexuality and presenting her partner to her mother and experiencing domestic abuse, lesbophobia and discrimination from her family. Lucía's mother started to emotionally, psychologically and physically abuse her, weaponizing her sexuality to exert control and power, as well as to isolate her from her sisters and family. Lucía's partner was also victim of the violence from Lucía's family.

At LAWA, Lucía was identified as being at high risk of further harm. The case was referred to a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for coordinated support and safeguarding interventions. Advocacy with police and support liaising with Police was needed to ensure that the violence was classified as Hate Crime alongside Domestic Abuse, to ensure that the experiences of both women were recognised and properly investigated, and that appropriate response and protection was given to them. They were advised and supported regarding any possible legal proceedings with the Crown Prosecution Service, and supported during police reports and statements.

Housing advocacy was urgently undertaken, leading to successful placement in safe, secure accommodation. This not only offered immediate physical safety but also allowed both survivors to begin the process of emotional recovery in an environment free from judgment or violence.

In addition to securing housing, ongoing emotional and psychological support was provided to help both individuals process the trauma they had endured. Safeguarding measures were coordinated with young people's services to ensure that their protection remained a priority. They received support and advice on welfare application and its process, to establish financial independence and stability.

Lucía and her partner are now living peacefully in their own home, being able to cope with day to day activities, engage with their community, work, being free of violence and free to be who they are.

Over the course of the last year, *the counselling department supported 125 women, offering 16 sessions to women from our refuges and 12 sessions to women from the advice centre. These were one to one session in person, online and by-phone to adapt to women's unique needs. Our counselling service is trauma informed and women centred approach.* We take into consideration the cultural background of the women, meaning that we understand that each woman's experiences, values, beliefs, and ways of expressing herself are influenced by her culture, religion, language, family structure, and social norms. Our counselling service is offered in Spanish, Portuguese and English. LAWA's counselling service acknowledges the impact of trauma on the woman's life, including the negative impact on the physical and mental health. Our mission is to support women in retaking control of their lives, to foster healing and to find hope for their future. Also, to provide a safe, supportive and non-judgmental space for women survivors. We provide a confidential space for women to think, reflect and to explore the violence they have suffered. We highlight the strengths and resilience that women have developed despite their traumatic experiences. Additionally, our service also incorporates an intersectional, approach which helps us to provide a better counselling support by offering a holistic understanding of women' overlapping identities (such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and

ability) and how these intersections influence their experiences.

Finally, our counselling has been expanding the support for women. From the end of last year, we are offering workshops for women in our community. Our main hope is to continue supporting these women to have a better understanding of the important of our mental health and general well-being. Also, for women to be able to connect with other women from our community, to create a sense of belonging and support between them. Besides the workshops, our counselling department continues assisting women to develop coping mechanism to cope more effectively with the aftermath of trauma, to have a better understanding of what happened to them and how they can continue to move forward with their life.

Case study

Marissa is a 38-year-old woman, she was born in Brazil and is a mother of two boys. The family arrived in the UK in 2022 seeking a better a financial opportunity since her partner had family here. The relationship between Marissa and her partner was already tense. He was not supportive raising the children. Marissa felt that she was doing most of the work at home alone. When he was not working, he was spending time with his friends outside home.

Once in the UK, the family went to live with the partner's cousin, who promised them support with finding a job and school for the children. The communication between the partner and Marissa became worse, he started to be verbally abusive towards her and in front of the children. Marissa and the children started to miss their country and family, as they did not speak English, the children were waiting to start school

and Marissa was not working. The verbal abuse started to escalate to psychological abuse, as the partner used to tell Marissa that she was not good enough to find a job and that she was not a good mother. Marissa soon started to realised that her partner's behaviour was getting worse and that she did not want to continue the relationship. However, he started to threaten her to send her back to Brazil without the children if she leaves him. Marissa started to feel fear as she was afraid of losing her children.

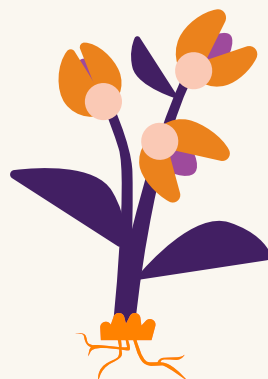
One day, Marissa went to the supermarket and came across a woman who was speaking Portuguese, and they started talking. Over time, they became friends, and Marissa shared the problems she was having with her partner. The friend told Marissa her experience at LAWA, and how the organisation helped her as she is a

survivor of domestic abuse. At first Marissa was hesitant to contact LAWA for help as she was afraid of her partner sending her back to Brazil.

Few days later, Marissa's partner came home drunk with his cousin. He became aggressive, wanting to continue drinking, but Marissa asked him to stop. He responded with physical violence. Marissa called her friend for support and spent the night at her house with the children, who were frightened and confused. The day after, Marissa made one of the most important decisions of her life: she contacted LAWA for support. With the help of a support worker, she was able to register her children at school and with a GP. Marissa began learning about her rights and how the system in the UK works.

She was also referred to our counselling service. Through therapy, Marissa began reconnecting with the woman she used to be in Brazil. Little by little, she started believing in herself again and regaining control over her life.

Marissa and the children continued living with her partner; however, over time, Marissa began working and became more independent from him. She was able to save money, and with support from LAWA and the support worker, she became more aware of her legal rights. Eventually, Marissa was able to leave the relationship and take the children with her. She shared that when she left the house, she felt like a "butterfly, free, empowered, and full of motivation to begin a new life with her children, free from violence".



OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT LAWA

GROWING TOGETHER PROGRAMME

The Growing Together programme remains a unique and vital initiative, continuing to attract new members, many of whom join through word of mouth. For many, it is a trusted space where they can connect with others and feel a sense of belonging.

With a membership list exceeding 100 people (67 of whom actively took part in this year's activities), the programme's impact is clear.

Launched in October 2019, the programme has become a cornerstone for older members of the community, offering meaningful opportunities to share their migration experiences. The programme continues to focus on reducing isolation and loneliness while encouraging friendship and solidarity. This year, we ran 187 activities, including weekly bingo, allotment visits, craft workshops, English and IT classes, and monthly birthday celebrations. These activities have not only strengthened community bonds but also supported members in building confidence and independence. This year also brought a moment of deep reflection, as the group came together to honour the life of a member who passed away (the first loss the group had experienced as a whole), deepening their sense of mutual care and support.

CHANGE MAKERS PROGRAMME

Change Makers is a programme that seeks to promote a sense of community and safety for migrant Latin American women in the UK. Through monthly gatherings guided by a feminist and collective learning framework, it aims to fight feelings of isolation, foster connection, and offer a platform for community building.

Over the past year, 59 Spanish-speaking women took part, engaging in sessions on motherhood, conflict resolution, intersectionality, mental health, and more. Alongside the adult group, our Chavitas programme for school-aged girls in Lambeth had 46 participants.

Together, we explored themes around well-being, autonomy, and connection with one's roots and identity, with self-determination as our guiding principle and ultimate goal.

This year, we carried out a total of 29 interventions, including external activities such as a visit to Kew Gardens and a Risograph workshop, where participants co-created a fanzine on migration. These complemented the regular monthly sessions, deepening collective experiences and community bonds. In March 2025, a volunteer from Brazil joined to help expand the programme to Portuguese-speaking communities from the Global South, adapting the sessions to meet their specific needs and realities.

VOLUNTEER AND INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

Our Volunteer programme continues to create meaningful opportunities for Latin American global majority women, addressing the inequalities they face in the job market while enabling them to contribute their skills to LAWA's work.

This year, our cohort of 19 volunteers was recognised as Volunteering Team of the Year by Voluntary Action Islington, in acknowledgment of their unwavering support across LAWA's core areas. We were also excited to introduce two new volunteer roles in Immigration Support and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL).

These roles have helped us grow our capacity and better respond to the increasing needs of our community. To celebrate their contribution and encourage community-building, we organised a group outing to The Royal Botanic Kew Gardens. Our volunteers continue to be essential to the delivery of our services; their dedication, insights and lived experience make a real difference across the organisation.

As part of our organisational development strategy, we have kept our internship programme, and over this reporting period, we welcomed two interns at our Advice Centre who later became staff members as case workers. We are proud to see this initiative meeting our goal of creating pathways for Latin American women to access and thrive in the job market, while also enabling them to build the skills and confidence to take on roles within the sector. Their contributions not only allowed us to expand our service capacity but also played a significant role in our achievements over the past year.



PARTNERSHIPS

LAWA takes part in different VAWG and housing spaces across the sector and, as part of this *we work in partnership with other organisations from the sector and the Latin American Community*. In these spaces we work to ensure that the needs of the women from our community are heard by the sector and other state institutions so that services can be improved, and women are being heard at the top level.

In this effort, we are part of the following spaces: VAWG Business Group and the Violence Against Women and Girls networking in Islington represented by the Samira Project, the Hackney Violence Against Women and Girls Practitioner Forum and VAWG Strategic Board in Hackney, and the Barnet Community Safety Partnership.



We also continue to be part of different partnerships for the provision of services:

OYA CONSORTIUM: The OYA Consortium is a Black and Minoritised refuge consortium integrated by LAWA and three sister organisations, Asha, Ashiana, and LBWP. All OYA members are 100% 'by and for' the communities we serve, which is a unique characteristic of the OYA Consortium. We offer an intersectional and Black feminist approach, and our support is provided in 10 different languages, covering Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, Persian, Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali and English. Individually, each organisation has at least 30 years of experience.

SAMIRA PROJECT: The Samira project is funded by Islington, led by IMECE and in partnership with KMEWO and LAWA. We have been providing services under this project for over 12 years, offering a specialist service for Black and Minoritised survivors in Islington.

CASA PROJECT: Funded by the GLA, the CASA project is a move on accommodation initiative in London that aims to offer supported accommodation to women who are ready to move out of refuge accommodation. For two years, women are supported to continue with their journey as they recover from the trauma and rebuild their lives. This is a Pan-London initiative.

CLAUK: CLAUK is a coalition of Latin American organisations from the voluntary sector that have come together to raise awareness and understanding of the issues facing the Latin American community in the UK and to provide a collective voice for and represent the collective interests of the Latin American community in the UK.

LONDON VAWG CONSORTIUM: LAWA is part of the largest London – violence against women and girls Consortium, a space widely known and established within the women's sector and with important influence work before London Councils, DLUHC, and GLA.

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