

LAWA

LATIN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S AID



Annual Report 2025-2026



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Produced by:
LAWA's staff and board of trustees

Cover photo:
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Illustrations:
Juan David Cadena and Celeste Barta

Photos:
LAWA's archive

Layout:
Latitud Estudio / latitudestudio.co

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Introduction

Message from our Chair

Gender-based violence continues to affect over 3 million women in the UK. For women from Latin American and other Global Majorities this is not the exception, but is compounded by additional challenges that increase these women's vulnerability. Over the last year, women coming to LAWA have continued experiencing barriers to access safety shaped by society, the law and policies and practices from different authorities influenced by the hostile environment against migrant communities. Considering these holistic needs, over the last year LAWA continued to provide trauma-informed and culturally sensitive lifeline support to over 1.000 women and children with over 7.000 interventions who accessed housing, immigration advice, safe accommodation, domestic violence advice, counselling, family support, and outreach.

LAWA has continued demonstrating to be a trusted safe space for women from our community who are recovering from abuse, a "space providing hope", as many of them have shared. In such a difficult context, LAWA has continued centering solidarity with the women we serve and showing determination and resilience when advocating for their rights, providing a caring environment with high quality and holistic support. Staff have continued to update their knowledge through training and engagement with different networks, and worked along service users to ensure the support provided responds to their evolving needs.

This upcoming year will be complex and unknown for our operations. As LAWA comes to the end of its 5-year strategy and its planning for the near future, we are seeing changes in the political landscape with the increase of far rights movements, and an rapid increase of anti-immigration and xenophobic narratives –some of them now from people in decision making spaces. We are seeing an institutional system that lacks capacity to respond effectively to the increase of gender-based violence and domestic violence against global majority communities, and their intersecting needs such as safe access to housing.

Working in this environment is challenging, yet our staff and volunteers continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience, commitment, and

adaptability in the face of ongoing changes. They work tirelessly alongside our service users, always placing their needs and best interests at the heart of everything they do. Through their commitment, they uphold and promote the values of social justice, sisterhood, and feminism that are central to LAWA. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to express our deepest gratitude for their unwavering commitment and invaluable contribution to LAWA's mission.

I also want to extend our gratitude to our funders, partners, and supporters who stand along with us and making our work possible. Your solidarity makes a difference in the lives of women and children that seek our support.

For the upcoming year, we will continue to work along women and children from Latin America and other Global Majorities and advocate for them to live a life free from violence and fear.

Susana Klien

"Over the last year LAWA continued to provide trauma-informed and culturally sensitive lifeline support to over 1.000 women and children with over 7.000 interventions who accessed housing, immigration advice, safe accommodation, domestic violence advice, counselling, family support, and outreach."

Message from our Director

This was supposed to be the final year of our five-year strategic plan. However, the incredibly rapidly changing environment in the UK makes long-term planning an almost impossible task. This country is not the same as it was two years ago, and everything suggests that it is unlikely to be the same in the next two. Instead of rushing into a new strategy, with our Board, we have decided to extend the current plan by one year while we take time to reflect on the impact that the rise of the far right is having—and may continue to have—on our community and on survivors of gender-based violence.

Sadly, as we continue the work of shaping this strategic direction, we have witnessed increasing violent attacks on migrant communities, while Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) continues to be weaponised as a tool for anti-migrant rhetoric. As I prepare this report, the Government has announced the rollout of the Early Prisoners Release scheme and is discussing a cruel Immigration and Asylum Bill, which is a clear example of how women, and specifically migrant women, continue to face the most difficult barriers to accessing support and services, and why organisations with an intersectional approach are vital to deliver this work.

Although we are aware of the immense challenges that lie ahead in front of us, I believe this organisation, and the work that we do, is the

“Even though it is not easy to continue this work in a racist and anti-migrant environment, we continue to learn from the resilience of the women we support.”

embodiment of hope. LAWA continues to provide a lifeline service for over 1.000 women and children every year, covering emergency accommodation, advice and advocacy, immigration, housing, counselling, community engagement, and policy work. Even though it is not easy to continue this work in a racist and anti-migrant environment, we continue to learn from the resilience of the women we support, and we will keep working to provide a safe space for them to turn to.

This report is evidence of this work. It shows not only the impact of what we have accomplished this year, but also the amazing efforts of our staff and volunteers, who strive every day to support service users and achieve the best possible outcomes for them, always going above and beyond. In 2027, as we start implementing our new strategy, we will strive to honour the work of all the Latin American women that came before us and built our organisations, so we can continue standing alongside racialised women and children, working to end VAWG and support their path towards safety, healing, and self-determination.

Angie Herrera



LAWA and our impact during the last year

Since 1988, we have been providing specialist by and for services to Latin American women and women from other Global Majority communities affected by gender-based violence. As the only refuges in the UK and Europe run by and for Latin American women, we provide safe, culturally specific and trauma-informed support to women and children fleeing domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence.

We also offer a wide range of services including our Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Advice Centre, counselling in Spanish, Portuguese and English, and community-based programmes for women and children. Through initiatives such as Change Makers and Growing Together, we continue creating spaces of safety, support, connection and empowerment across the community. We also promote systemic change by addressing the intersection of homelessness and domestic violence, advocating for the Latin American women’s experiences and perspectives to be represented in policy and decision-making.

This past year, we supported 1146 women and children from Latin American and other Global Majority communities through 8885 interventions across our services. As a grassroots organisation, we are deeply rooted in the communities we serve and widely recognised as a trusted source of support for women experiencing violence, isolation and insecurity.

Listening to our service users is central to our work and to our understanding of women-centred support, which we see grounded in ensuring women feel safe, respected and listened to, while supporting their autonomy, strengthening trust, and providing culturally specific support that responds to their individual experiences and needs. Through regular feedback and outcome monitoring, we continue improving our services to ensure our support responds to this in meaningful and compassionate ways.

Alongside the feedback, we also track measurable change in women’s wellbeing and safety through regular outcomes monitoring, comparing scores at the start and end of their support. This year, the biggest shifts were in women’s knowledge of their rights (with 74% of women improving their knowledge) and their confidence to ask for help when they need it (with 65% improving). 60% of women also reported feeling safer. For children, the clearest improvement was in social integration (70% improving).

Through the feedback, we identified the following impact over the last year:



Women and children at LAWA: who are they and what are their intersecting needs?

The women and children who access our services at LAWA are people who constantly face barriers when seeking support, rooted in their intersecting characteristics such as class, ethnicity, race, gender, language and immigration status, amongst others. These intersecting factors, shaped by a racist and patriarchal system, leave them highly vulnerable and at a significant disadvantage.

Over the past year, the hostile anti-migrant environment that has been building over the recent years has intensified significantly. This has been reflected in growing support for far-right populist movements across the UK, alongside increasingly restrictive immigration policies, which has heightened uncertainty and vulnerability for our service users. Women often arrive to our services with increased levels of vulnerability shaped by their experiences of abuse and their experience with reaching out to the system.

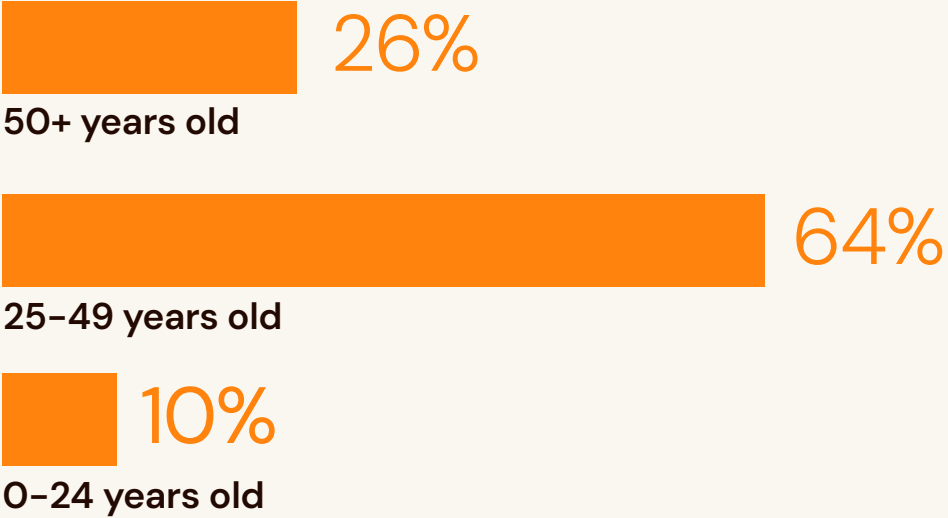
The data collected offers an important picture of the women and children who turn to LAWA for support. Behind every statistic is a person navigating a hostile system that disowns their experiences. These findings reinforce the importance of specialist, trauma-informed and culturally sensitive services that recognise the service user's needs and realities. Our commitment remains to ensure that LAWA is a safe, inclusive and non-judgmental space where every woman and child feels heard, believed and supported.



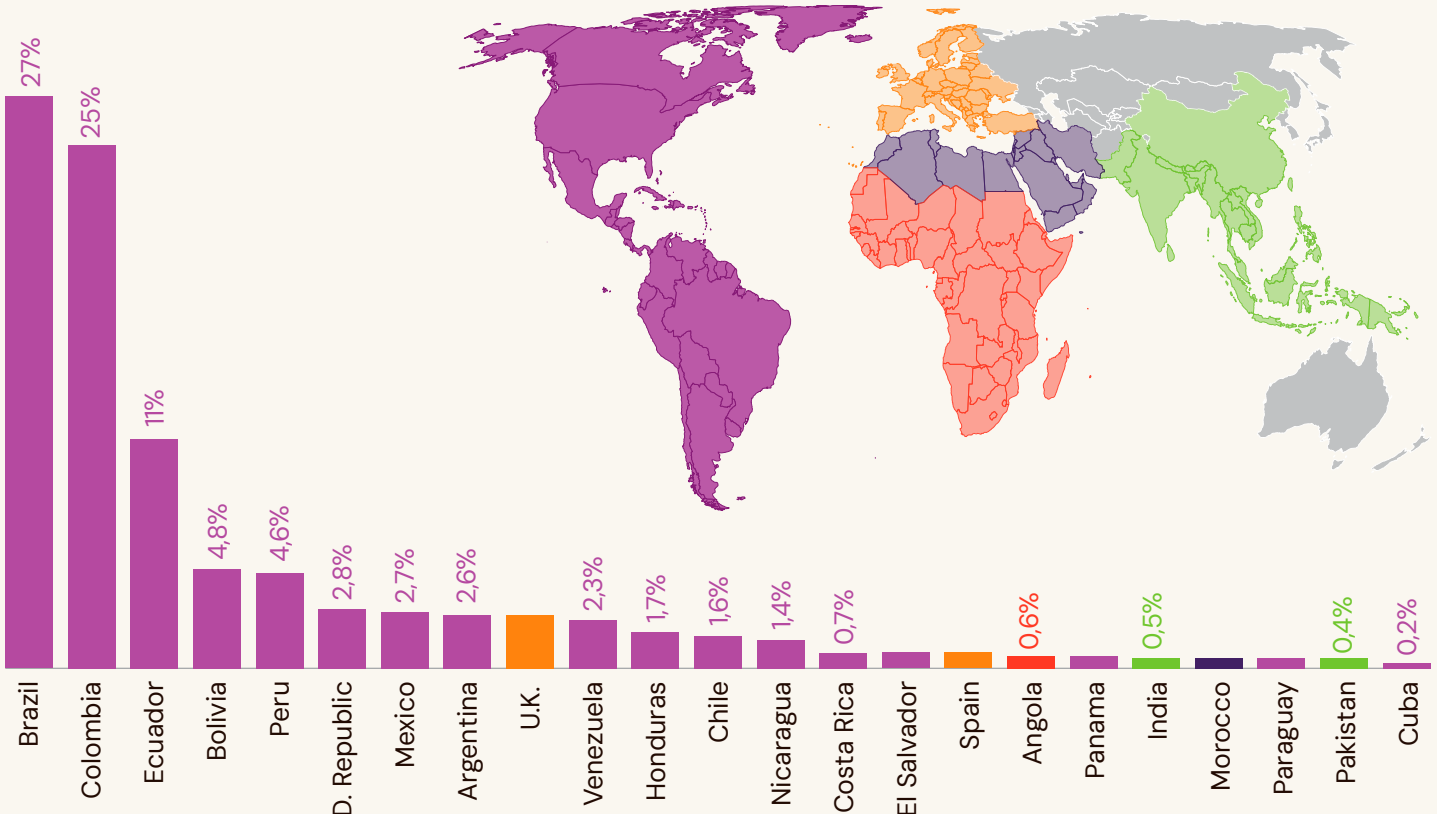
Our Service Users

Over the course of 2025–2026, we provided support to women and children from around **50 countries**. The majority were of Latin American origin, with the largest numbers coming from **Brazil (27%)** and **Colombia (25%)**.

Ages varied considerably, with women aged between 25 and 49 predominating (64%).

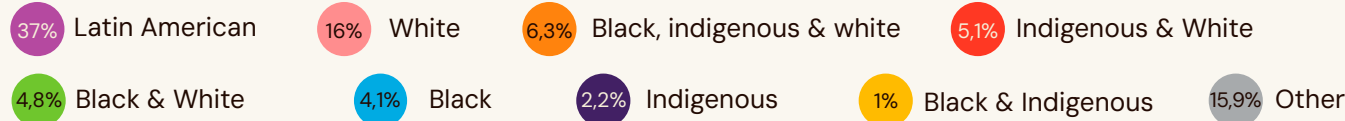


Country of origin



Ethnicity

92% Latin American



1,9% Black / Black British



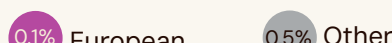
1% Arab (Middle Eastern/North Africa)



1,3% Asian / Asian British



0,6% White



0,1%Gypsy or Irish Traveller



2,1% Mixed Ethnicity (Other Black / White)

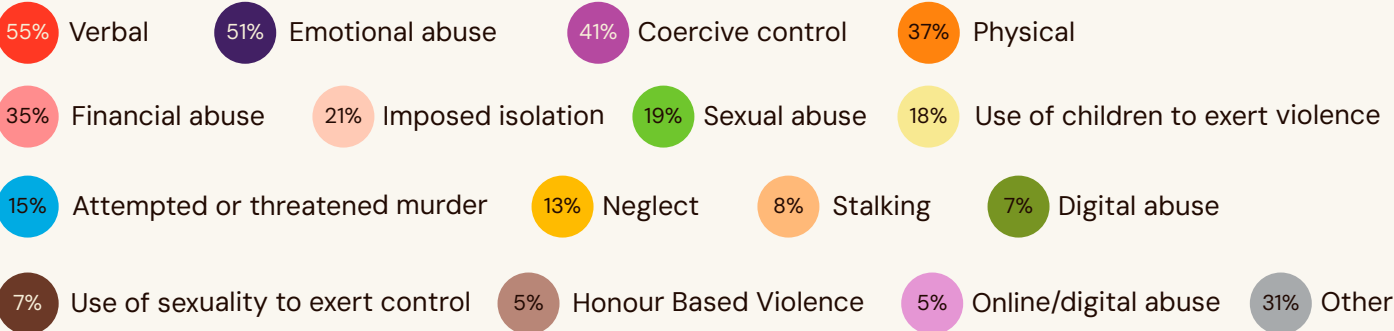
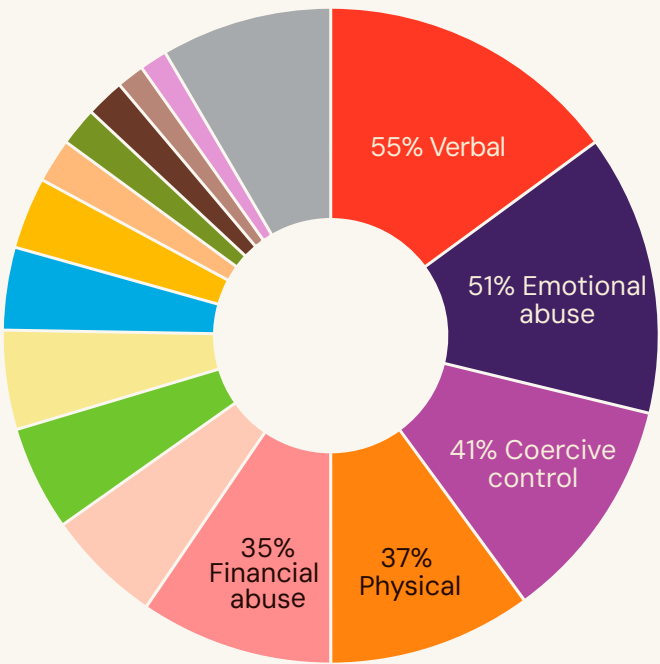


This diversity extended beyond nationality and was also reflected in their ethnicity. Most women identified as **Latin American (92%)**. While **37% described their ethnicity solely as Latin American**, many others reported specific ethnic identities, including Black, Indigenous, White, mixed ethnicity and other backgrounds. Women from other global majority ethnic groups, including Asian, Arab, Black, and Gypsy communities, represented the remaining 8% of service users.

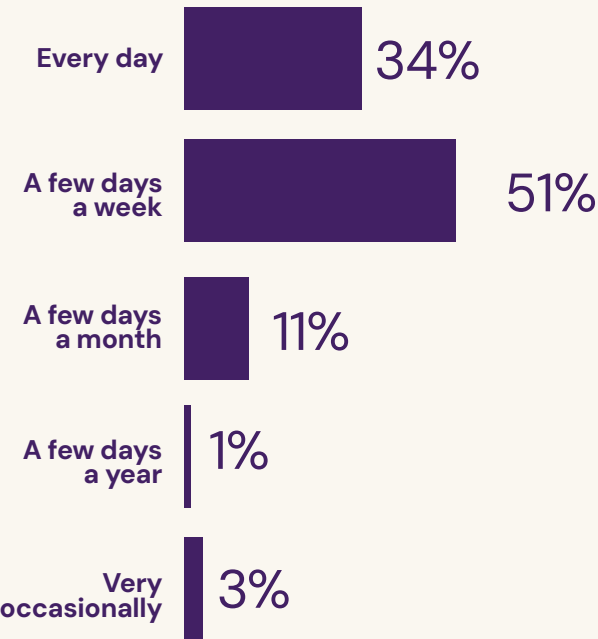
Experiences of gender-based violence

Many women had the opportunity to learn how to identify the different types of abuse and the many ways in which it manifests during their journey at LAWA. In this way, we were able to identify more than 30 types of abuse that they had survived, as well as the alarming frequency with which they experienced them, with some days a week (51%) being the most common, followed by daily (34%).

Women accessing our services typically experience three or more forms of abuse. The percentage for each type of abuse represents the proportion of all women supported by LAWA who have experienced that specific form of abuse. As many women experience multiple forms of abuse, percentages will overlap and may total more than 100%.

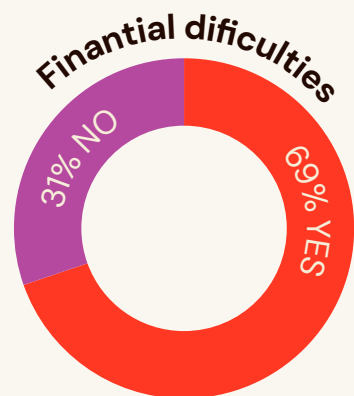
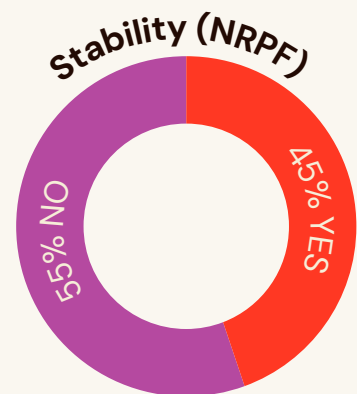


Frequency of abuse



97% of the survivors were victims of more than one type of abuse, and as in previous years, the majority were abused verbally (55%), emotionally (51%), physically (37%), financially (35%), and sexually (19%). Coercive control (41%) once again stood out as one of the most frequent forms of abuse, which is concerning, as it is one of the most difficult types of abuse to identify and can significantly limit women’s ability to seek support, thereby prolonging their experience of abuse. In addition, imposed isolation (35%) and the use of children to exert violence (18%) were also frequently reported.

These figures highlight the epidemic of domestic violence that the UK is facing, and sheds light on its effects on women from Latin American and other Global Majority backgrounds, an issue that requires urgent attention. At LAWA we work alongside women through our services and advocacy efforts.



Financial hardship

Many women arrived at LAWA facing high levels of economic vulnerability, a circumstance that often becomes an additional barrier to leaving an abusive relationship, as the fear of becoming homeless, losing their income or losing access to food can force survivors to stay with their abuser for longer. In fact, economic abuse continued to be one of the most common forms of coercive control.

During this period 69% of the women reported being in financial difficulty when they began their support process with LAWA. Furthermore, 55% of the service users did not have access to public funds (NRPF), which excluded them from essential state benefits and support at times of particular need.

Cultural and Language Barriers

Global Majority communities in the United Kingdom face significant linguistic and cultural barriers that hinder their integration and, consequently, limit their access to services, support and opportunities. These barriers also affect the women and children who access our services at LAWA, exacerbating the vulnerable situation in which they already find themselves due to other factors.

The data collected shows that a significant proportion of our service users reported feeling uncomfortable communicating in English (21%), or that they could only manage this language in emergency situations (35%), and the majority (59%) stated that they require interpreting support.

Recognising the intersection of the multiple dimensions of identity that intertwine and overlap has been fundamental to our work at LAWA. This reality highlights the need for comprehensive services which, in addition to providing language support, incorporates a culturally sensitive approach that helps to reduce the barriers and burdens associated with being a woman from a Global Majority community in the UK seeking support.

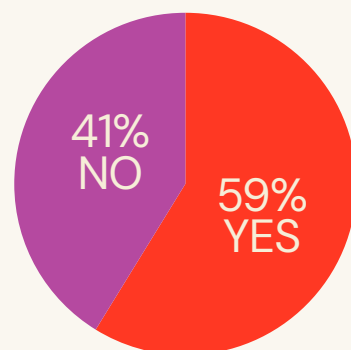
Comfortable for all contact 25%

Comfortable for most contacts 19%

Comfortable for emergency contacts 35%

Not at all comfortable 21%

Interpreter required



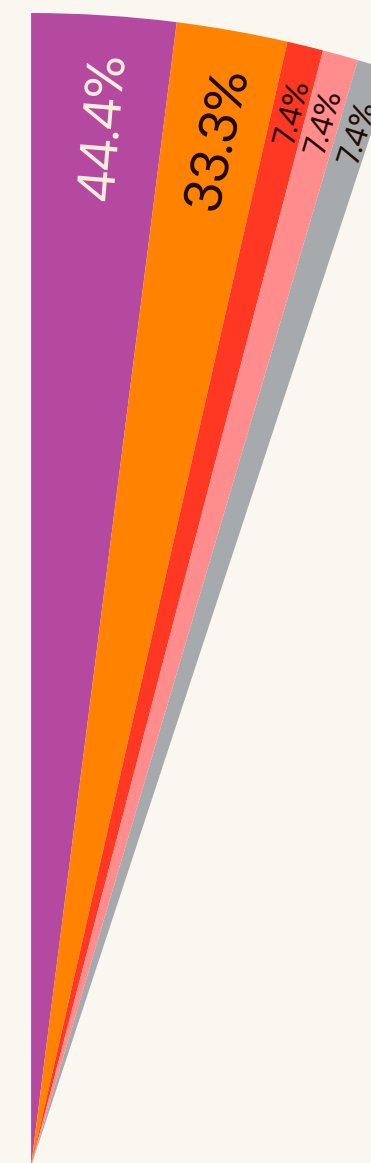
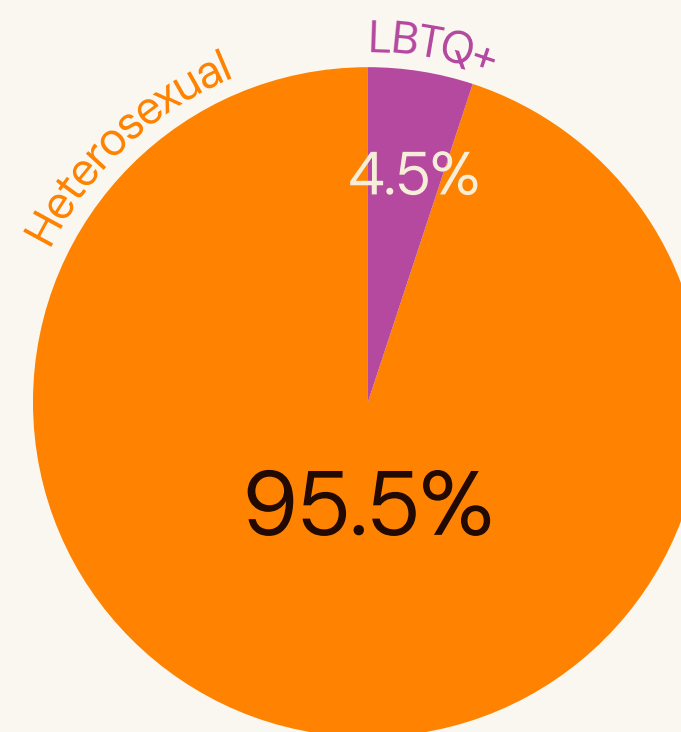
Sexual orientation diversity

While most of the women accessing our services identified as heterosexual, an important 4.4% were part of the LGBTQ+ community. Although this number was relatively small, this group reflected a diversity of experiences within the community. Among those who identified as LGBTQ+, 44% identified as bisexual, 33% as lesbian, and the remainder identified as pansexual, queer or other. This highlights the importance of recognising that gender-based violence also affects LGBTQ+ women, who, moreover, often face multiple forms of discrimination, social exclusion and stigmatisation that can make it even more difficult for them to access support and protection.

At LAWA, we have continued to strengthen our specialised services for the LGBTQ+ community and expand our community outreach activities. Through our participation in events, awareness-raising initiatives and outreach activities, we aim to raise awareness of the services we offer and help ensure that LGBTQ+ women feel safe, represented and understood when seeking support.

LGBTQ+ community

- Bi-sexual
- Lesbian
- Queer
- Pansexual
- Other



Public Policy and Advocacy

Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA)

During the reporting period, WAHA continued to play a key role in analysing the intersection between housing and VAWG for Global Majority survivors in the UK. WAHA is a leading voice in this area, and through supporting Global Majority women experiencing very challenging housing situations, we provided direct support to 100 service users across 712 interventions.

We observed an increase in the number of interventions per service user and the time taken for each case, which highlights the growing difficulties faced by service users and the impact of the housing crisis and the changes to the immigration system on them. Despite the difficulties imposed by the system, our WAHA team has done exceptional work in advocating for, and securing the best outcomes for, service users, while also challenging unlawful practices that retraumatise them and endanger their lives and recovery.

Alongside the WAHA casework, we continued our policy and influencing work, which is firmly grounded in this casework and the experiences of the women supported by organisations within the OYA Consortium. Through partnership work, participation in key influencing spaces, policy and legislation analysis and engagement with key stakeholders, we aim to improve the practices of Local Authorities in their service provision and response to service users' needs, with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes and holding them accountable.

WAHA Case Study

Over the past year, changes in immigration policy and a gap in staff training have led to inconsistent and improper implementation. Cases that should be straightforward, like verifying and assessing a survivor's right to public assistance, have become increasingly complex. This has compounded the hostile environment, as untrained staff, outdated procedures and biased decision-making add further stresses on service users. Likewise, misinformation is being weaponised by perpetrators, causing survivors to feel even more insecure about seeking help for fear that it could lead to immigration-related issues.

Common scenarios include an increase in offers for families to return to their country of origin, despite there being avenues for access to public funds; a decline in the provision for women with Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC) due to concerns about their continued access to benefits; and a growing number of cases where women have had their access to services hindered by the E-visa system, which is prone to errors. One such case is Elisa's. A Brazilian national living in the UK since 2019, she approached the council in October 2025 after fleeing abuse from her former partner. The professional who dealt with her case was unable to verify her status via the E-visa system: she was told that the QR code was not working. That alone led to her application for housing support being refused. With no access to help, Elisa had no choice but to rent a private rented flat she couldn't afford. As this flat was beyond her means, she went back to the council for help, who, now able to verify her immigration status, subsequently refused her support on the basis that she had a fixed address and was therefore no longer in need, despite the fact that their earlier refusal had created this situation.

Visit WAHA
site for more
information.





Our services

Refuge and emergency accommodation

This year, we supported 58 women in our refuge. We have noticed an increase in Latin American women accessing our refuge services, accounting for 100% of spaces for months at a time this year, as opposed to the usual 60–70%. Our service continued to feel the effects of the increasing hostile environment in the UK towards migrants and survivors – an impact felt across all our services.

Amongst these cases, we completed 997 interventions. The majority of our most complex cases this year involved mothers who have been dragged through the Family Court as a further means of control. Alleged perpetrators typically deny all claims of abuse toward or witnessed by the child, instead relying on the debunked parental alienation narrative, mental health concerns, and claims of abduction on the basis that the mothers are migrant women. This causes further abuse by the system and prolongs survivors' exposure to trauma.

Despite this, 100% of women stated they felt safe in our refuges and 96% stated they would never return to their previous relationship. This year, we also started facilitating group conversations about what healthy relationships look like, and how to spot red flags and green flags.

Family Support Work

The Children Service grew this year into a team of two case workers, allowing us to support 35 Children and Young People. With this new capacity, we were able to extend this support to some children in the community through Advice Centre cases, achieving a total of 391 interventions – a crucial achievement for a service through which mums and children are supported to process their experiences of violence and heal as a family unit. The impact of this work is clear: over 90% of women stated that they felt comfortable with their support worker, as did their children, and 82% stated that their relationship with their child improved as a direct result of the work the family support worker did.

A trend we saw this year was greater need for practical support from both the CYP and Refuge service with regards to Child Arrangement Orders.

Although these processes are meant to be objective legal ways to ensure that contact is arranged in a safe manner, it is often used to continue exercising control and abuse by alleged perpetrators. Common tactics include accusations of abduction because the mother is migrant; accusations of poor mental health – itself caused by the abuse –, used as indication of poor mothering; accusations of parental alienation for having fled; and accusations of lying to secure housing or benefits, to name a few.

Case study

Karina is a 31-year-old Brazilian woman. She met Julio in 2016 through a dating app. In 2019, Karina came to the UK for the first time to meet him after being in contact online since they met. She was here for 3 weeks, and he didn't want her to leave, saying he wanted a family. Upon returning to Brazil, she discovered she had fallen pregnant. At 6 months pregnant, they met up in Portugal. Here, the abusive behaviour started. Julio began pushing her and blaming her for everything. Their first son, James, was born in late 2019.

In March 2022, Karina was granted a partner visa to come to live permanently in the UK. Julio wanted to control everything she did, including when or if she ate. Julio wanted Karina to be submissive to him. Karina had their second son, Fernando, in late 2023. The abuse escalated at this time, with emotional abuse, throwing objects, slamming doors and punching walls, and spitting at her. This all happened in front of James and Fernando.

All of this had affected Karina psychologically for some time, but in mid-2025, her mental health deteriorated significantly. She began to get physical symptoms and was experiencing physical abuse, so she decided to flee. She was referred to us by another BME organisation in August 2025. She was assessed for the refuge and came days later with her 2 sons. Concurrently, she was helped by our Immigration service to apply for MVDAC.

At the refuge, she was assisted to ensure she was immediately safe. She made police reports about everything she'd experienced. Karina and her children were registered to the GP, and she was linked in with a solicitor so that she could do child arrangement orders, so that her children could see their father in a way that was safe and had taken all Safeguarding concerns into consideration. She was also heard at our local MARAC and was helped to apply for benefits, inclusive of Universal Credit and child benefit.

Karina was never against the children having contact with their father, but due to concerns around his behaviour, wanted this to be done in a safe way and assessed by CAFCASS. Julio accused Karina of having ill mental health and sent erroneous information to the court to have her appear unfit as a mother. This caused a lot of

stress for Karina and legal battles, where she was ultimately able to show there were no concerns with her mothering and any mental health issues were as a direct result of the abuse she experienced.

Karina attended our counselling service for emotional support and was also engaged with our CYP service, where she had 1:1 session with the Child Support worker, as did James and Fernando. She was in the refuge for 6 months and made friends with other service users. She was helped to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain and once she felt her practical matters were settled, she was able to spend time healing and focusing on herself.

Towards the end of her stay, she was able to find a full-time job and with this new income, she was able to be placed directly into a private rented accommodation, a rarity for women leaving the refuge. She stated that at the refuge "the most helpful thing for [her] was that [she] felt heard, and at the same time, the support [she] received and everything [she] said or shared were kept confidential." She also said "my stay there had a very positive impact because I received the help I needed at the time, and so did my children. It gave me the mental space to think about my children and their needs, and to do things that I would not do otherwise."

Her children are now seeing their father in a contact centre, and contact will not progress if there are any issues during these sessions. This is something Karina is okay with, and she has passed her probation at her job. She is settling into her new life, free from abuse. She said that now "I think and feel that I can do anything I want to do".

Violence Against Women and Girls Advice Centre

447 survivors of gender-based violence were supported by our Advice Centre this year, through 4,245 interventions. This represents an increase of over 25% in cases compared to the previous year, and a 46% rise in interventions. This growth reflects the intensified level of advocacy required within the UK's 'hostile environment', which continues to fail women with no access to public funds.

Amid a worsening housing crisis, economic hardship, and limited immigration pathways, many survivors face compounded barriers. Our Advice Centre supports women to access their rights, liaises with external agencies – including social services, the police, and local authorities – and provides practical assistance to help achieve the best possible outcomes. We consistently advocate on behalf of survivors, challenging decisions and gaps in support from social services and the Home Office to ensure that women can exercise their rights.

We have observed that hostile actions towards migrants are expanding in the public sector, with severe impacts on social services across the country, resulting in our service users being subject to xenophobic attitudes and remarks directed by professionals. There is an increase in requests for overstaying migrants to return to their country of origin, despite having potential immigration pathways. This increases the demand on our team's expertise to challenge the abusive behaviour of statutory services that were meant to protect survivors of gender-based violence.

Through our drop-in service, we also support women with other general needs – this year, for example, providing advice relating to benefit applications, homelessness, and more. We have observed a significant increase in housing-related issues and risk of homelessness for families. Many are single mothers on low incomes, reliant on benefits, whilst facing ongoing challenges in accessing safe and adequate accommodation. In addition, vulnerable migrant women continue

to have limited access to supportive health benefits due to the lack of evidence provided by medical teams, evidence that women cannot fully access due to their language barriers. Our Advice Centre team supported 269 women through 568 interventions in our drop-in services, which continue to run every Tuesday.





LBTQ specialist support

Last year our LBTQ+ Project reached the highest number of cases since its launch (20). A growing number of lesbian women have been accessing the service for support fleeing Domestic Violence, as well as to understand abuse versus stereotypes of lesbian dynamics of relationship.

The impact of the outreach project is noticeable, as is the impact of having a service by and for LBTQ+ women from Latin America. Providing a safe and confidential space for discussing the specific dynamics of abuse and violence within the LBTQ+ community has been an enriching experience, raising awareness within the community and, in doing so, paving the way for safety and breaking down stereotypes and heteronormative dynamics amongst LBTQ+ couples. Lesbian and Queer clients reported feeling empowered after accessing our services, and that having a confidential space to have those conversations helped them to overcome the idea that seeking help might mean you are betraying the community.

Discussions on better policies and routes to safe accommodation for LBTQ+ Survivors of Hate Crime have become more evident this year as we noticed an increase in hate crime against transgender women and a great barrier to access safe housing, especially for those with unsecure immigration status. A lack of understanding of the intersectionality of Global Majority identities and LBTQ+ Survivors is increasingly concerning, and Statutory Services still have limited resources to assess the risks of LBTQ+ survivors, leading to potential risks being overlooked and survivors being unable to access the appropriate support they need. As a response to that, LAWA developed a specific LBTQ+ Risk Assessment and started implementing it this year, helping us to better identify risks and needs that are specific to LBTQ+ survivors, leading to better advocacy work and outcomes for the service users.

We reached over 250 people by attending community forums and activities, practitioners' networks, engaging with consulates and delivering sessions on LBTQ+ Support during the 16 Days of Activism. Year after year, the project proves to be increasingly relevant and important, making a powerful contribution to a world free from violence and ensuring the visibility and inclusion of LBTQ+ women in the debate on VAWG.

Immigration

Our Immigration Service continues providing specialist advice and support to migrant women who are victims of domestic abuse. Over the past year, we have carried out more than 740 interventions to help them access their legal right to remain in the UK independently of their abusive partners and spouses.



Despite the current hostile environment and sentiments against immigrants, alongside the latest tougher changes in immigration law, we secured permanent residence for most service users from our refuge and Advice Centre. We are also proud to have supported many single mothers of British children, or those with settled status, to regularise their immigration status in the UK. This has directly resulted in a high number of our service users gaining access to welfare benefits and housing, securing a more stable and decent life in the UK for themselves and their dependent children.

This year, we increased capacity within the service by having a dedicated Level 1 adviser providing support in the Immigration drop-in sessions. We have also offered an estimated 153 sessions giving advice and information to the broader Latin American community through our immigration appointment booking service.

Case study

Marisol is a 25-year-old woman who fled to the UK after experiencing rape and being denied effective protection and justice in Guatemala. With no family support in the UK, insecure immigration status, limited English-language access, financial hardship, and responsibility for supporting her disabled child abroad, she became highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. After entering a relationship, she experienced escalating coercive control, emotional, physical and financial abuse, which intensified around his substance misuse. Following a physical assault in November 2024 and the discovery that she was pregnant, Marisol was referred to LAWA, where she was assessed as high risk and supported with safety planning, referrals to Social Services and MARAC, immigration advice, counselling, and advocacy around NRPF, including housing support. She also experienced a further sexual assault after separation, adding to cumulative trauma and safeguarding concerns.

Throughout pregnancy and after the birth of her daughter Athena, Marisol faced significant institutional barriers that increased her risk and undermined her dignity, including delays and failures in Local Authority support, stigmatising and discriminatory language from social services, victim-blaming within Child Protection processes, including blaming her for the sexual assault experienced during pregnancy; inadequate practical safeguarding support; and passport-related administrative barriers. LAWA provided sustained holistic advocacy, with her caseworker looking for a good solicitor, supporting her with practical support, including with making sure she had accommodation whilst she was on labour, and helping Marisol secure NRPF funding for temporary accommodation. Marisol was also emotionally supported through Trauma-informed counselling.

Her baby Athena has now her British passport, and our immigration adviser supported with a fee waiver in order to facilitate an application for leave to remain as the parent of a British child. Following stabilisation, Marisol and Athena moved into supported mother-and-baby accommodation, and they are free from abuse, with all necessary advocacy needed in place.

Counselling

During 2025–2026 our counselling service supported 173 women, compared to 125 in the previous reporting period – an increase of 37% – through 1,795 interventions, up from 1,422 last year. One of the most significant developments this year was extending the counselling programme from 12/15 to 20 sessions for women referred through both the Advice Centre and Refuge.

Women themselves told us, through feedback, that they needed more time, and the change also responded to the growing complexity of the cases we support, with women increasingly navigating severe trauma alongside immigration issues, safeguarding concerns, ongoing legal proceedings and financial hardship. A consistent 20-session programme has also meant more equitable access, regardless of which service first referred a woman to us.

It's still early days, but the extended programme is already helping women build stronger relationships with their counsellors and engage more deeply in their healing process. Counsellors have noticed the hostile environment increasingly shaping what comes up in sessions including prolonged legal processes, housing insecurity, rising living costs, and local statutory mental health services unable to meet the needs of women experiencing complex trauma, all compounding the trauma women are

already carrying. Our team also changed shape this year, with a new manager covering maternity leave, two new therapists, and two volunteers. We also expanded our counselling rooms this year, giving women the safe, dedicated space they need for this work.

Sessions continue to be offered one-to-one, in person, online and by telephone, in Spanish, Portuguese and English, delivered by qualified migrant therapists from Latin America who bring both professional expertise and cultural understanding to each woman's process. The strength of these relationships was reflected in this year's feedback: 100% of women reported feeling listened to by their therapist, 100% said counselling helped them better understand their experiences, 98% rated their therapeutic relationship as excellent, and 100% said they would be likely or very likely to recommend the service.



Case study

Valeria is a woman originally from Venezuela who experienced significant abuse and trauma from an early stage in her life. As a young adult, she moved to Spain, where she met her husband. Later, the couple relocated to the UK, where Valeria was studying and working while raising their three children, one of whom has a disability and was later diagnosed with autism.

Over time, Valeria began to experience ongoing domestic abuse from her partner. In addition to the abuse within the relationship, she faced constant criticism from extended husband's family members, particularly in relation to her mothering. She was frequently judged and undermined, especially regarding how she cared for her child with additional needs. Valeria described feeling over-scrutinised and unsupported, while also struggling to access appropriate services and assistance for her children. As the abuse escalated, Valeria became increasingly isolated. She felt that no one understood her situation and that she had no safe way to leave the relationship. She described feeling trapped, exhausted, and overwhelmed by her responsibilities as a mother, particularly while trying to care for a child with complex needs without adequate support.

When Valeria first engaged with the service, she was experiencing significant symptoms of trauma, including flashbacks, insomnia, persistent anxiety, emotional distress, and frequent crying. She also expressed intense feelings of guilt and self-blame, often describing herself as a "bad mother" despite her ongoing efforts to care for her children under extremely difficult circumstances.

With the support of the service, Valeria was able to safely leave the abusive environment and access counselling. Through therapy, she was provided with a safe, confidential, and non-judgemental space where she felt listened to and understood for the first time. The therapeutic process supported her to explore her personal history, process her trauma, and begin to make sense of her emotional responses.

Over time, Valeria developed greater self-awareness and emotional regulation and began to challenge the feelings of guilt and self-blame that had been reinforced by her experiences. She gradually rebuilt her confidence as a mother and recognised her strength and resilience.

By the end of the counselling process, Valeria had taken significant steps towards rebuilding her life. She managed to take forwards the safety plan with the support of the DV advisor. She began engaging with external support networks for parents of children with disabilities, where she reported feeling a sense of belonging and identification with others who shared similar experiences. This connection reduced her sense of isolation and strengthened her support system.

Valeria is now living independently with her children, free from abuse, and is actively accessing the support needed for both herself and her children. Her journey reflects the transformative impact of holistic, trauma-informed support in enabling women to move from crisis to safety, and towards recovery and empowerment.

Outreach and community engagement at LAWA

Growing Together Programme

Growing Together has been running since October 2019 as a community programme led by and for elderly women.

During the reporting period, we organised nearly 150 activities to keep the group active and socially connected, including allotment gardening, weekly bingo, crafts, and regular English and IT sessions. Monthly birthday celebrations and summer outings also helped strengthen friendships and reduce isolation.

The group continues to grow through word of mouth, with around 35–40 women participating in activities, creating a welcoming and supportive space for all involved.

Change Makers Programme

This year marked the 8th year of the Change Makers Programme, with each group bringing its own energy while staying true to the programme's purpose as a space for connection, shared learning, and reflection. Together, we focused on naming and recognising violence as a way of preventing it, explored the political dimensions of our migration journeys, and built a sense of community that feels like home.

In total, we delivered 25 sessions, reaching 120 participants. Across this period, we worked with two Spanish-speaking groups, engaging in conversations around intersectionality, motherhood, fatphobia, anarchism, and the links between mental health and systems of oppression. While these topics are not always easy, they were approached with care, curiosity, and mutual support. Participants described the space as safe and meaningful, helping them feel more connected and less alone. Many sessions with the current cohort have been co-facilitated by participants themselves, bringing their knowledge, passions, and lived experiences into the space in powerful ways. Together, we explored themes such as women in cinema, creative reflections on migration, anti-racist practices, and the politics of swimming.

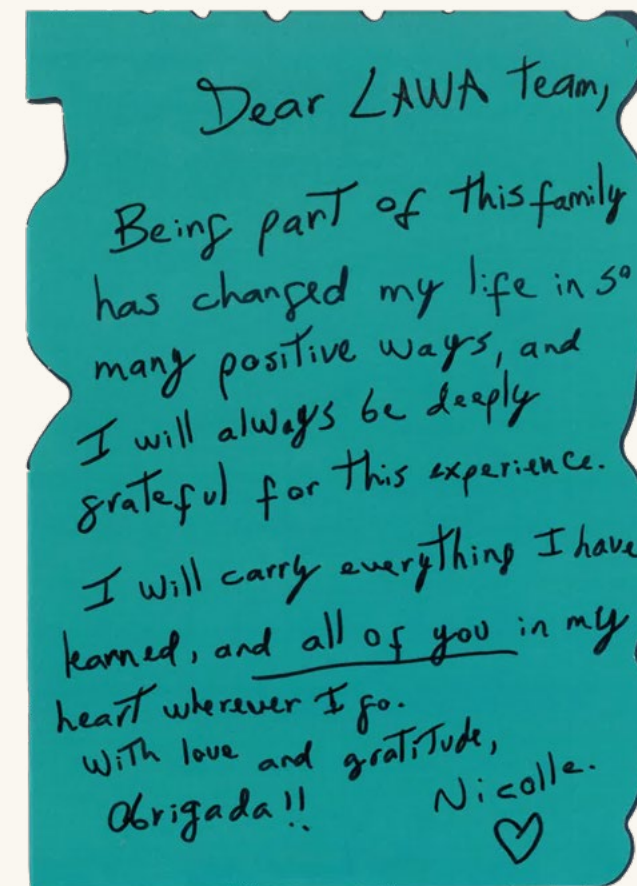
Our Brazilian cohorts have also continued to grow following a positive response from the community. After launching last year, a second cohort began this year with strong engagement and attendance, with participants actively shaping sessions around topics that matter to them, including health, gender, migration systems, racism, and Brazilian identity. It has been inspiring to see these spaces develop, and we are grateful to the volunteers who have made this possible. Alongside this, we delivered the Chavitas programme, working with 44 schoolgirls. Through this programme, we created space to discuss healthy relationships, boundaries, and emotional wellbeing in ways that feel relevant to their lives, supporting young people to prioritise their autonomy and care for themselves and others. All this work continues to contribute to LAWA's mission to end violence against women and girls.

Volunteer programme

Over the previous year, our volunteer cohort grew by more than 60%, reaching 31 volunteers who contributed across key areas including casework support, community engagement, counselling, and administration.

We also introduced new roles such as general advice, WAHA casework support, and LGBTQ+ casework support, alongside engaging over 25 translator and interpreter volunteers supporting remotely across the UK. These developments have significantly strengthened our capacity to support the community across our services.

The volunteer programme continues to enhance service delivery while providing valuable work experience and professional development opportunities for women in our community, helping them overcome barriers to employment. As part of this, we introduced a new training session, "Applying for Jobs in the UK," equipping volunteers with practical tools and confidence. Feedback from each cycle remains consistently positive, with participants reporting increased confidence, new skills, and a stronger sense of direction in their career paths.





Partnerships

LAWA is active in several VAWG and housing spaces across the sector, working alongside other organisations from the sector and the Latin American and other Global Majority communities. Through this involvement we work to make sure that the needs of the women from our communities reach decision-makers in the sector and in state institutions, so that services can be improved and the women's voices and experiences are heard at the highest levels.

As part of this effort, we sit in the following spaces: the 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 are also involved in different ongoing partnerships focused on 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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