

LAWA and LAWRS:

Breaking barriers together for
Latin American Women in the UK



On November 28, 2024, Latin American Women's Aid (LAWA) and the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) – two of the UK's leading organisations supporting Latin American women – came together for a joint internal session as part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. This collaboration underscored the critical importance of uniting forces to tackle the systemic challenges faced by survivors of domestic violence within the Latin American community in the UK.

The meeting served as a space to reflect, share learnings, and strategise on the pressing barriers and potential solutions for improving service delivery. For Latin American women – often marginalised by immigration policies, institutional neglect and cultural differences – this partnership represents a beacon of hope and a catalyst for systemic change.

Recognising barriers: Challenges Facing Latin American Women in the UK

The barriers faced by Latin American women survivors are both systemic and deeply entrenched.

Key challenges identified during the session included:

- **Restrictive immigration policies:**

These policies, particularly the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) condition, leave many survivors without access to vital financial resources. NRPF restricts access to public funds for individuals on certain visas, which means survivors often cannot access housing support, social security or other critical benefits.

- **Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC):**

This provision allows survivors to apply for temporary leave to remain in the UK, enabling them to access support services. However, institutional unawareness and long waiting times often leave women in vulnerable situations without the immediate help they need.

- **Unsafe housing:**

Many survivors face insecure or unsafe housing conditions, compounded by budget cuts and a lack of affordable options.

- **Digital exclusion and hostile environment:**

Limited access to technology and systemic hostility toward migrants, such as prolonged visa delays and refusals, further marginalise these women.

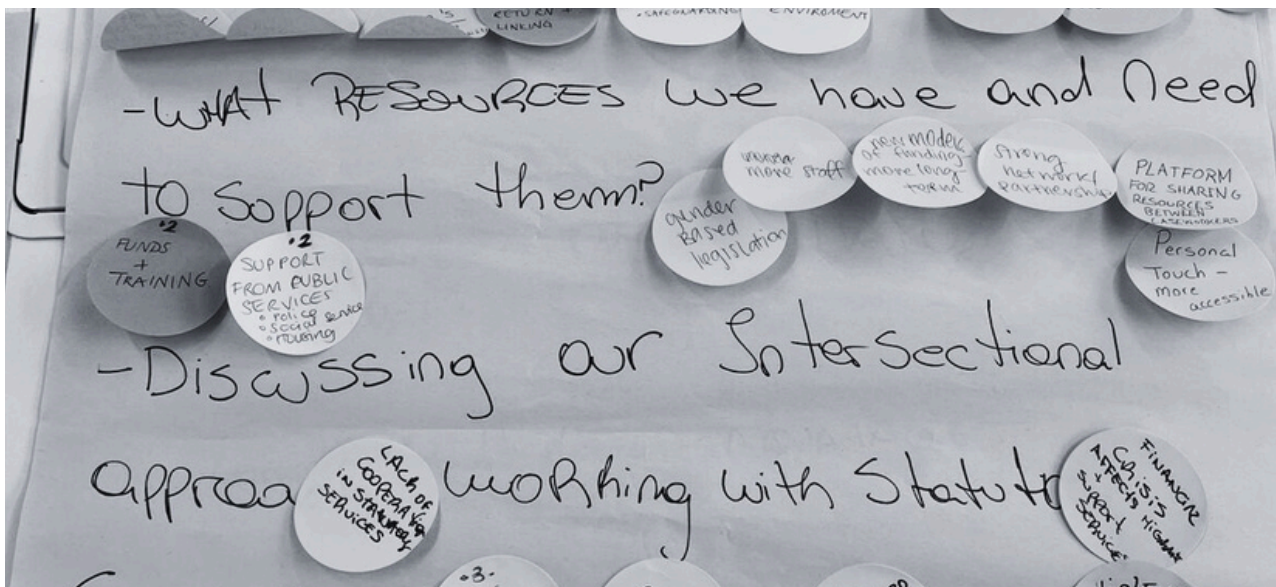
- **Institutional thresholds:**

Many survivors face barriers in accessing services due to strict eligibility criteria, leaving them unsupported.

Insufficient mental health support:

The lack of culturally tailored mental health services exacerbates trauma and creates additional barriers for survivors.

These challenges are not just bureaucratic hurdles; they perpetuate abuse and create cycles of marginalisation that are hard to escape.



The importance of an intersectional approach

An intersectional approach is essential for addressing the overlapping barriers faced by Latin American women in the UK. LAWA and LAWRS emphasised the importance of collaboration between NGOs, statutory services, and funders to ensure that survivors receive support that is not only effective but also culturally sensitive.

Intersectionality recognises that factors such as immigration status, language barriers and cultural differences intersect with gender-based violence, leading to distinct and complex challenges. For instance, some survivors are excluded from accessing legal or housing support due to their immigration status, while language barriers and institutional racism further hinder their ability to seek justice and protection.

During the meeting, it was highlighted how LAWA and LAWRS are both addressing these challenges by implementing culturally centred approaches that provide tailored support to meet the linguistic, cultural and social needs of survivors.



Highlighting progress and the ongoing need for support

Despite the significant barriers, the session provided an opportunity to share key achievements by both organisations, such as building trust-based networks, delivering critical interventions and promoting systemic reforms. These efforts are focused on fostering safer environments, empowering survivors and driving institutional change.

However, challenges persist. Sustained financial support is critical to maintaining and expanding these services. Without adequate funding, culturally focused, survivor-centred approaches risk being constrained. Funders are essential in supporting these organisations to address the unique needs of Latin American women and advocate for systemic change.

The collaboration between LAWA and LAWRS underscored their shared commitment to addressing the challenges faced by this group as survivors of domestic violence in the UK.

By identifying obstacles, sharing insights and recognising progress, the organisations aim to foster an environment where women can live with safety, dignity and justice.

Our combined efforts demonstrate the potential for meaningful change, paving the way for a future where every survivor can access culturally tailored support to rebuild their lives.



Latin American Women's Aid
www.lawadv.org.uk



Latin American Women's Rights Service:
www.lawrs.org.uk