

Annual Report 2020-2021



Director's message

Latin American Women's Aid was founded in 1987 and since then we have provided services including safe accommodation for Latin American women and their children facing gender violence. We are an organisation lead by and for Latin American women and other Black and minoritised women in the UK. Since 2015 we have been able to diversify and expand our services in terms of; refuge accommodation, advice & advocacy services, counselling, children services, empowerment program, elderly program, volunteer and internship, as well as learning and development areas of the organisation.

This year (2020) was particularly difficult; we faced unprecedented challenges due to the global pandemic-COVID 19, as no one was expecting the level of complexities that COVID brought to everyday life. The demand of our services increased massively in all areas, we had to accommodate and adjust quickly to the crisis in order to respond appropriately, and be able to manage the emergency state of the cases of women and children we were receiving throughout all our services.

We were able to secure emergency funding during the pandemic which allowed us to maintain and respond to the increase in demand of our services. The funding also allowed us the space to plan our service delivery whilst in the

COVID pandemic which, at the time, did not have any end date. Despite all the difficulties, we were able to open a third refuge with the support of our funders and housing association (Peabody) and even though it was a big challenge, it was extremely necessary to open more bed spaces for minoritised women and children especially in this period.

In addition, we were able to increase our BME partnership work with sister's organisations throughout the OYA-BME consortium. We collaborated with the consultation on the domestic abuse bill and the amendment proposal lead by Imkaan on the inclusion of minoritised women issues.

We are still facing the consequences of the pandemic, as COVID is still part of our daily routine. The uncertainty and adjustments of how we will be operating in the future in order not to affect or lose our community based and person centre approach is still a question but also an opportunity to reflect and make positive changes in the organisation.

We are very proud that our organisation is still standing, showing resilience and strength throughout the difficulties.

Yenny Tovar Aude
Executive Director at LAWA

Message from the Board

Since April 2020 LAWA has continued to grow from strength to strength against a backdrop of life, post-pandemic, and the aftermath that follows. This has not been without its challenges and it has been widely documented that domestic violence increased during the pandemic, as did unemployment rates, coupled with a hostile environment of austerity and immigration policy, which was felt acutely by migrant families and Black and Minoritized communities. LAWA worked tirelessly to respond to the increasing demand in service to reach women and families, far and wide. Incredibly, LAWA was able to open a third refuge during this time. This is indicative of LAWA's tireless dedication and passion to reach its mission and aim – to end violence and achieve self-determination.

In a precarious landscape for many Black and Minoritized organisations, LAWA sought to increase its partnership work through the OYA-BME consortium, holding in mind its key values of intersectional and communitarian feminism. Through partnership work led by our sister organisation, Imkaan, LAWA consulted on the Domestic Abuse Bill which sought to bring to the fore issues of minoritized women within the Bill and create change on a macro-level. LAWA also secured additional

financial resources in the 2020-2021 period, that helped us respond to the emergency. This was all brought the dedication from our policy & fundraising staff who are looking to make change and ensuring we can continue to fund all the work LAWA does.

LAWA would not be in the position it is in today if it wasn't for the hard work of our Staff and as a Board, we would like to express our gratitude and pride for how staff have weathered adversity in the past year. As always, we hope that LAWA continues in its trajectory of strength, resilience and growth, keeping its core values at the heart of this so that it can continue to support and empower the most marginalized women, create change and provide life-saving services.

Claudia Pari
Intermin Chair of Board of Trustees



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Who we are and our impact in 2020-2021

Latin American Women's Aid is a "led by and for" specialist organisation working to end gender-based violence against Latin American and other Black and minoritised women and girls in the UK. We run the only refuges by and for Latin American women and children in the Europe. We also provide advice and advocacy in our Advice Centre, with specialist services for LGBTQ women and specialist housing and immigration advice.

We offer community engagement services like our Change Maker Program and the Growing Together Project that engages with our Latin American migrant communities and through which we develop long lasting social connections that combat individual loneliness and institutional exclusion. Our organisation and community are made up of other Black

and minoritised women and we are proud to be trans inclusive.

Our services are holistic and intersectional, which means that we provide everything a woman needs to recover and empower themselves, rather than only offering crisis intervention and sign posting support. We ensure that we provide meaningful, personalised, empowering support throughout a survivor's journey. Our counselling service provides survivors the emotional support that is a key aspect of recovery from domestic abuse and other forms of gender based violence.

Through our frontline services we are able to collect rich and unique data that supports our research and policy work focusing on ending VAWG and accessing long term housing for VAWG survivors.



This year we have carried out a total of

10,061 interventions to 1252 service users

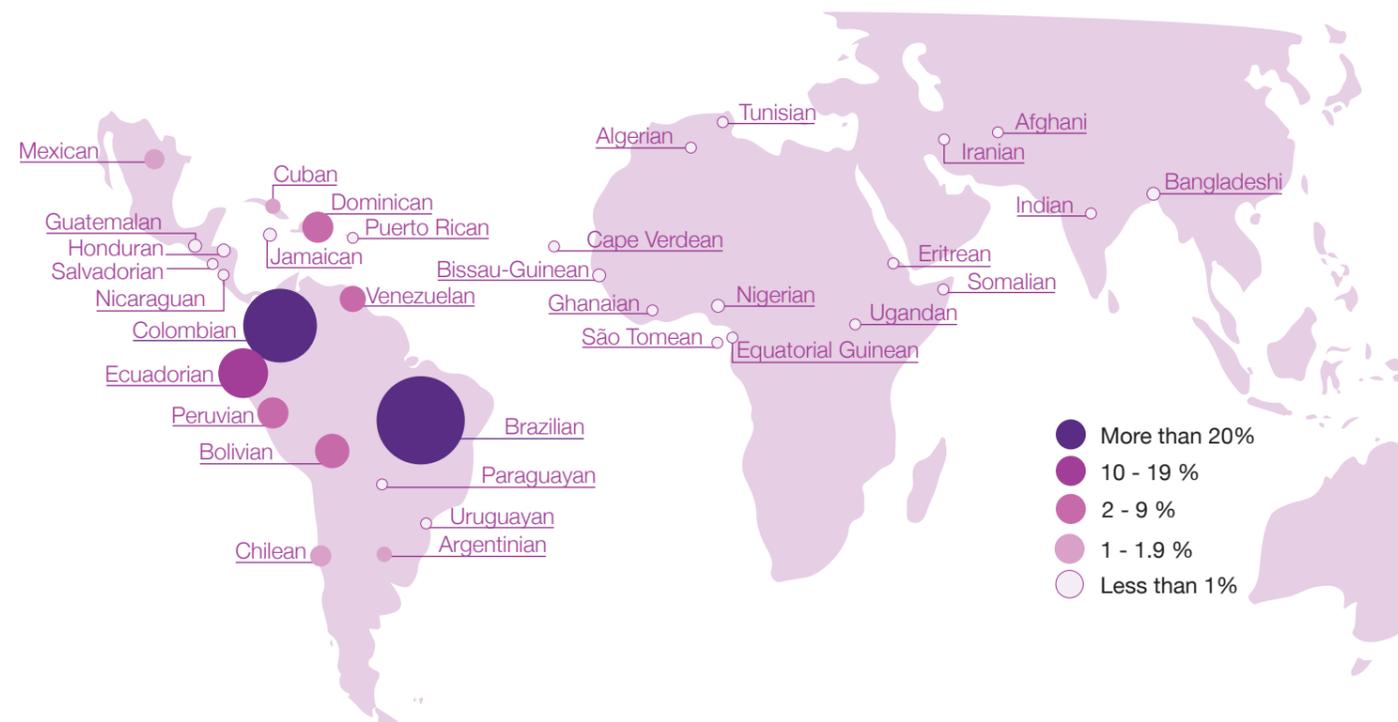
At LAWA we make it a priority to listen to our service users and check in to see if our interventions are making the positive changes we hope. Through feedback and outcome tracking we can report the following impact of our work:

- 85%** level of increase in response to the statement "I feel safe" after LAWA's intervention.
- 94%** of women stated that it made a big difference that this service was provided by an organisation led by Latin American / Black and minoritised women.
- 98%** of women stated they would not consider going back to their previous relationship.

User profile & intersecting violence

The general profile of LAWA's users reflects the diversity of the Latin American and Black and minoritised population in the UK, as well as the challenges encountered by migrant women.

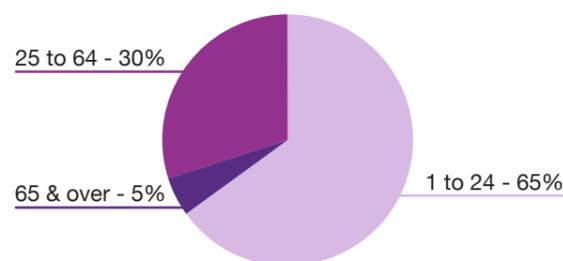
LAWA survivors of violence are often presented with more complex and intersecting needs arising from their identities and experiences.



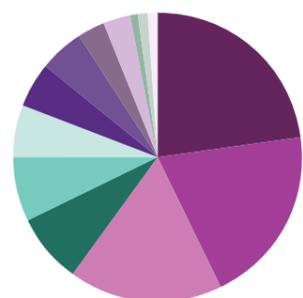
Our Service Users

Upon beginning their journey with LAWA our service users voluntarily fill in our diversity and monitoring forms. This enables LAWA to keep track of the composition of our service users. This year the majority of women accessing our services were Brazilian (32.9%) and Colombian (23%). Most of them were aged up to 24 years old (65%) and the majority identified as simply Latin American (23%), however the ethnicities chart demonstrates that many of our service users identify with the many varied ethnic identities that exist in the Latin American culture also. This highlights that the Latin American identity can cover a broad range of ethnic identities and it is entirely up to the women filling in the forms how they choose to identify themselves.

Age of service users



Ethnicity



- Latin American 23%
- Latin American: White 20%
- Latin American: Other 17%
- Latin American: Indigenous & white 8%
- Latin American: Black & white 7%
- Mixed Ethnicity: Other Black / Black African / White 6%
- Latin American: Black & indigenous & white 5%
- Latin American: Black 5%
- Black / Black British: Other 3%
- Latin American: Indigenous 3%
- Asian 1%
- Black / Black British: Caribbean 1%
- Latin American: Black & indigenous 1%

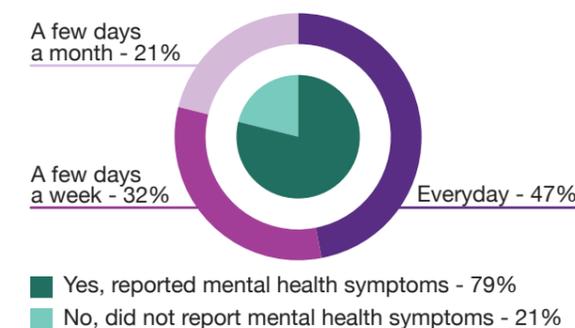
Country of origin

Brazilian 32.9%	Portuguese 1.4%	Cape Verdean	Nicaraguan
Colombian 23%	Spanish 1.4%	Equatorial Guinean	Nigerian
Ecuadorian 10.5%	Cuban 1%	Eritrean	Paraguayan
Bolivian 5%	Argentinian 1%	German	Puerto Rican
Dominican 4.1%	Less than 1%	Ghanian	Salvadorian
Peruvian 4.1%	Afghanistan	Guatemalan	São Tomean
Venezuelan 2.9%	Algerian	Honduran	Tunisia
British 2.6%	Bangladeshi	India	Ugandan
Chilean 1.9%	Bissau-Guinean	Iranian	Uruguayan
Mexican 1.7%		Jamaican	

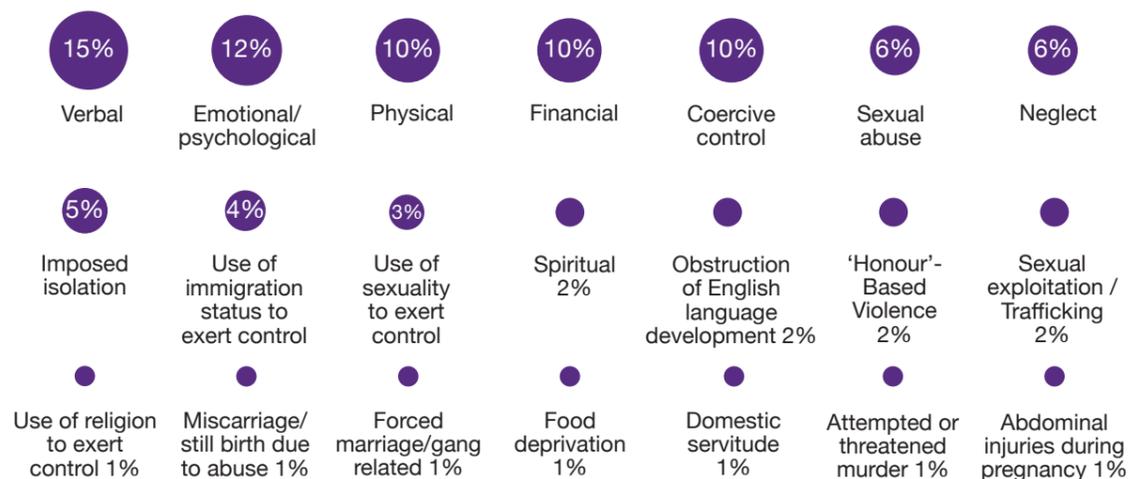
Abuse Experienced

At LAWA we record our service user's experiences of abuse and make the appropriate risk and needs assessments with them. The majority of abuses experienced are verbal (15%), emotional (12%), physical (10%) and financial (10%). The majority of women experienced their abuse every day (47%) with a few days a week (32%) being the next most frequency of abused experienced. These experiences and their frequency understandably have an impact of the survivor's mental health, with 79% of women reporting that they have mental health symptoms.

Frequency of the abuse / Survivor reported mental health symptoms



Types of abuse experienced

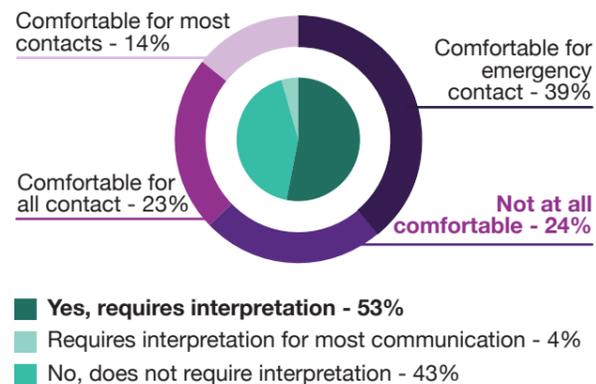


Cultural Barriers

A key barrier for our service users in accessing rights and services is language and cultural familiarity. Data from our service users show that 24% are “not comfortable at all” in speaking English and only 23% are “comfortable for all contact” in English. Additionally, 53% of service users state that they require an interpreter. For these reasons it is unsurprising that 20% of service users that had sought support from a generic provider then came to LAWA.

As all our services are available in Spanish or Portuguese, we are better able to help these women navigate the services and support available to them. We also offer English Language lessons to improve our service user’s self-empowerment.

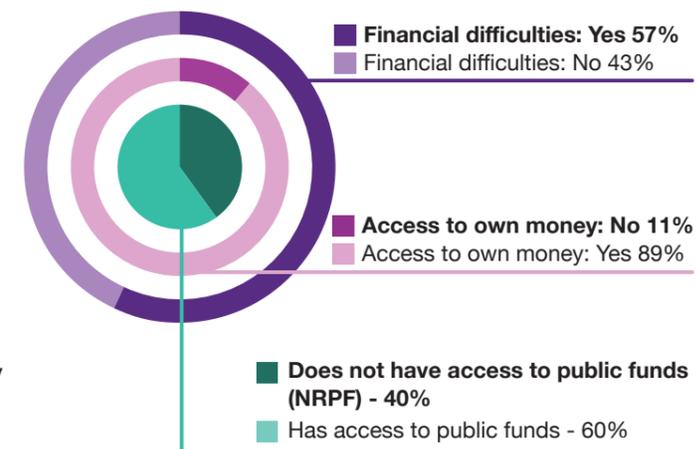
Spoken English & need for interpretation



Financial Independence

57% of our service users report having financial difficulties, 11% reported they had no access to their own money, and 40% classified as No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

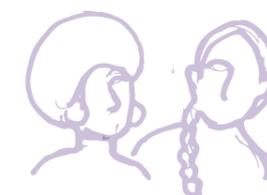
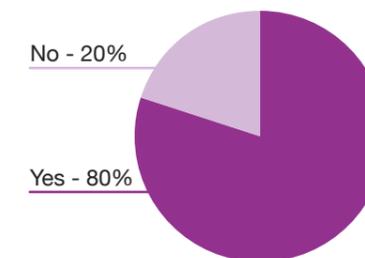
Financially independence is key to starting a new life away from domestic abuse. Through the advice centre’s pathways to employment skills and benefits advice our service users are better equipped to begin a life with financial independence. LAWA also fully understands the nature of financial abuse and how it is used by perpetrators.



Institutional Violence

As reported in last years Annual Report (2019-2020) as well as the WAHA report (2019) it has been clear that policies have increasingly negatively affected our service users specifically. The ‘hostile environment’ policy to immigrants is practiced at the front line in Local Authorities and generic service provision. The legal and cultural impact of Brexit means that our service users are most likely to not escape domestic violence through fear of not being eligible for any support or worse, to be detained by immigration enforcement authorities. Further to this, the steady decline in frontline services and funding for Black and minoritised led focused services adds to the institutional violence compounding on the already lived experience of domestic violence.

Has survivor left a generic service for BME service?



LAWA Services

The Violence Against Women and Girls Advice Centre

The Advice Centre helped **362** women over the course of the year and provided them with **2526** interventions.

Our VAWG advice and support centre offers culturally specific support that operates in Spanish, Portuguese and English. We provide information, advocacy and support to all Latin American and Black and minoritised women survivors of gendered-based violence. The Advice Centre offers advice and support through the following: one-to-one appointments, drop-in days, telephone advice, in-house surgeries and outreach points. Our remit includes domestic violence and other gendered forms of violence, welfare benefits advice, housing and emergency accommodation, child support, career and employment advice, skills development and community building.

The Advice Centre provides advice, support, and referrals for women as a first point of contact. In consultation with the women, they often refer women to other LAWA services and, when necessary, they will refer high-risk cases to the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).

96.4% of women stated that the advice given to them increased their knowledge of their rights, options and services in the UK.

85.5% stated that advice given to them increased their knowledge about how to enter paid work or access welfare benefits and manage debts.

80% stated that advice given to them increased their knowledge about domestic violence, the justice system and legal options.

Specialist Services at the VAWG Advice Centre

LBTQ Advice Service

LAWA recognises that a lack of visibility and representation of LBTQ in service provision prevents LBTQ survivors to approach services for support. For this reason, our specialist service is delivered by an LBTQ member of the LBTQ and Latin American community, so that the staff member providing support truly understands the community and issues specific to the community. This service provides support and advice on a myriad of issues including hate crime, domestic violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking. It is an ongoing service that can be requested by any member of the Latin and Black and marginalised communities at any time.

For further information please contact lbtq@lawadv.org.uk

WAHA Initiative

Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) is an initiative for Black and Minority Ethnic women jointly run by the Latin American Women's Aid and London Black Women's Project under the OYA consortium of BME refugees.

WAHA aims to address Black and minority ethnic women's intersecting pressures of poverty, homelessness and gender violence through promoting changes in housing policy and practice in the UK using a rights-based approach. It is a policy but also a frontline project advising, representing and supporting survivors to make appeals and secure safe and appropriate accommodation, in an environment free from violence and intimidation. During this period, through WAHA, LAWA continued to deliver high quality specialist legal housing advice, and engaged in a number of knowledge dissemination activities to (webinars, workshops etc.) to ensure learnings from the project would be known and utilised by the wider sector. This was also the time in which the project consolidated its work and embarked in a new phase, which is focusing on expanding the advocacy and campaigning element of the project.

For more information contact lha@lawadv.org.uk



Sexual Harassment Advice Project

During the last period of the Sexual Harassment Project, LAWA in conjunction with partner organisations LWBP and The Angelou Centre organised and delivered the Sexual Harassment Information Exchange – Roundtable. This was a unique opportunity for BME organisation to discuss positive practices in response to sexual harassment cases and to build a more robust and impactful response to sexual harassment. The discussion centred on the experiences of BME and migrant women.

The discussion was intended to contribute towards a report and an intersectional sexual harassment manifesto. Two round-tables were delivered online with the participation of approximately 10 to 15 professionals from different women organisations. Some of the findings and discussion during the two round tables are described as:

- Black and minoritised women, including migrant women, are less likely to report being sexual harassed and the work place due to fear of losing their jobs.
- Immigration status of the survivors prevent them to seek advice and support.
- High levels of sexual harassment cases were report in the cleaning, care and hospitality sector.
- Survivors are not aware that there are legal protection measures they can apply for protection.

The full report was released November 2020.

Case study



Maria* had been married to a man for many years and had children with him, many years later the marriage broke down and they divorced in Colombia. The perpetrator, a woman who Maria had known since childhood, started contacting Maria and proposed to Maria to live in the UK with her. Maria moved to the UK and brought her children after.

The perpetrator owns the property that she lives in (she was paying the mortgage) and Maria contributed in helping pay for bills and the upkeep of the house. At the beginning of the relationship everything seemed fine, she was caring with her and her children. But after the perpetrator's father died, she radically changed and started abusing Maria and her children emotionally and financially. The perpetrator became very aggressive at home and forced Maria to do everything that she wanted. Maria and her children were not allowed to express their feelings because they were living in her house.

The perpetrator started reviewing Maria's bank statements regularly, and it became common practice. If Maria made any steps to gain any type of financial independence such as starting to save money, the perpetrator would abuse her emotionally and told her she could not save money without her authorization.

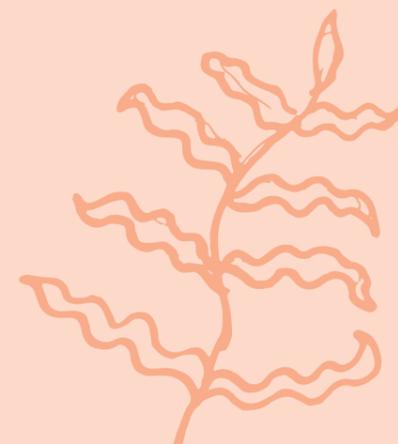
When Maria came to LAWA she was at the stage of contemplating to leave, however for the time being she felt too distressed to deal with a drastic change so stayed at a family member's house.

In her first appointment with the LAWA Advice Centre she was given tailored and specialist advice. She was advised on the cultural difficulties that she might experience with regards breaking away from this abusive situation and provided her with options regarding alternative accommodation. Because of Maria's immigration status, the advice worker identified the need to apply for the DDV Concession so Maria could have access benefits. The advice worker discussed the impact on children living in a hostile and abusive environment even if the abuse is not directed to them and provided Maria with suggestions about how to leave the house in an emergency.

Maria was referred to LAWA's in house counselling service and her case, with permission from Maria, was referred to external services such as family law and social services.

LAWA followed up on Maria's DDV (Destitute Domestic Violence) application, onto her SET DV (Settle in the UK as a victim of domestic violence) application and onto her ILR (indefinite leave to remain) application which she was successfully granted this year. She has also started her counselling sessions with LAWA and through our outcome measures, has reported a 95% improvement in answering the statements; "I feel safe, I feel my children are safe, I know my rights, I feel like I have a good support network"

Maria continues her journey out of abuse and into self-empowerment and dignity with LAWA.



Observations of LGBTQIA cases

Overall, many women who identify as LGBTQIA are needing services from LAWA from their abusive heterosexual relationships. Often, when the woman's sexuality is known, it is weaponized against her by the perpetrator, who uses her sexuality to turn her children or network against her. We have one case where the location of adult daughter of a perpetrator was betrayed by someone in the community because they did not approve of her "lifestyle", highlighting how dangerous LGBTQIA stigma is in the Latin American community.

Some cases present as a heterosexual case, but the service user identifies as Queer, or Bisexual, or Asexual, and are requesting emergency help from escaping their abusive heterosexual relationship. The issue of their sexuality is unknown to everyone she knows. Demonstrating the necessity to provide LGBTQIA welcoming spaces in the Latin American community.

VAWG Advice Centre Trends in 2020-2021



Accessing services when the woman is no recourse to public funds is virtually impossible, yet because of hostile policies and practices towards migrant women, more are being classified NRPF. Currently 40% of our service users have been classified NRPF. We know from our own WAHA report 'A Roof not a home' (2019) that many are processed NRPF incorrectly and this further complicates the intervention required by LAWA to secure the rightful entitlements of our service users.

Continued Hostile Government Policy & Practice towards Migrants

The impact of the hostile policy environment on migrant survivors reporting VAWG to the police is not insignificant. Many women are unable to escape abuse for fear of immigration authorities. And if they do seek help, they are largely unable to access refuge support as these survivors would be more likely to not have recourse to public funds because of increasing financial exclusion of migrants by the state. Changes in law and practice due to Brexit has exacerbated the number of immigration issues for women in our community escaping VAWG.

Thanks to lobbying efforts on behalf of the Black and minoritised "by and for" ending VAWG sector, changes have been put forward to UK legislation to better secure emergency accommodation for migrant women escaping DV and access to entitlements.

Universal Credit

The continued use of Universal Credit has complicated the process for obtaining entitlements and necessary interventions. Many service users are denied universal credit or are classified NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds) due to incorrect assessment, and those that are accepted need further support in meeting the demands of benefit teams especially through the DWP online platforms. This additional layer of work not only jeopardises the material and emotional stability of women needing support, but also stretches our resources to the maximum. Further to this, the new benefits processes do not take into account how widespread financial abuse and coercive control manifests itself in cases of domestic violence. Survivors are unlikely to have their own identification documents or bank accounts, making access to Universal Credit more difficult.

Increase in Referrals and Demand

This year we have seen an increase in the number of referrals to refuge accommodation by 60% and a rise in the number of calls to our Advice Centre post each lockdown.

As reported last year we moved to an increased digital provision, which meant increasing our digital activity and capacity to respond through online channels, like our webchat and WhatsApp. We also adapted our drop-

in service to an online format. From April 2020 onwards we have had an average of 4 online chats/ contact per day, which show the substantial increase and usage of this channel.

This year the Advice Centre made a total of 444 referrals both internally and to and from external organisations involving 339 people.

The impact of 3 Lockdowns (April 2020- April 2021)

Within this time frame the country experienced 3 lockdowns. This had significant impact on our service as well as impacting on avenues for women escaping DV. During the lockdowns, LAWA's Advice Centre had to work remotely and online, whilst coping with the increase in demand. From the beginning, it was clear that women from our communities are within the most vulnerable members of our society and self-isolation posed serious and significant risks to women and their children in abusive households.

During the lockdowns the increased emotional, coercive control and financial abuse continued, and women were afraid to go out to report the incidents for fear of getting infected. Others did not make contact in that time due to language barriers and because the perpetrator was always present.

We continued observing that older women had more difficulty seeking support due to mobility issues, as well as barriers to accessing information using new technologies. They were forced to stay in quarantine much longer because of their higher risk of infection, which in turn prolonged their social isolation, increased their exposure to abuse, and reduced their opportunities to seek help. Many of our service users were also abused by their children and other family members living in the same household.

As lockdowns eased and the National vaccination program moved forward, Advice Centre caseworkers were able to resume some of face-to-face appointments and spaces, always following safety protocols.



LAWA Services

Our Refuges

This year **68** service users (40 women and 28 children and young people) have benefited from being able to access safe emergency accommodation and received **1990** interventions.

When entering the refuge, women across our refuges are supported with tailored individual holistic advice and services so that they are able to make meaningful changes to their lives and move forward with dignity. On the practical level these include securing long-term accommodation, providing legal advice (immigration, family law, and benefits) and securing their entitlements.

This year additional targeted services/ surgeries included:

- intervention on benefits support (190),
- on specialist housing advice (238),
- on immigration matters (73),
- on family law (139), and
- on career advice / education pathways (138).

These opportunities enabled women to make informed decisions about their lives and improve their sense of safety and empowerment. Our crisis response interventions are also reflected through key indicators such as MARAC referrals (38%), and referrals to solicitors in different areas (family, immigration, housing) (60%).

Through opening the third refuge in September 2020 we increased our bed space capacity by 26% specifically providing emergency provision for women who are in low priority for housing. The new house has a capacity of 8 bed spaces and is dedicated to providing emergency housing for particularly vulnerable women who are less likely to benefit from services as they are either childless or with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

Additionally, our Family Support Worker provided support directly to children and young people (CYP) living in the refuges. Personal sessions were provided directly to mothers, as well as sessions provided to family units.



Our Refuge staff provide comprehensive resettlement support to all refuge residents who are moving on. This entails help with administrative details, local mapping of community services, and further interventions if necessary.

85% of women reported to have improved their sense of safety for themselves and their children after moving into the refuge.

100% of women who left our Refuges stated that they had moved onto safe accommodation.

How did your stay in the Refuge impact on your life?

“ Heavily. Before I was not aware of how bad was my relationship, and how the people can abuse you. I wasn't aware of how bad I was and now I know how worthy is my life. ”

“ I felt peaceful because I could go to places, do what I wanted to do. I felt free to talk to my mum, something I couldn't do when I was living with the perp. It felt nice having my own money and be able to spend as I wanted. The perp used to give me only the money related to child benefit. ”

“ It feels like it was a rehabilitation process. It put me in the good direction on what to do next. I was able to think back and see my mistakes. Also, to have learnt from other women's stories. It gave the opportunity to networking and have good relationships with other women. It helped me to see life in a more positive way. ”



Family Support work

When families enter the refuge, we assess both mum and children (when age is appropriate) to create a mutual action plan for both. It is often the case that the domestic violence they've experienced has had an impact on that relationship, and part of our work is to support them so they can heal this damage.

In all circumstances, the Family support worker has a discussion with the family to contextualise why they are at the refuge, for many of the children this is the first time that their experience in and around Domestic Violence (DV) is spoken about. Often, DV is normalised to the child to the extent that they were unaware that their situation was not normal and the parents do not openly discuss the situation with their children. The process of contextualising the situation to the children "this is a house for mums and children" and how the father's behaviour towards mum isn't safe is the beginning of their journey towards recovering, as it is the first time it is directly discussed and identified to the child. It is also why the improvement in housing as an outcome indicator is an important measure in children's recovery from DV, it shows that being physically removed from the situation and into a healing space is a key aspect of this change.

The tailored action plan encompasses both emotional and practical support. For instance: registering the family at the local GP, contacting the Health Visiting team, when applicable, and contacting school admissions team or children's officer of the council to place children as soon as possible, and also creating a safe and warm space for children to be.

Meanwhile, we also make applications for Child Benefit and Child Maintenance, and our Family Support Worker provides weekly key one to one sessions. Individual sessions in the playroom make children comfortable to open up about how they felt during the direct or indirect domestic violence experience, along with how they are reacting about living in our refuge.

We also arrange group sessions with age-appropriate activities for children and young people to interact with each other, as well as activities for mothers only. The Family Support Worker enables children to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood successfully.



How did your children's stay in the refuge impacted on their life?

- “ He is more able to relate with other people. More people to play and talk to. Built his confidence and broaden his relationships. ”
- “ I feel that she is more close to me. That our relationship became stronger. Sharing with other kids it was good for her. ”
- “ It was good. Because the share time with other kids. It was good to make the transition easier. ”

Refuge trends in 2020-2021

Increase of interventions per service user

We note that interventions per service user have increased over the past three years. This year on average 29 interventions per service user were made, whereas last year we noted 27 interventions per person, and the year before that, 24. This clearly demonstrates how the impact of the ongoing migrant hostile policy is having a compound straining effect on services such as ours.

Financial security of service users

A great challenge for our residents in the past year was financial security.

Most of the women work in the cleaning and hospitality industries which were greatly affected by the lockdowns, in addition these were mostly jobs with zero-hour contracts and no job security. Given their job conditions, none of them were eligible to government programs such as furlough. On the other side, women who were entitled to benefits but had no National Insurance Numbers (NIN) were not able to access them in a timely manner given the delays in the NIN submission as Job Centres were working remotely. This level of financial insecurity and uncertainty had an impact on our resident's mental health.



The impact of 3 Lockdowns (April 2020- April 2021)

Given not only the logistic/mobility challenges that arose during the pandemic lockdowns, but also the increase in demand for our services, the third refuge opening represented an important success within this context. Shortly after opening, the new refuge was fully occupied.

The pandemic has put many of our service users surviving VAWG in a position where they were increasingly challenged and pressured to stay with or return to their perpetrators for lack of options due to shrinking statutory and specialised services. LAWA has put in place different concrete measures to respond to this increased level of need and additional demand. Opening the third refuge within the pandemic allowed us to offer additional accommodation to more women who were desperately looking to flee. We were also successful in securing emergency funding to increase the refuge worker support and to increase our advocacy efforts.

The additional barriers to statutory provision presented during this period meant many residents stayed on for a longer period of time than usual and our move on time-frame for residents had to be extended from the usual 6-7 month stay. This plus the heightened anxiety and the more complex nature of immigration needs in this post Brexit policy landscape, meant that interventions for each resident multiplied almost sevenfold and tenfold in some cases.

LAWA Services

Mental Health and Emotional support

117 women and children were serviced by LAWA's counselling service through one-to-one assessments and the service provided 685 therapy sessions.

LAWA's in house Counselling Service provides psychotherapy support in Portuguese, Spanish and English. We adopt a culturally sensitive, trauma focused approach that supports Latin American and Black and minoritised survivors of different forms of gendered-based violence to recover their mental and emotional health.

Our counselling package of 16 one-to-one free sessions provides a safe, confidential, non-judgmental environment for survivors to express and reflect on their traumas, ultimately empowering women to recover their self-confidence and take control over their own lives.

100% felt listened to by their counsellor.

100% stated they were very satisfied with the counselling service.

100% of women stated that their therapist helped them understand their problems and experiences.

100% of women said they would recommend this service.

“ I'm really glad for all you have done for me and my son. ”

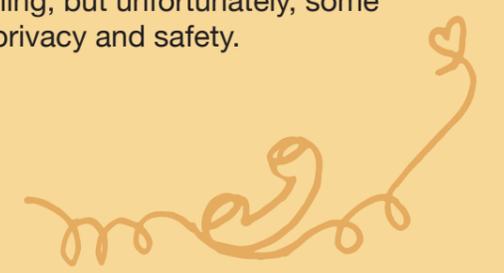
“ NEVER stop offering this type of service to women and children. This opportunity that LAWA offered me was a blessing and it saves lives. Thank you LAWA. Forever grateful. ”



The impact of 3 Lockdowns (April 2020- April 2021)

This year an unprecedented number of assessments were conducted in order to risk assess all referred clients and to prioritise those who required immediate counselling resulting in 64 women and 20 children who received tailored psychotherapy in their native languages. The remaining 33 women were placed on the waiting list or referred to an external counselling service. The counselling service adopted this strategy due to an immediate increase in referrals after the end of the first lockdown in 2020.

In response to the first lockdown in March 2020 LAWA's counselling department suspended all face-to-face sessions and all the sessions became online, either via video or via phone calls. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on victims of domestic abuse was immense and we experienced an increase in demand for online support. Many women were confined to their homes in close proximity to their perpetrator and were unable to lean on their usual support networks. We saw a drastic increase in the referrals for online counselling, but unfortunately, some women could not receive counselling for lack of privacy and safety.



LAWA Community Projects Change Makers

This year the Change makers' workshops focused on intersectional systems of oppression.

Over the past year the Change Maker programme delivered a total of 15 workshops to 33 Change Makers. The lockdowns had an impact on how many women could participate with the programme and for the same reasons the workshops had to be reduced. However, a positive result of purely online activities meant that previous Change Makers could participate from Colombia and Spain.

For three years the Change Maker program was carried out face to face, two years were in Spanish and the third year was in Portuguese. Due to the changes in circumstances brought on by Covid-19 the programme had to reduce this year's workshops to monthly workshops and to deliver all the activities online. The program



returned to Spanish and participation was made more interactive via online platforms such as WhatsApp. We conducted spaces to discuss themes such as; how to survive the Covid-19 pandemic and how to deal with domestic violence and gender-based violence. In addition, we discussed challenges of national and international political movements, in particular extending our solidarity and actions with anti-racist movements.



- 85%** have strongly agreed that they increased their knowledge and awareness about the workshops' subject.
- 100%** women completing the program have reported to have increased their 'knowledge and awareness about Gender Based Violence and intersectionality'.
- 81.25%** of the participants strongly agreed that they increased their confidence and sense of empowerment.
- 100%** of participants enjoyed connecting with other women during sessions.
- 90%** of respondents strongly agreed that they have strengthened their community integration and networks.

LAWA Community Projects Growing Together



The Growing Together Group, achieved an important milestone over this period, which was completing their diaries of the quarantine project "Lo que nos contaron nuestras abuelas" (What Our Grandmothers Told Us). This was a tremendous achievement for all participants and has filled them with lots of pride.

During this period of the pandemic, women kept themselves busy with daily Zumba classes (online) and weekly meetings every Thursday via zoom, which helped them to feel less alone and share key information in such uncertain times. They also continued engaging in other activities that the group grew accustomed to in pre-pandemic times such as celebrating birthdays and playing a quiz every Tuesday. The group formed strong bonds of friendship and solidarity, and everyone is mindful of each other's wellbeing. Special online workshops were organised on Fridays or at weekends to address topics in support of their mental and physical wellbeing,

and those workshops were followed by ludic activities such as karaoke singing. Once it was safer to start meeting up in small groups, the group resumed face to face activities such as 'Come to Lunch with Me'. These were lunch time meet ups organised in groups of six, where women cooked recipes from their countries of origin and had lunch in houses with garden and appropriate space.



LAWA Public Policy and Advocacy

As a BME refuge provider we have seen an increase not only the number but also in the level of complexity in the cases. The 'hostile environment' policy has created multiple barriers to immigrants which permeate throughout the various statutory services and processes. The COVID-19 pandemic hit our services at a time when the 'led by and for' specialist VAWG sector was already facing a crisis of underfunding, shrinking of services and relentless systemic racial discrimination against immigrants. Imkaan has outlined the impact of this dual pandemic in their position paper 'The Impact of the Dual Pandemic' (2020) and in our experience of the past five years we can attest to the conclusions of this paper through our own data. We expect the consequences of the pandemic to last beyond the emergency period. Marginalised communities, and especially BME women who are VAWG survivors, face challenges that will last longer and the overall recovery is expected to need more time. Whilst the government has increased financial support to our sector to deal with COVID, together with other sector organisations, we are advocating before different government bodies to maintain this increased level of provision beyond the pandemic.

The COVID pandemic only exacerbated these inequalities and complex needs and showcased the increased demand for specialist organisations like ourselves. We responded to those challenges by advocating on a local

level with housing and VAWG departments within local authorities to support BME women and organisations. We have been also actively involved in the anti-racist group within the VAWG sector, which came together as a result of the rise of the Black Lives Matter global movement and in the interest of addressing racism practices within the sector. We are also founding members of the OYA consortium of BME refuges, and we lead on the Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) project, supported by Trust for London, that aims to address the intersected needs of women facing gender-based violence and homelessness.



Digital communication and accessibility

As reported last year due to the unprecedented advent of COVID 19, our communications platforms became the main arena for communicating to all our service users as well as the wider Latin American community. We used our existing social media platforms to disseminate critical information about accessing our services, and raise awareness about the urgency of the domestic violence crisis during lockdown. We opened additional ways of communication such as online chat, WhatsApp - safer options for women who couldn't speak - and provided additional phone numbers where to call for support. We ran campaigns through our social media to reach a larger number of women, and used our established WhatsApp community groups to share this information.

Also, we provided additional ways of communication, such as online groups, frequent phone calls, online chat to maintain contact with service users from the counselling service, as well as women involved in all our community projects. Our Change Maker program sessions were delivered online, our Advice Centre maintained the online chat platform on the LAWA website and we noted a 186% increase in visits to the LAWA website demonstrating the critical need for our services.

Between lockdowns we continued to ensure that women from our communities received information about our services including our online resource such as '10 steps to do at home', which we shared on all our social platforms and can be accessed

Facebook

Total reached: 240,382

Audience: 31,2% live in London, 79,8% are women

Instagram

Total reached: 40,763

Audience: 32,9% live in London, 89% are women

Twitter

Total of impressions: 329,900

Total of profile visits: 16,358

at <http://lawadv.org.uk/en/get-help-coronavirus/lawadv.org.uk/en/10-steps-to-do-at-home/>



Or scan our QR Code to access the briefing.

ESOL Online

Given how language is such an important cornerstone of integration for the women in our community, continued provision and take up of ESOL lessons is a very important part of their journey towards empowerment and independence. Therefore, we adapted ESOL classes services, which are now running fully online. With English in Action we provided access to online English Classes at beginner and intermediate level to 37 service users this year.

LAWA Partnerships

During this year, LAWA was part of different partnerships for the provision of end VAWG specialist services.

Samira Project

Together with IMECE and Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Organisation (KMEWO), LAWA provides specialist support to women with Kurdish, Turkish and Latin American backgrounds in the borough of Islington. This project improves referrals pathways for women who approach the local authority seeking support.

women survivors of gender-based violence in London'.

Refuge without Borders

LAWA is the service delivery organisation for specialist 'led by and for' BME refuge provision in this cross-borough partnership. The local authorities joining this project are Lambeth, Southwark, Barnet, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, led by Islington. Through this partnership the listed Local Authorities benefit by being able to create specialist referral pathways to us when a woman of our community presents themselves to them as fleeing from domestic violence.

OYA Consortium

OYA is a consortium of BME organisations providing refuge and specialist supporting services to survivors of different forms of VAWG. It is composed of sister organisations; Asha Project, Ashiana network, London Black Women's Project, and Claudia Jones, with the support of Imkaan. Together we provide services in seven London Boroughs with outreach across Pan-London. Through this partnership, LAWA leads the WAHA initiative and the report 'A Roof, not a Home: The housing experiences of Black and minoritised

CASA project

Funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA), LAWA is part of a Pan-London partnership providing move-on advice and support to women and families who have recently moved from refuge accommodation to a longer-term housing scheme.



Volunteer Programme

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



Join our volunteer programme

We seek skills in different areas for different roles, thus we accept different professional profiles. It is preferable that you speak English and at least one Latin American language – Spanish or Portuguese.

We request a minimum commitment of 6 months (8 months for counselling volunteers). These are some of the areas in which you could support us:

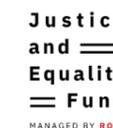
- Case Work Support
- Community Engagement
- Translation and Interpreting
- Communication & social media
- Counselling

To apply or find our more please email volunteer@lawadv.org.uk.

100%

feel that "the work that I performed for LAWA was important and valued by the staff".

With thanks to





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