

# Annual Report

WOMAN  
MIGRANT  
& PROUD

LAWA

## LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S AID

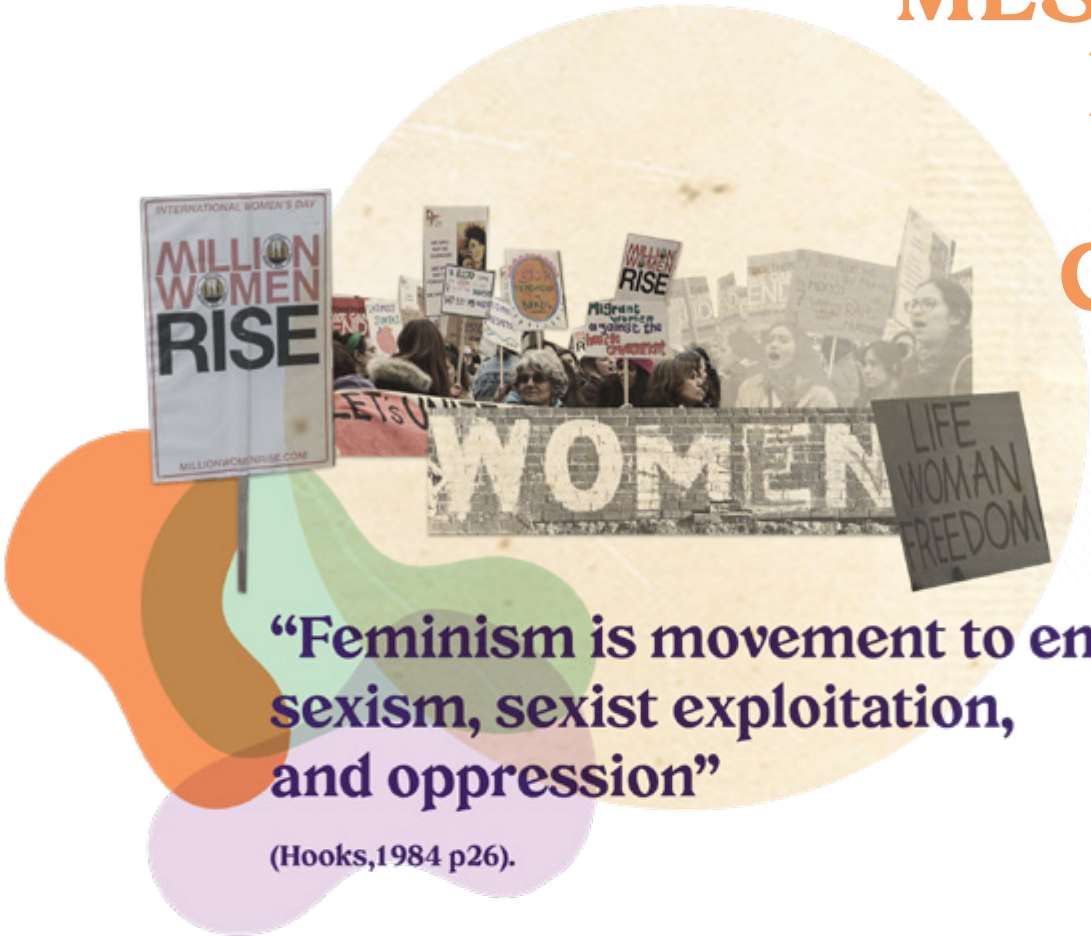
2022 /  
2023



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# MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

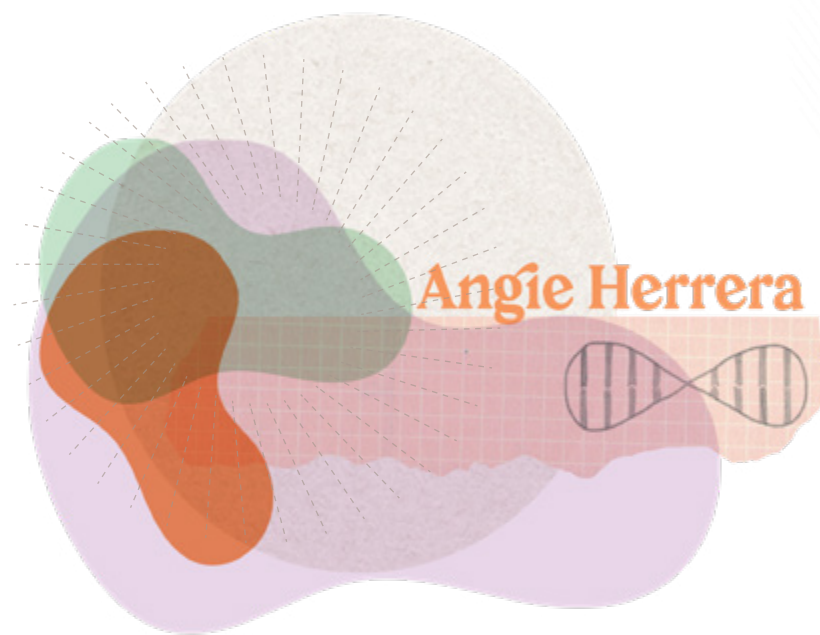


During the last year, LAWA has continued providing critical services to survivors of violence and responding to and adapting to the changing needs of service users. We have successfully run and improved the refuges, strengthened the capacity of our advice centre and community services, nourished our partnerships and continued responding to the complex needs of the service users despite the increased challenges we face in the sector. On behalf of the board, I want to acknowledge the commitment, passion, care and work of our staff, interns and volunteers as without them these achievements would not have been possible.

Black and minoritised communities, migrants, women and children’s survivors of violence continued facing barriers and challenges to navigate a system that usually disowns their experiences. The cost-of-living crisis, in particular, has had a substantial impact

on Latin American and other black and ethnic minority communities, with survivors of domestic violence’s mental and physical health been severely affected. In this hostile environment that our service users experience on a daily basis, LAWA has continued supporting women to recover from abuse and their agency to live fully their lives. We anticipate that the year to come will not be different, with black and minority ethnic groups still facing the brunt of the cost-of-living crisis, the continuation of a hostile environment for migrants and asylum seekers, continuous cuts to social services, and increased violence against women and children. LAWA will need to prepare for increased demands for our services, and to ensure we can continue living up to our commitment of providing tailored sensitive services rooted in care and solidarity to Latin American and black minoritised women experiencing violence every day.





## MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR

As I reflect upon my journey at LAWA spanning nearly six years, from the moment I arrived in the UK as a Latin American migrant to my current role as Director, I am filled with a profound sense of honour and gratitude. This organisation's journey (turning 35 this year!) has been nothing short of remarkable, and it's with great pride that I share with you some of our accomplishments as well as the challenges we face as we navigate the complex landscape of the UK.

Witnessing LAWA's growth, including the capacity in our refuge accommodation, from a team of nine to an impressive team of almost 30 dedicated and tireless women, has been a truly inspiring experience. Our growth has been purposeful and driven by an unwavering commitment to better serve Black and Minoritised women survivors of VAWG from our community. The addition of essential services, such as the specialised LGBTQ+ support, immigration and housing advice, and our unique advocacy work in housing and Domestic Violence, has strengthened our mission and allowed us to comprehensively address the intersected needs of survivors.

Our journey towards progress has not been without its hurdles. The global pandemic tested our resilience and adaptability to ensure the uninterrupted provision of essential services. The complex realities of Brexit added an

additional layer of complexity to the women of our community, demanding the development of new services as well as additional expertise. Simultaneously, the ongoing Cost of Living crisis has exacerbated the challenges and vulnerability faced by those we serve.

It is crucial, however, to acknowledge a harsh reality: despite our tireless efforts to deliver advocacy and support, the external environment presents mounting obstacles in our mission to cater to the needs of women and children who have survived abuse. The urgency of our work has not diminished, but the barriers we encounter are becoming more challenging.

As we share our annual report, it is my hope that our achievements stand as a testament to the tenacity and dedication that define LAWA. Our accomplishments are fuelled by the collective determination of our team, and the resilience of the survivors we serve. While challenges persist, our commitment remains unshaken.

The path ahead might be complex, but I have every confidence that, united, we will continue to effect positive change in the lives of the Latin American and other Black and Minoritised women in the UK.

With gratitude and determination.

## WHO WE ARE AND OUR IMPACT DURING THE LAST YEAR

LAWA runs the only refuges by and for the Latin American community in the UK and in Europe, with over three decades of experience in the provision of "by and for" specialist refuge accommodation and supporting services to women and children fleeing from different forms of gender-based violence, mainly Domestic Violence. **We are a grassroots organisation that is not only widely recognised by women in the community, but also highly trusted as attested by the over 1500 women and children that seek our support every year.**

Alongside our refuge service, we run a VAWG (Violence against Women and Girls) Advice Centre and community-based projects that allow us to reach more Latin-American women every year, such as the Change Makers and Growing Together.

**This year we have carried out a total of 7925 interventions to 1543 women and children.**

**FOR LAWA IS A PRIORITY TO LISTEN TO OUR SERVICE USERS AND MEASURE IF OUR INTERVENTIONS ARE MAKING THE POSITIVE CHANGES WE AIM TO ACHIEVE. THROUGH THE FEED-BACK AND OUTCOME TRACKING, THIS YEAR WE ACHIEVED THE FOLLOWING IMPACT:**

**98%**

said they feel more confident

**98%**

said it made a difference that the service was available in a Latin American/black and minority ethnic led women's organisation

**99%**

said they wouldn't consider going back to their previous relationship

**83%**

stated that the advice provided helped them increase their knowledge about their rights, options and services in the UK

**100%**

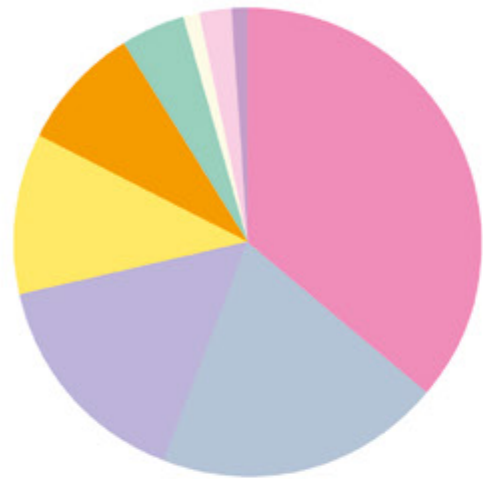
moved into safe accommodation after the refuge





# WHO ARE THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN THAT WE SUPPORT AND WHAT ARE THEIR INTERSECTING NEEDS

## Ethnicity



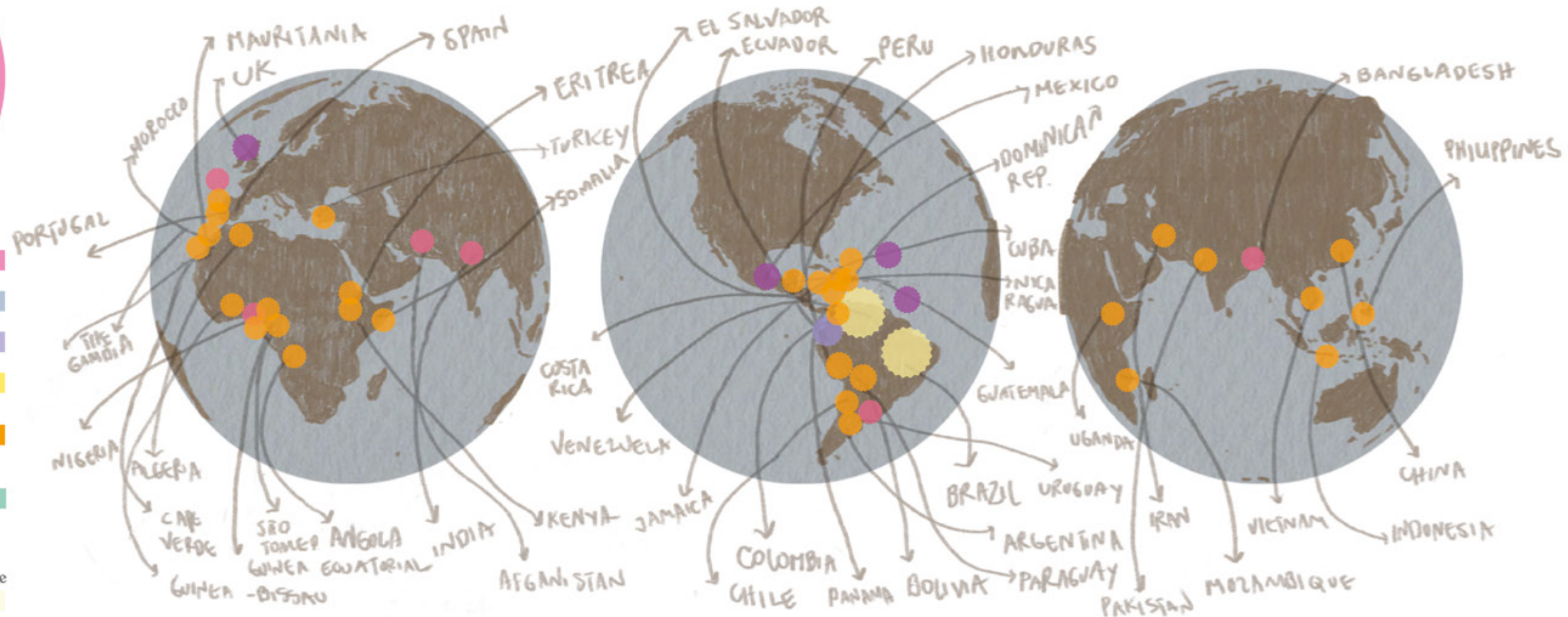
## Country

## Of

## Origin

All our service users are minoritised women, children and young people who face intersecting disadvantages that shape their abuse experience, and therefore withstand additional barriers when seeking support. The different elements of women's identity intersect and make them face additional barriers such as structural racism, a hostile anti-immigration environment, cultural discrimination, lack of support in interpretation services, and lack of legal aid, among others.

Over the past year, the women from our community have been particularly affected by a combination of the Cost-of-Living crisis, as women arrived in complete poverty and with no source of income; and the implementation of Brexit laws that have increased the challenges for women with pre-settlement status. Often, the system completely disowns experiences of violence and dynamics such as coercive control that frequently constrains women from accessing education or work, which creates additional challenges and increases their vulnerability.



**MORE THAN 20%**

**10 - 19%**

**2- 9 %**

**1.9 - 1 %**

**LESS THAN 1 %**

At LAWA we know the importance of recording information to keep track of the composition of our service users in order to respond to their specific needs. Service users complete our diversity and monitoring form when they start their journey at LAWA. Based on this information we know that over the last year, **most of our service users continued to be Brazilian (26,2%) and Colombian (21%).** This year we saw an increase in the number of women over

50 years old (24%), however, the majority are still between 25 and 50 years old (66%). **Following this trend over the past years, the majority (33.5%) of women identify just as Latin American,** however, this year we supported more ethnic minorities than in previous years, including ethnic identities that exist in the Latin American culture also, including black and indigenous, Asian and central Asian.

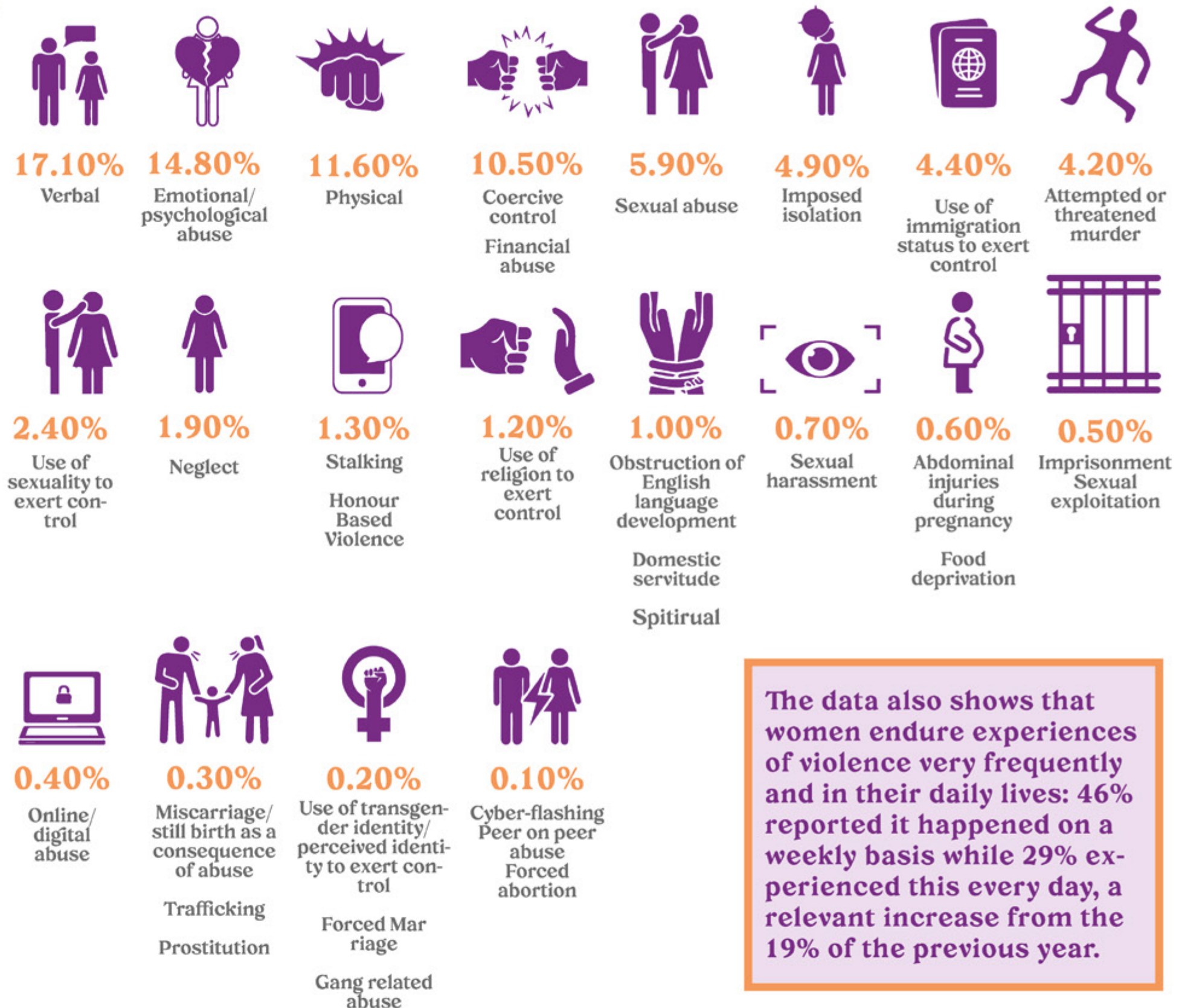


# EXPERIENCES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

## Type of Violence Experienced

To register information about the types of abuse experienced by our service users, we need to build trust with them, so they feel they are in a safe space. This is the reason at the beginning of the woman's journey with us, women usually only share basic information regarding the violence they experienced. As trust is built upon, women usually open themselves up and share more experiences throughout their lives. For LAWA is crucial to know this information considering that we can adapt and personalized our services even more according to what each woman has experienced.

As shown in the graphic, most of our service users experienced verbal (17,1%), emotional and psychological (14,8%), and physical abuse (11,6%). However, most of the women experience more than one type of abuse. During their journey at LAWA, they learn about the different types of abuse and how they manifest, and often they disclose other types of violence and additional experiences that they have not identified as abuse before. One of these cases is financial abuse, which 10,5% of our service users manifest they have experienced it.

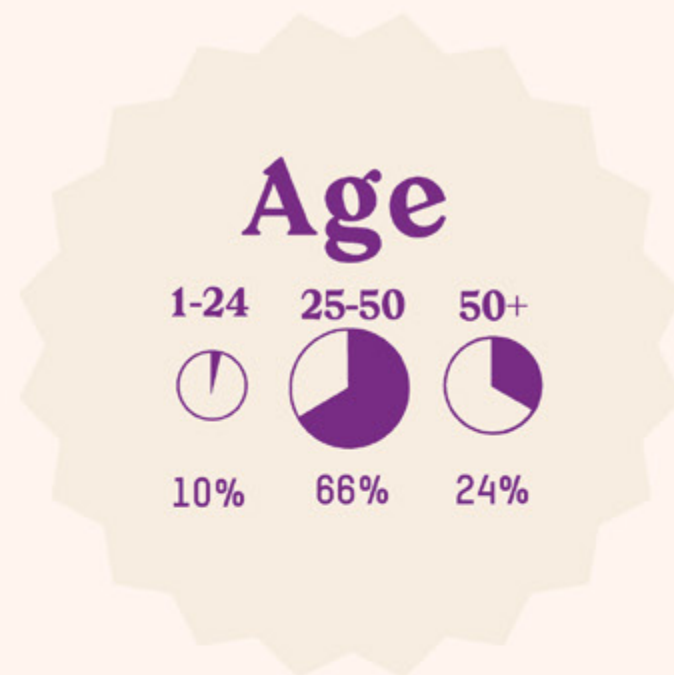


The data also shows that women endure experiences of violence very frequently and in their daily lives: 46% reported it happened on a weekly basis while 29% experienced this every day, a relevant increase from the 19% of the previous year.

## Frequency of Abuse





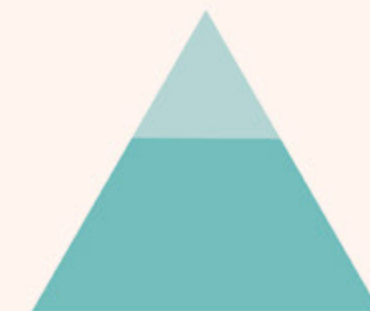


## Cultural and Language Barriers

### SPOKEN ENGLISH AND NEED FOR INTERPRETATION



85%  
Drop-in users:  
speak English? - NO



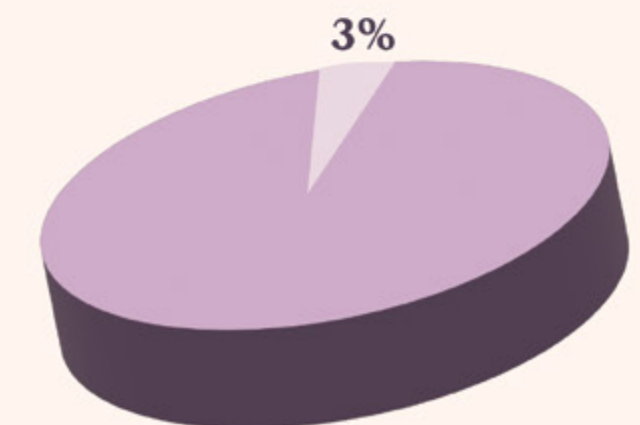
65%  
Not at all comfortable  
with spoken English

Most of our service users (85% in our drop-in and 65% in other services) do not feel comfortable at all with English. This represents a barrier for them to access support and statutory services, not only as an interpretation challenge, but it means a lack of knowledge to navigate a complex system. **For our service users it makes the difference to receive support in their language of preference as it allows them to understand the full scope of their situation.**

## Diverse Sexual Orientation

The vast majority of LAWA's service users are **heterosexual, cisgender women**. Only 3% of the women identified as being part of the LGBTQ+ community. Through our LGBTQ+ specialist services, we are seeking to increase the awareness of LAWA's services, as well as the understanding that violence also operates within same-sex couples. Our outreach activities aim at building trust with the community so they feel **LAWA IS A SAFE SPACE FREE OF JUDGEMENT WHERE THEY CAN FIND SUPPORT.**

Heterosexual, cisgender women  
Bi-sexual, Queer, Lesbian, Asexual

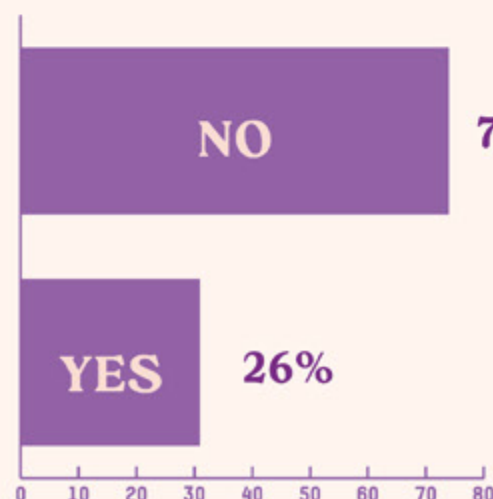


## Financial Hardship

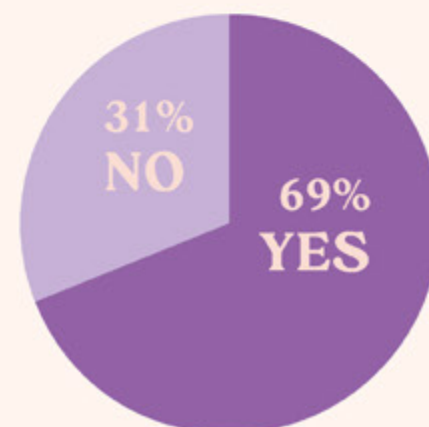


The cost-of-living crisis has had a substantial impact on women from the Latin American community and other black and ethnic backgrounds. This, combined with delays and barriers in accessing statutory services has forced women to stay with their perpetrators for longer periods of time as they are in a vulnerable financial situation in addition to the violence they are experiencing. **This is reflected in the figures we collected where 69% of our users were experiencing financial difficulties. During this year, 74% OF WOMEN HAD NO ACCESS TO PUBLIC FUNDS.**

### NRPF (No Recourse to Public Funds)



### Financial Difficulties





# The context of public policy: Access to housing as a Black and Minoritised women survivor of Domestic Violence

Following the coming into force of the **Domestic Abuse Act 2021, women who are homeless because of domestic abuse must be recognised as being in priority need**. However, local housing authorities continue to refuse or delaying the provision of interim accommodation for Domestic Violence survivors. With the rise of homelessness and scarcity of affordable housing stock in the country, and specially in London, local authorities struggle to find suitable temporary accommodation for families, or spaces for women only. What tends to happen is that they rely on Bed & Breakfasts, which, with the shared facilities and inadequate space, are generally unsuitable for families. Local authorities also tend to send families to hotels where there are no cooking facilities, so the families cannot afford the costs of feeding themselves for more than a week. When the woman fleeing violence can go into a refuge a number of other challenges also need to be circumvented by community organisations like LAWA, who are not locally commissioned. Some of these include:

**\*Unfounded delays or refusals in the adjudication of Housing Benefit.**

**\*Continued use of the argument of lack of local connections to withhold support to survivors of abuse.**

**\*Patchy support from housing officers for survivors to find to find long term, stable housing.**

We continued this work under our Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) initiative, a service that has a strong 4-year track record delivering high quality housing advice and support for black and minoritised survivors of abuse. Importantly, the initiative also involves doing continued in-depth analysis of the case files from our service users, as well as conducting practical sessions with advisors where we exchange information on the latest policy and practice areas that are relevant to the provision of this service. At the end of this period, we published a brand-new section of our website where we provide key data snapshots and analysis coming out of our case work, as well as survivors' testimonies and blogs.

## Key results - WAHA initiative:

**90** 90 BME survivors with complex housing needs directly supported, significantly improved their housing outcomes.

**77%** of our service users secured or re-tained safe and suitable accommodation following the support from the WAHA project.

**390** survivors supported through the WAHA initiative in total.

**5** months has been the average length of support given to each case in order to guarantee positive outcomes.

# Institutional advocacy in the Family Courts: A Landmark ruling

After a long battle, with our leadership, supported by Dr Charlotte Proudman, Rights of Women, and alongside Refuge and Women's Aid Federation we won a landmark case in the High Court of England and Wales ensuring confidentiality of women's refuge addresses. The case concerned draconian and dangerous location orders made against a woman living in one of our refuges, the staff in the refuge and numerous other agencies demanding that the refuge address be handed to the solicitor for the other party in the case. The orders placed the safety of the woman and other refuge residents at risk and caused enormous distress to the staff. Our joint submission led to court ruling [2023] EWHC 471 (Fam) - Case No: FD22P00405.

This ruling established that only in circumstances which are truly exceptional, and urgent, should documents be personally served on women at refuges' residential addresses, that women's refuge addresses are always confidential, and

that migrant women surviving domestic abuse face barriers to accessing services which are discriminatory. This was not the first instance in which orders of these nature had been served to LAWA. Unfortunately, we went through two other cases of similar nature in 2019 and 2020. In all those three cases, we believe that these orders stem from the discriminatory and disproportionate presumption that there is increased risk of abduction of the child by the mother because of her being a migrant. The impact of these orders was devastating, including, in one case, the abduction of the child by the perpetrator.

We consider the ruling a landmark because it explicitly named and acknowledged for the very first time in the courts of England and Wales the concept of intersectionality and the multiple barriers of inequalities and oppression that migrant women suffer including no recourse to public funds, immigration insecurity, discrimination from authorities, language challenges, etcetera.



Click or scan to know more about



# WAHA

# OUR SERVICES



LAWA Refugee Services

During this financial year we supported a total of 77 women to access to access emergency and safe accommodation in our refuge. From this, a total of 45 women and their children received support from our Family support Service. Together, they received a total of 2,101 interventions. 100% of women supported moved into a safe accommodation after the Refuge some of these accommodations provided by the council, private or other form of accommodation. 99% women said they wouldn't consider going back to their previous relationship.

LAWA refuge continues being the only refuge that provide specialised and tailored support by and for Latin American Women in need of emergency accommodation in UK. During this year again, we successfully manage to respond the specific needs of the residents.

During this time, the team has continued to provide excellent high-quality emotional and

## Refuge and emergency accommodation

practical support for the residents, drawing on numerous local resources and working in partnership with external services to help them obtain the support they need to regain confidence and independence, including counselling, applying to social welfare benefits, ESOL classes, access to free clothes and other free activities and resources as well as engaging with internal and external activities.

Additionally, women are assisted to report incidents of domestic abuse or any form of abuse to the police and other relevant authorities, and this often includes supporting them to liaison with legal professionals to apply for legal protection measures or family matters. Frequently, support workers assist them in Court when legal representation is not available. This showcases that our approach is to support women throughout their entire journey, rather than only signposting to other organisations.

On arrival, after a careful referral assessment, the support worker and the women agreed on a tailored, person-centred safety and action plan to empower them to have with a life free of abuse. Refuge workers provide information to the residents, so they can make an informed decision of what they consider is the best option for their and their children lives.

As a communal housing scheme designed to support vulnerable women and children survivors of gender-based violence, the staff provides weekly spaces to address any issues arises, clarify any rules, and carry on collective activities

etc. They also have weekly one to one key work session with each resident to provide support with topics like GP registrations, benefits, legal issues, school registration when children are involved and health and wellbeing support is provided for both the women and children in the 1:1 session, or family support sessions.

A vital part of our work is safeguarding adults and children who access our service. When there is a safeguarding concern, referral to relevant professionals such children (MASH) or adult social services, police MARAC are made. The staff have attended refresher training and continued to receive support in team meetings, supervision etc, to better support cases where safeguarding concerns arise. It is a key element to work in partnership and coordination with other services, including statutory agencies.

In the last year we have seen Increase of need for mental health crisis services. Long-term trauma informed therapeutic services are difficult to access due to high demand and the pre-requisite imposed by these services for women to be in a permanent accommodation to be able to access to support denying Women in the refuge or women living in temporary accommodation (TA) the possibility to access the support they need.

In the Resettlement process, the staff provides support to women and children living in the Refuge with their move-on housing needs. The support aims to empower the women and children as they prepare for their new beginning.

Women have access to the resettlement support while living in the refuge and the support will continue when they move up to three months. The support worker will assess each woman's plans for when she leaves, and the worker will support her with the applications for housing in the area she wishes to restart her life. The

worker will then work with the resident with the practicalities of leaving the refuge and moving to another area. This may include set up utilities and source household, furniture and goods when required.

Once the woman has been located in a new area, the re-settlement worker will ensure appropriate safety measures are in place and that resident is in touch with services in the community.

This process has become increasingly difficult given the lack of available housing options for residents. More and more women are making the decision of moving into private rented housing, as it is impossible to find social housing, 36% of our service users had to move into private rented accommodation and other forms of accommodation because of this challenge.

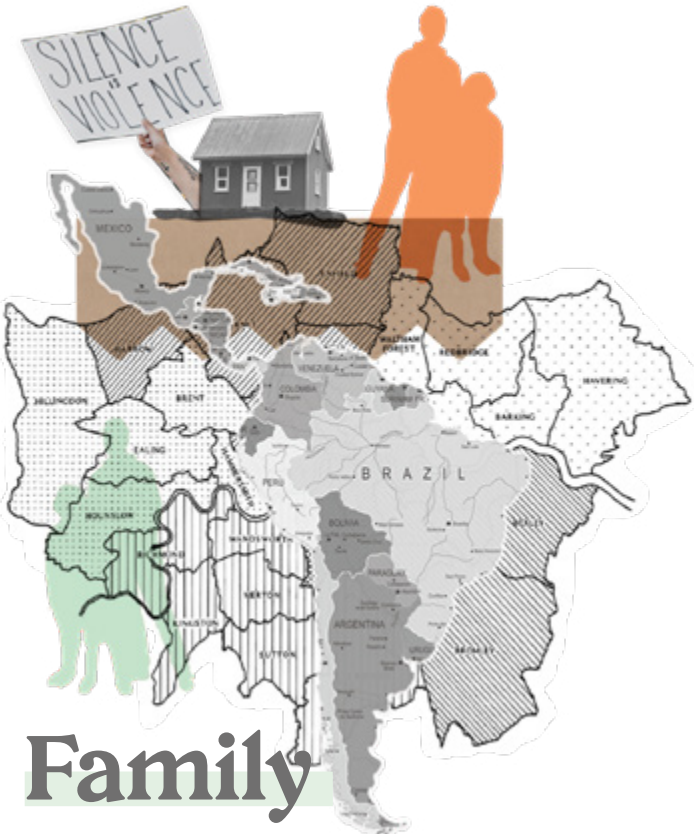


LAWA Refugee Services



# OUR SERVICES

## Refuge and emergency accommodation



## Family support services

Our Children and Young People Emotional Wellbeing Adviser continues to work with families in the refuge, providing emotional aid to children and mothers.

We have expanded this service, which includes 1:1 session with children, mum-children sessions and group activities, by having monthly outings to give mothers and children a space for them to further their bond and do something outside of refuge, which is focused on their development and enjoyment, rather than on what has happened to them. Feedback has been very positive from

both children and mothers. Activities range from museum visits, farm visits, group picnics, and water games activities.

The 1:1 sessions with the children are mostly focused on Play Therapy, depending on the age of the child and the needs assessed in the first sessions, apart from game hour, the CYP worker also does different assessments throughout the sessions and depending on the needs are results of those, adjust the plan to work with the child. The 1:1 sessions with mom are aimed to talk about their bond, how the mom observes the child, any difficulties or struggles they have been having and any further topic mom feels like it's important to bring into the sessions to deal with what they have been through. In the mum-child session the focus is to give examples to mum regarding topics discussed in the sessions like boundary setting, emotion identification and/or management and other topics mums feel like are currently relevant.

The goal of the group activities, both the outings and the activities in house, is to bring their attention to activities with joy and distraction, and to focus more on their relationship, enjoyment, doing something different to get out of the routine. Feedback from the activities is always positive and mothers and children are always excited to see what the next activity will be. Through this support, 82% of the children



### LAWA Family Support Services

showed an increased in their social integration skills and 63% had a positive increased in their family and social relations.

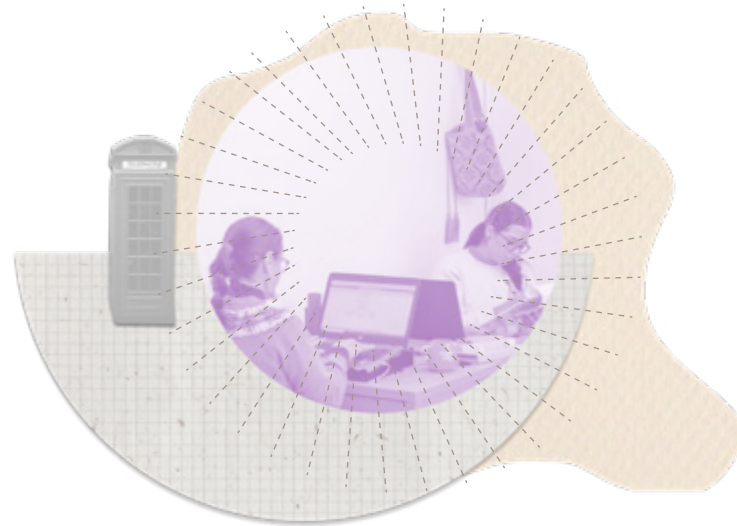
During this year, we have had an increased number of cases of children within the autism spectrum. We have, therefore, worked to develop external relationships with organisations that provide specialist support to children and families. Unfortunately, although guidelines are that it should not take longer than 13 weeks for a first appointment, the reality is that cases we have worked with show the waiting list for an assessment is closer to 1-2 years. Aside from the lengthy wait times, it is complicated to access, and services often do not have interpreters in place for mums whose first language isn't English. There is very limited availability of support for children with autism and this creates further barriers to mums and their journey of recovery.

The CYP worker helps assess children's development and can often be the first professional to flag concerns around any diagnosis. She will liaise with the child's Health Visitor for follow-up and make appropriate referrals to CAMHS and other paediatric services. She can provide the mothers who come into our refuges with tailored support explaining what autism is, what steps can be taken to support their children, and explaining the process of receiving assessment and support in the UK.



# OUR SERVICES

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS ADVICE CENTRE



LAWA Advice Centre

During the last year, the **VAWG Advice Centre supported 416 women through 3094 interventions**. This represents an increase of 13% of service users in comparison to last year. Our VAWG specialist advice includes advice and practical support in welfare benefits, housing, family Law, immigration (OISC L1), career and employment advice, community building and ESOL classes that are open to all the community and focused on learning vocabulary for everyday and working purposes.

The current hostile environment is increasing barriers for migrant women in all levels of needs. Based on the limited immigration options, women are becoming more vulnerable, needing to access food banks, irregular work and accommodation, and increasingly becoming at risk of homelessness. For women with children, the support from statutory services has failed in providing the necessary actions to ensure the

safety and wellbeing of families fleeing domestic abuse. This implies that our work is extended to actions that should be taken by statutory services and even support with tasks that should be derived from governmental aid. These complexities lead to our caseworkers to increase their time in each case to ensure that families have their needs met and rights respected. The need to increase the time on each case leads to the decrease in the capacity for new referrals and could signify that in the future there is a reduction of number of women seen and receiving support in the service. During the last years, the impact of post Brexit is very much felt in the everyday life of the survivors of gender-based violence who have a pre-settled status. Based on the obstacles that the Home Office has forced into migrants who have been in the UK for less than five years, women are being refused their Universal Credit applications, Child Benefit, Housing Benefit, among other benefits. Along with this factor, there is a lack of knowledge by frontline professionals who are unaware of the rights that women survivors of GBV can access. The law and entitlements around pre-settled status are rapidly changing, which affects the rationale in which many frontline professionals work that are not updated of new legislation.

**Due to the lack of intersectional awareness of the difficulties faced by migrant women by government officers, migrant women end having negative experiences with statutory services and facing additional challenges.** They struggle more to access comprehensive answers from



LAWA Advice Centre

the police, social services, safeguarding teams, housing, and more, and have their language needs commonly ignored. Social services have failed several times in asking women to return to their home countries without questioning if they have a safe space or assumed that due to their immigration status, they are not eligible for statutory support. Furthermore, the immigration status of mothers is being weaponised against them in courts. Perpetrators do legal proceedings against mothers to prevent them to leave the country with the child, despite mothers not having any intentions to do so, perpetrators aim to perpetuate their abuse and control via legal institutions.

There is an increased number of walk-ins that are women seeking information to access asylum status. This is because women are finding that there are limited routes to regularisation when they are fleeing their home countries due to gender

violence. Unfortunately, the list of safe countries from the Home Office does not comprehend the complex conflicts that occur in Latin American countries, and many are discouraged to seek asylum despite being in need for a safe location after fleeing different forms of abuse. At LAWA we provide them with support to access refugee support and can access Immigration Legal Advice of their best pathway to follow.

For women that need non-VAWG related matters, the Advice Centre provides appointments every Tuesday where women have the possibility of receiving support by making an appointment or walking in. During this year we assisted 309 women and acted on 439 interventions of one-off support.





Million Women Rise, March 2023

## LBTQ specialist support

At LAWA, we provide holistic LBTQ+ support for Latin American and BME women, our outreach programme aims to expand the contact with service users who can access our support, and professionals that are not familiar with the service. Among other factors, such as cultural and religious barriers, there is limited access to specific support for lesbian, bisexual, and queer women from our community; the outreach is incredibly valuable as we see increasing numbers of LBTQ+ cases. This year we have increased the numbers of people that have been reached by our LBTQ outreach programme, having six different spaces where over 215 people have been in contact with our project and available support. As a trans-inclusive organisation, we have

noticed an increased number of asylum seekers in fleeing violence from Latin America, this counts as the great majority of our LBTQ clients. Trans women flee situations of high physical risk and gang related violence after receiving little to no support in their home countries. Many times, they are consequently victims of Human Trafficking and experience different forms of exploitation in the UK.

The number of lesbians and bisexual women seeking our services shows us that the need of an outreach program is deeply necessary, as the Latin American community is still very religious orientated, and these women not always feel comfortable talking about their sexuality openly with generic services for women. The language

barrier, the lack of safe spaces to openly talk about their sexuality, immigration status, issues accessing income support and are still the main challenges presented in our cases of LBTQ+ women. The outreach program helps make sure that the LBTQ+ Latinx community is aware of confidential and safe service for them to be able to navigate all the layers of violence a queer woman might face. We notice a pattern among lesbians to not engage with statutory services and not to report the abuse, and we believe this is connected to the fact that most of same sex couples tend to believe that a women cannot abuse other women (whilst men continue to be dominantly the larger number of perpetrators). We aim to include a safe space for lesbians and bisexual women to seek protection, understanding how the patriarchal society build on all of us misogynistic thoughts and attitudes, and we are all vulnerable to this

## Immigration

The migrant status is often becoming a barrier for women to access support. The specific cases of those women who have come to the UK with a spouse visa as partners of British nationals, or settled (with permanent residence), and whom during their relationship suffered domestic abuse, can make an application to the Home Office under the Domestic Violence Rules which allow them not to stay in a risky and abusive situation. The common issue is that those women who are being subjected to different forms of domestic abuse, are not aware of such protection provision in place by the government. Our service therefore has made a countless impact for those migrant women who are in vulnerable situations of abuse by their partners, to make independent and informed decisions, and to flee abusive and complex relationships, and be safe without the fear of losing their

immigration status. The case of migrant women who have come to the UK as dependents of a European national, and who get a pre-settled status under the EUSS, face the exact situation of an unawareness of their immigration options, as those explained above when facing the breakdown in their relationships due to domestic abuse.

We have informed and advised 134 women on the legal options to make an application to 'retained the right of residence' under the EUSS, to be able to hold and secure their stay in the UK.





# OUR SERVICES



## CASE STUDY

Pilar\* is a Brazilian woman who moved to the UK in October 2022 with her husband and son (Portuguese nationals). Her husband said to Pilar that he would take care of the accommodation, application for the EUSS, and the finances, as he has already lived in the UK before Brexit and had pre-settled status. This way, she could focus on settling in with their three-year-old son. When they arrived, Pilar found hard to learn English whilst being the full carer of their child and would have rejections for jobs as her status was still pending, according to her husband. Not been able to access a job and speak English made Pilar isolated and she started to feel down about herself and her abilities.

After six months, Pilar's husband started drinking, and as he had control over the house finances, she started having issues buying food; he would spend all their income on going out and abusing substance. Pilar was not aware how much he was earning nor had access to their account, as he had only given her a card extension where he checked what she spent daily. As the time went on, he started becoming aggressive with her when she asked for food, and she avoided eating to make sure her son had enough food for the day. Pilar started making her family aware of his current behaviour, and she asked her sister to contact the police if she said a codeword.

One morning Pilar rushed to take care of her child while he was desperately crying, her husband went after her and said that it was nothing, when she tried to get to her son again, her husband pushed her and slapped her saying she should obey him. He took her phone away from her. That same day, she waited until her husband had a shower and took her phone to message the codeword to her sister.

Pilar's sister could not call the UK police from abroad, so she searched online for support services for Latin American Women living in London. She messaged LAWA through our chat services and gave us all Pilar's information and disclosed her concerns over Pilar's safety. LAWA shared a safety plan with Pilar's sister.

LAWA contacted the statutory services and informed the situation. The team asked the police to go to the address and say that the report came from a neighbour to avoid the perpetrator to be suspicious. Pilar and her son were taken by the police to a hotel. From then, Pilar accepted to continue with LAWA's support, and was happy that she was able to flee the abuse from her husband. Through an assessment with her caseworker, she was able to speak on her mother tongue and disclosed the abuse she was experiencing. With her caseworker, she understood that she was a victim of minimisation, verbal abuse and xenophobic behaviour, emotional and physical abuse, isolation and coercive control, financial abuse, neglect and food deprivation, immigration abuse, obstruction of language development, and digital abuse. Pilar accessed a non-Molestation order, and the perpetrator is prohibited from contacting her or her son.

Social services started to support Pilar and her son with housing as she was not sure of her immigration status. They were clear that they only had funds to support her for two weeks. LAWA provided immigration support and called the EUSS resolution centre to understand her status. At that point, Pilar found out that her

husband had done her application, but he failed to send the evidence of their relationship, her application was closed, and she had no status. This meant that she could not work, access welfare, or have the right to rent. When statutory services found out, they started pressuring Pilar to return to her home country, saying they would pay for her ticket, they did not consider if her home country was safe, or if she had any means there to be with her son. She decided to stay in the UK as she had no resources to raise her son in her home country. In face of this challenges, Pilar's emotional wellbeing deteriorated. She was already fragile from leaving the relationship and had to make decisions that would determine her life.

LAWA's caseworker had to advocate and do several calls to statutory services to have Pilar's accommodation renewed. The renewal would be every couple of weeks in a hotel. She could not provide nutritious food for her son as the local foodbank had limited resources and they did not have a kitchen. The approach from statutory services began being hostile and without the right sensitivity that a recent survivor of Domestic abuse needs.

Through LAWA's intervention for 7 months, Pilar was supported with her practical and emotional needs, she was granted pre-settled status as a mother of a child with EUSS. With this, her journey changed, and she was able to work, and her son attended nursery. She attended LAWA's ESOL classes and her caseworker assisted her with her CV. Pilar finally accessed a Temporary Accommodation that now has a kitchen and separate rooms for her and her son.



# OUR SERVICES

## COUNSELLING

**Our counselling approach is women-centred and trauma informed one**, that helps women to heal from the violent experience and find meaning and purpose in their lives after the impact of the traumatic experience of domestic violence. Our services provide a safe and non-judgmental space for women to explore their trauma experience in their mother tongue language Spanish, Portuguese and in English.

**Our goal is to support women to reduce the impact of the traumatic event in their lives** and increase daily functioning, guide them in achieving self-determination, restoring self-stability, self-efficacy, self-continuity, and reclaiming self-identity, establishing healthy boundaries and exploring healthy coping mechanism skills to manage more effectively the aftermath of trauma and promote trauma awareness and increase the understanding of it.

**Our services is one of the few services in London offering a Spanish/Portuguese speaking**, gender responsive and including an intersectional approach, therefore the demand in the last year has been increasing and we only work with internal referrals from LAWA Advice Centre and Refuge.

**92 women received counselling within the period April 2022 to March 2023 in a short-term therapeutic work of 12 and 16 individual sessions with a total of 1004 1:1 sessions.**



LAWA Counselling



## CASE STUDY

\*Name changed for safety reasons

Patricia\*, was referred to the counselling services throughout the internal refuge referrals by LAWA's support worker. She escaped an abusive relationship that she endured for several years and manage to have practical support with the refuge and emotional support within the counselling services.

Patricia got married young and had two children in her native country; she migrated to the UK when her children were under five years old, as her first husband was physical abusive towards

her and then she decided to leave the country looking for a better life.

Patricia experience as a single mother, working hard to provide for her children was challenging but her determination made her to stay in a new country. She started working as a cleaner and offering services of babysitting.

After years she decided to form a new romantic relationship with a British man that presented as charm and polite, the relationship developed fast, and they got married, Patricia own words "it was like a dream come true". However, her new husband started changing after the marriage,



he discriminated against her culture and background and made discriminatory comments within their friends. Patricia never challenged him and silently accepted that behaviour; gradually the verbal abuse increased and developed into to coercive control and the cycle of emotional abuse (idealisation, devaluation, repetition, and discard) went on for years. Patricia was confused, and feelings of shame and guilt as she thought he was the “perfect husband”.

Patricia was constantly sick, but her GP could not find any physical evidence of her sickness, when her children were old enough to leave the house, she decided to look for help and approached to LAWA.

She was admitted to one of the refuges and started therapy with one of the counsellors where Patricia felt a safe space to explore and understood her experience of emotional abuse, the trauma, and multiple losses that Patricia experienced left her with a massive bereavement. She engaged in therapy and mourned her losses that enabled her to grieve, transform loss and restore hope, recovered her self-esteem from the traumatic experience of emotional abuse. Patricia felt isolated as some friendships that she thought would support her in the painful process of separations, instead blamed her and emotional blackmailed her to return with her estranged husband.

The trusting and non-judgemental relationship that developed between Patricia and her therapist contributed to the healing process. Although her personal circumstances changed drastically, her physical health was affected with chronic unexplained pain due to the severe levels of anxiety and depression that she was facing while she was in the process of adapting herself to live in a women’s refuge.

Working in partnership with other professionals made her journey a slightly easier, Patricia was determinate to reclaim her identity as Latin American woman that for many years was

neglected due to the abuse that she endured.

Her sessions with LAWA were the first ones that she had in her mother-tongue, and she was always very committed to the process and took useful tools from the session into practice in her daily life. E.g., established a healthy boundary with others and prioritising her own needs.

Patricia sees herself as a survivor not any more as a victim, she is aware that emotional abuse left invisible wounds and take time to heal that deep invisible wounds that for years were open and not heal.

# OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## Change Makers



LAWA Change Makers 2023

The Change Makers programme in this period launched its new phase of work, key activities included:

**Internal pilot trainings with staff and volunteers adapting the curriculum developed through the change maker programme to cater the needs of new staff, volunteers, and refresh knowledge of existing staff (3 trainings with 15 participants in total).** The new training package developed and trialled was called: Intersectionality and ways of working at LAWA. These pilots and its outcomes are being utilised to build from the ground up LAWA’s Institutional Learning Strategy and Operational programme.

**The intersectionality curriculum was also trialled for an external audience (Latin American employees’ group at Google), with whom LAWA has an ongoing collaboration.** This workshop took place in the context of the Latin Heritage Month in October 2022. The training (which is usually face-to-face) was adapted to an online format, to facilitate participation of employees at different locations (13 participants in total). The feedback of the session was extremely positive, and we hope this initiative will continue building strong links between that section of our community and the less privileged one that comes to use our services.

**In the context of the global campaign ‘16 days of activism against gender-based violence’ in 2022, staff from our Advice Centre and Refuges gave presentations at the Mexican and Argentinian embassy, which proved to be an excellent community outreach effort to raise awareness about our services through those networks and in social media.**



# OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

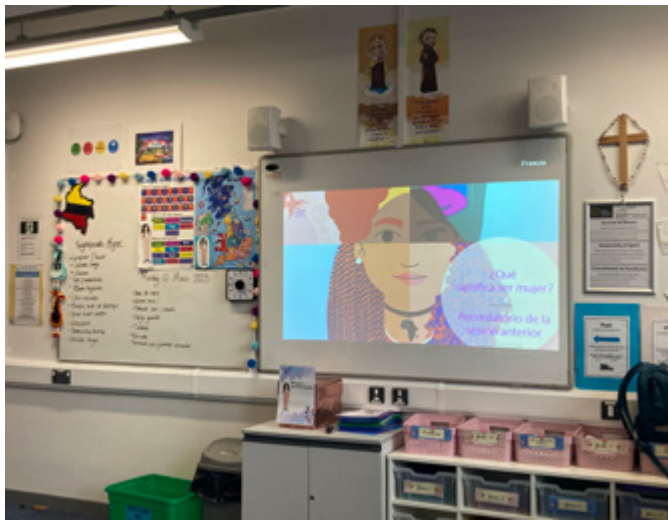
## Growing Together



LAWA Change Makers 2023

Change Maker Chavitas', which continues to be run in collaboration with Saint Gabriel's College in Lambeth and the talented Ms. Claudia Lopez, Teaching coordinator at that school, had an outstanding closure of the 2022 programme by visiting the Tate Modern in London to have a direct and powerful encounter with works by Latinx artists such as Cinthia Marcelle, Ana Mendieta and Doris Salcedo, among others.

The programme for the 2023 cohort was designed and started to be implemented from January 2023. The new cohort of young girls is comprised of 25 girls between 13- and 17-year-old. Some of the activities will include, among other things, participation from Latin American female employees at google in some of the workshops. We hope they can act as role models and inspiration for the young girls.



LAWA Change Makers Chavitas 2023



LAWA Growing Together

The Growing Together group (a by and for Latin American Elderly women's group) is now a well-established reference for our community in London. Women from all walks of life continue self-refer and engage with the very diverse, fun, and useful activities facilitated by our group coordinator. During warmer days women go on outings to different sites in London, and on a weekly basis they gather for a community lunch where they play games, chat, and support each other. Every month they celebrate birthdays of the group participants and go to their allotment based in Lambeth to look after their crops. With

support from volunteers, women also enjoy from personalised one to one IT lessons (to support autonomy and independence), skills-sharing (knitting sessions), bespoke English classes and informative workshops on important and varied topics for the community, ranging from mental health, grief and bereavement to the legislative changes that will require voters to have personal identification documents. While not everyone in our community falls in that category, our elders normally do, so this topic was an important one for us to raise awareness about.



## PARTNERSHIPS

As part of a wider sector, we work in close partnership with organisations from across the sector and the Latin American community. During this year we were part of different VAWG and housing spaces in which we work tirelessly to ensure that the different needs of Black and Minoritised women are taken into consideration.

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

In addition to this, LAWA continues to be part of different partnerships for the provision of services.

## OYA Consortium

The OYA Consortium is a Black and Minoritised refuge consortium compound of LAWA and three sister organisations, Asha, Ashiana, and LBWP. Imkaan, as the only Black and Minoritised umbrella organisation in the UK, is also part of OYA as a capacity building organisations. 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 10 years, offering a specialist service.



Million Women Rise, March 2023

## 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.



Million Women Rise, March 2023

## Our presence in social media



**3279**  
Followers



**4.6K**  
followers



**4119**  
followers

## Support our work

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# Islington Council

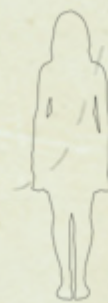
## DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities)

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# 2023

