

LAWA

2023  
2024  
2025

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MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR



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

During the period of this report, LAWА continued providing key services and practical and emotional support to women survivors of violence, while responding to changing needs due to the continuous collapse of the social welfare system and a hostile environment for migrants and refugees. Despite the challenges in the funding landscape, we managed to run and maintain our refuge provision, strengthened the capacity of our advice centre and community services, continued strengthening our partnerships -particularly with other groups of services for minoritised women- and continued responding to the complex changing needs of our service users. In October, LAWА celebrated its 35th year anniversary with service users and colleagues who have been part of this amazing journey (including former staff, board members and people from sister organisations). This was a meaningful moment to remember why LAWА was created, its feminist roots, the love that has been put into building a space for women survivors of violence to feel safe; and how critical it has been to centre solidarity, support and care in our evolution. We know that the year ahead will be difficult, in a context of increased racism and white supremacy. Recent riots and attacks against minoritised communities have been the consequence of years of normalisation of racism and Islamophobia, and migrants and minoritised people have been used as scapegoats by media, politicians and government officials. We will need to continue our work facing increased needs of our service users -particularly mental health- that are not being currently addressed by the health system and are putting additional pressure on our staff and organisation; facing a lack of affordable and suitable housing options and move-on accommodation; and facing reduced or short-term funding. However, as every year, LAWА will continue adapting to these changes ensuring that we remain responsive to the service user needs and working in solidarity with them, as well as working in partnership with others to expand service provision and advocate for change. LAWА’s work would not have been possible without the incredible and inspiring group of staff, interns, and volunteers who are part of it. They embody LAWА’s values and are the heart of our organisation. On behalf of the board, our heartfelt thank you.

Susana Klien

## MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR

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

As I write this letter for our Annual Report, we are grieving the tragic loss of three young girls. Their deaths have been weaponized by far-right extremists to fuel a toxic narrative of racism, xenophobia, and anti-Muslim sentiment. In the past weeks, we have witnessed riots erupting across the country, mosques being destroyed, asylum seekers' accommodations set ablaze, and migrant communities terrorized. These events did not occur in isolation. They are the culmination of years of a hostile environment towards migrant communities, shaped by government policies such as the proposed deportation of asylum seekers to Rwanda, and media campaigns that have long vilified migrants and refugees.

Yet, amid this darkness, we have also seen the power of collective action. Communities have rallied together, reclaiming the streets and standing against these hateful attacks. This collective response is a powerful reminder that we must unite against hate. Our strength lies in our solidarity; no one can achieve meaningful change alone.

At LAWA, we have observed an alarming increase in the complexity of the cases we support. Women face additional barriers due to their immigration status, are re-victimized by the criminal justice system—including the police and the courts—and struggle with a lack of housing options, deepening poverty, and escalating abuse. Our team continues to work tirelessly, providing the holistic support that women and children from Latin American and other racialized communities desperately need. Through our refuge accommodation, counselling, immigration, housing, and advocacy services, we stand side by side with women who are breaking the cycle of violence and forging new lives for themselves and their children. Our outreach projects continue to build community, offering safe spaces for Latin American women to reconnect with their roots and find solidarity.

As we share this Annual Report, I hope our achievements serve as a testament to the tenacity and dedication that define LAWA. Our successes are driven by the collective determination of our team and the resilience of the survivors we serve. Though challenges persist, our commitment remains unwavering.

In solidarity,

**Angie Herrera**



## LAWA AND OUR IMPACT DURING THE LAST YEAR

This year we have supported **1713 WOMEN AND CHILDREN** from Latin America or other black and minoritised backgrounds through **7488 INTERVENTIONS**.

For over **35 YEARS**, LAWA has run the only refuges by and for the Latin American community in the UK and in Europe. We provide “by and for” specialist services comprised of refuge accommodation, VAWG Advice centre, counselling and community-based projects. We are a community organisation widely recognised by the women from our community.

We are committed to the inclusion of our beneficiaries' voices in shaping our services. We collect regular feedback to understand what works best and what needs to be adjusted to fulfil our service user's needs. **THROUGH THIS FEEDBACK WE HAVE ALSO IDENTIFIED THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES OVER THE LAST YEAR:**

**FROM 322 WOMEN** who responded the questionnaire, **98%** said it made a difference that the service was available in a Latin American/black and minority ethnic led women's organisation

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

**93%** of women said they feel more confident

**100%** women said they felt supported by their therapist

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

**92%** of women stated that they increased their knowledge about domestic violence, the justice system and their legal options



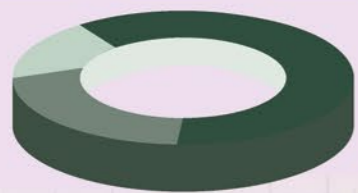
# WOMEN AND CHILDREN AT LAW:

## WHO ARE THEY AND WHAT ARE THEIR INTERSECTING NEEDS?

OUR SERVICE USERS are women and children that experience different barriers when seeking support. The intersection of different elements such as race, ethnicity, immigration status, language, economic status and others, results in different forms of discrimination derived from racist and patriarchal structures. OVER THE LAST YEAR WE HAVE SEEN AN INCREASE IN THE HOSTILE ANTI-IMMIGRATION ENVIRONMENT, THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS, DELAYS IN ACCESSING STATUTORY SUPPORT AND LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN TO ACCESS JOBS.

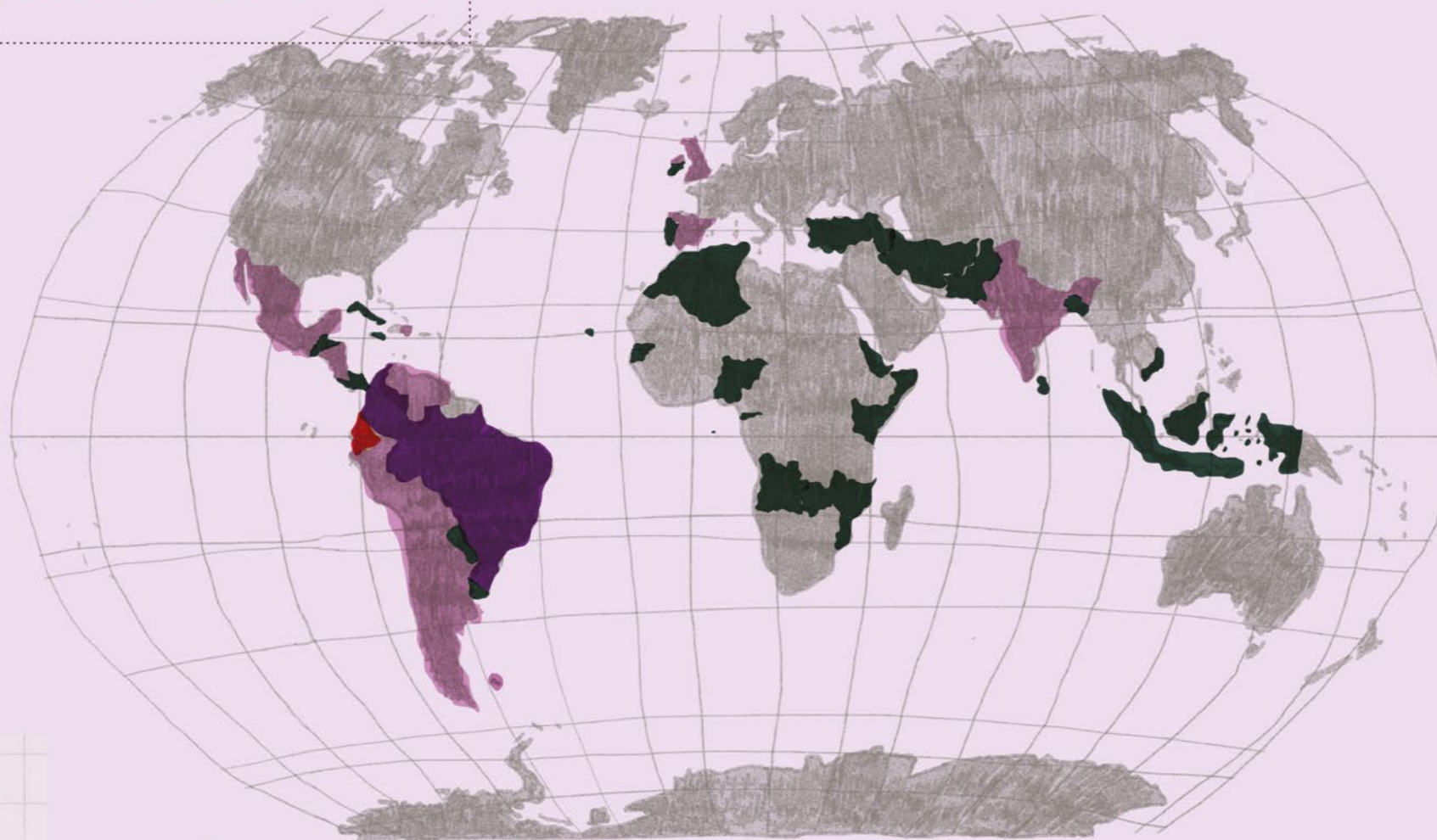
### OUR SERVICE USERS AGE

1-24	25-50	50+
10%	24%	67%



Our service users come from a diverse background, we work with women and children from over 50 countries, most of them Latin American. We continue to see the same trend regarding nationalities, most of our service users are from Brazil (26.7%), Colombia (23.7%) and Ecuador (10.9%). The predominant age brake is between 25 and 50 years old (67%) and 84.4% identified as different mixes of Latin American including black, indigenous and white.

### COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



- MORE THAN 20 %
- 10 - 19 %
- 2 - 9 %
- LESS THAN 1 %

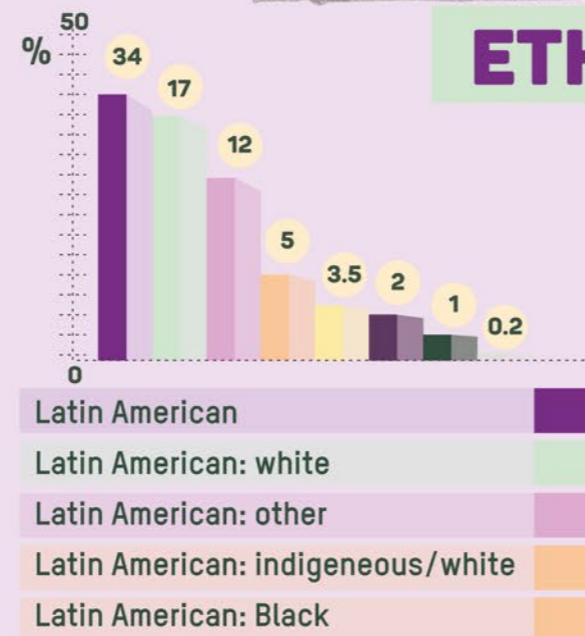
Brazil  
Colombia

Ecuador

Bolivia  
Peru  
Dominican Republic  
United Kingdom  
Mexico  
Argentina  
Venezuela  
El Salvador  
Honduras  
Chile  
India  
Nicaragua  
Spain

Bangladesh  
Paraguay  
Morocco  
Pakistan  
Panama  
Portugal  
Angola  
Jamaica  
Nigeria  
Iraq  
Afghanistan  
Algeria  
Guinea-Bissau  
Cape Verde  
Costa Rica  
Cuba  
The Gambia  
Iran  
Turkey  
Uruguay  
Equatorial Guinea  
Eritrea  
Guatemala  
Indonesia  
Republic of Ireland  
Kenya  
São Tomé and Príncipe  
Mozambique  
Sri Lanka  
Somalia  
Syria  
Zambia  
Vietnam

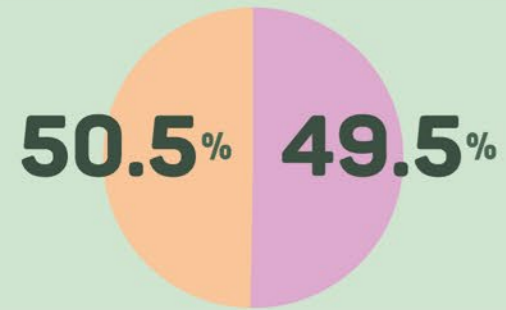
### ETHNICITY



Latin American: black/indigenous/white	
Latin American: black/white	
Black/Black British: Other	
Mixed Ethnicity: other black/Black African/White	
Latin American: black/indigenous	
Middle Eastern	
Asian/Asian British: Other	
Black/Black British: Caribbean	

Latin American: indigenous	
Asian/Asian British: Indian	
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	
Gypsy or Irish Traveller: Other	
White: British	
White: european	
White: other	

## CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS

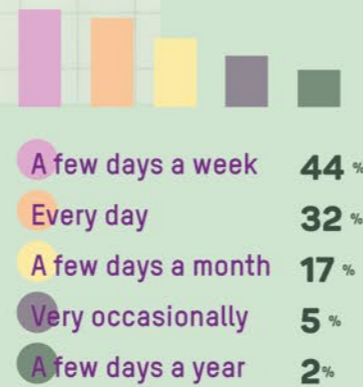


NOT COMFORTABLE WITH SPOKEN ENGLISH

COMFORTABLE SPEAKING ENGLISH

Regarding language, **50,5% OF OUR SERVICE USERS DO NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH ENGLISH**, meaning that they cannot access services without an interpreter. The lack of paid interpreters by statutory services often prevents them from disclosing and getting the support they need in emergencies. We have seen many difficulties for them to access this type of support and LAWA has had to put additional advocacy resources to support women in fulfilling their rights of interpreters. **LANGUAGE IS CLOSELY RELATED WITH THE CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF A WOMAN'S BACKGROUND, WHEN WOMEN ACCESS GENERIC SERVICES OR STATUTORY SERVICES, THEY OFTEN FACE A LACK OF CULTURAL AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING.** Although language is the most critical issue, cultural awareness goes beyond this and also includes the wider understanding of additional stereotypes, and to comprehend different cultural backgrounds and ways.

### FREQUENCY OF ABUSE



## EXPERIENCES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

This year, women continue to experience verbal, emotional/psychological, physical, financial and sexual abuse more frequent than other types of abuse. In this line, coercive abuse is one of the most difficult to identify when being in a violent relationship, which can result in longer periods of experiencing abuse and seeking for help becomes harder for women. **100% OF THE WOMEN THAT ARRIVE TO LAWA EXPERIENCED MORE THAN 1 TYPE OF ABUSE**, most of them at shockingly high rates of frequency: 44% a few days a week, and 32% everyday as the graphic shows. When arriving to LAWA, and as part of our support, women learn about different types of abuse, how it manifests and ways to understand, process and cope with the abuse their endured. During this journey they are also able to identify other types of abuse in their relationships. **THIS DATA EVIDENCE THE EPIDEMIC OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE** and allow us to make visible the stories and cases of Latin American women and women from other black and ethnic backgrounds, which is often disown by other types of services that women approach.

### TYPE OF VIOLENCE



## SEXUAL ORIENTATION DIVERSITY

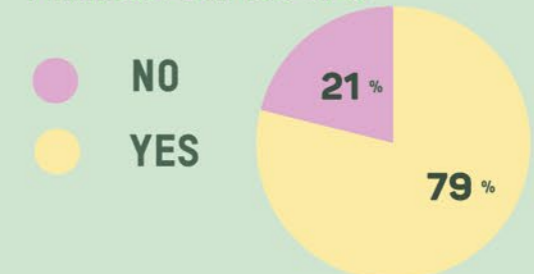
Although the majority of our service users identified as heterosexual, **THIS YEAR, 6% OF THE WOMEN IDENTIFIED AS PART OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY**, this represents twice the number of the previous year. Through our LGBTQ+ outreach services we have been able to participate in different activities with the community and have raised awareness of the services that LAWA offers. However, we also acknowledge that the violence experienced by this group is also related to the structural discrimination that they face and the violence that operates with same-sex couples.

## FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

### NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS



### FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES



Out of the total number of women that arrived to LAWA over the last year, **41% HAD NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS**. The number of women that have financial difficulties at the time they come to us **HAS INCREASED GOING FROM 69% IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR TO 79% THIS YEAR**. Women are arriving to LAWA in vulnerable economic situations that have put them in a position of staying longer in their abusive relationships due to the fear of not having a home, an income or even food. This situation might get worse if they try to reach a service that does not provide the necessary support of if the institutions do not provide language and cultural support. 20% of our service users went to a generic service before arriving at LAWA and highlight the importance of a service that is trauma informed and culturally appropriate.

## PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Our flagship specialist housing advice and advocacy service ‘**WOMEN AGAINST HOMELESSNESS AND ABUSE**’ (WAHA), continued to be a reference to the community and the wider ecosystem of support and advocacy services in this area within the VAWG and Housing Sector. We consolidated our Policy and Practice Learning Hub, a monthly space that we run to ensure we have an outlet to analyse in real time live cases that present challenging issues that need in depth understanding and potentially more dedicated institutional advocacy.

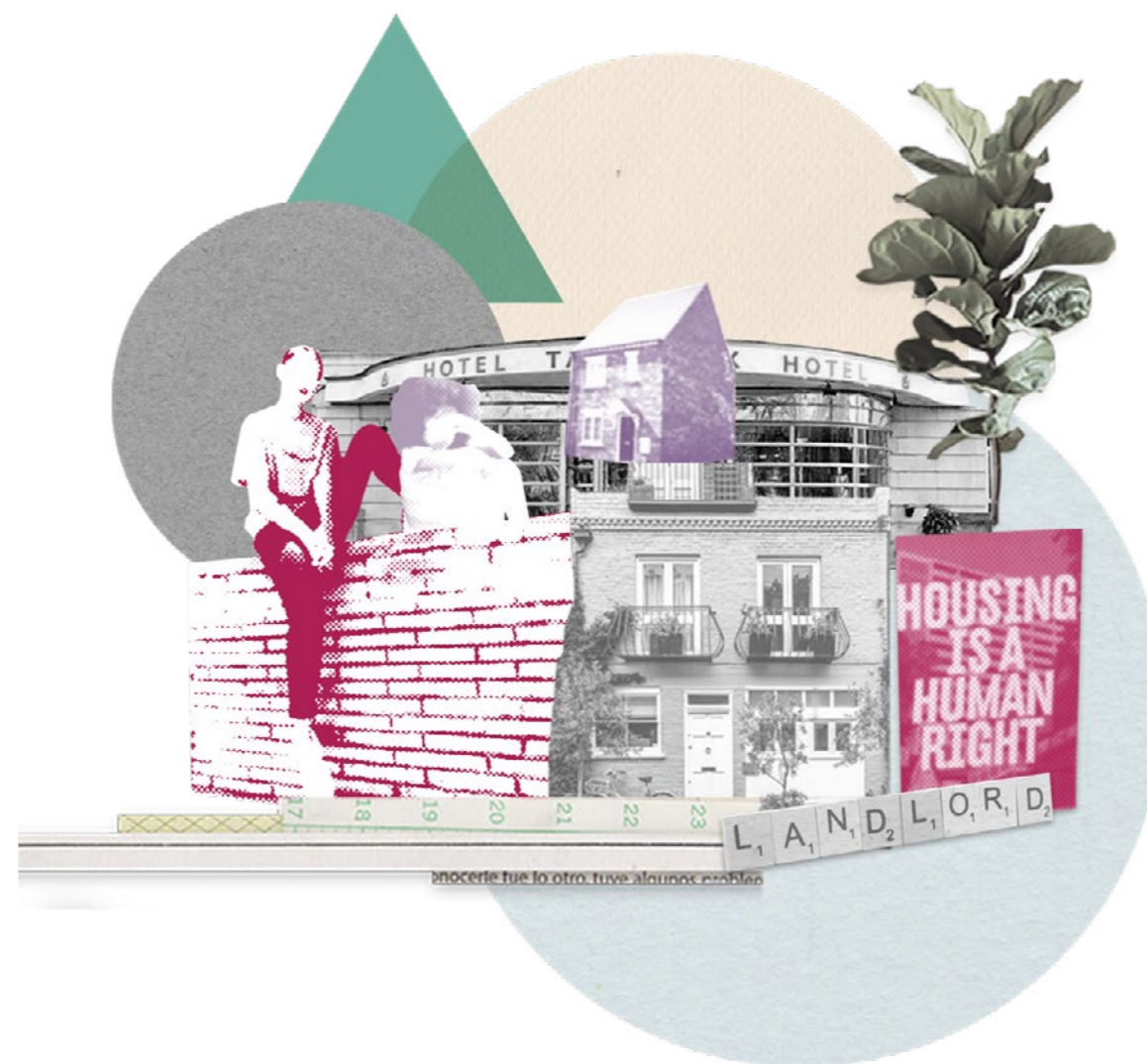
We directly provided high quality support and advise for **81 BLACK AND MINORITISED SURVIVORS OF ABUSE IN THEIR HOUSING JOURNEY, AND WE REACHED 300 USERS INDIRECTLY**. This year we published a series of three outputs providing fresh policy analysis and recommendations on housing policy to the Minister of Housing and Local Communities, (MHCLG – former DLUHC); The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), The Home Office, The Police, The London Mayor, the Greater London Authority (GLA) and to all London Local Authorities. We were able to update our 2019 research, building on our first ever user-centred evaluative research, and using the platform of our recently created micro-site. Our policy briefing was widely disseminated on World Homelessness Day 2023 and was submitted as evidence before the London Assembly Housing Committee’s investigation around Temporary Accommodation in March 2024. In this period, we also published a host of case studies and blog posts in our community languages (Spanish and, Portuguese) to ensure better engagement with our service users and the community at large.



Our December 2023 report ‘Homes for Healing’, with research updates from the WAHA initiative, was widely disseminated through social media, and specially through partnerships. It targeted influencing spaces such as the Housing Champions network in Hackney, the London Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Partnership Board (MOPAC/GLA, The London VAWG Consortium, The Council of Europe’s Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) in their evaluation visit to the UK in January 2024. We also submitted evidence using

data from our research to influence various reports and policies: the Joint VAWG sector General Election Manifesto (September 2023), the VAWG sector shadow report on the Istanbul Convention (December 2023) and provided evidence to the UN Special Rapporteur for VAWG Reem Alsalem in her February 2024 visit to the UK.

**Visit our WAHA site for more information.**



### Councils’ malpractice case study:

Lucia is a 36-year-old Uruguayan who arrived in the UK in 2018 with her long-time partner. For years, she suffered various forms of abuse, including sexual, psychological, online abuse and stalking, but this behaviour worsened when she had a child. Lucia case was classified as high risk by the authorities, and she contacted LAWA to take the first steps towards finding safe accommodation and protecting her son. Often, women like Lucia report this experience with the authorities as humiliating and traumatic. During this process, she revealed the need to repeat her story several times, being discredited and judged for seeking government help, and questioned for not returning to her home country. The lack of sensitivity and specialised training by the police and statutory services to deal with victims of VAWG means that migrant women like Lucia face a discriminatory approach before being supported, reviving traumatic moments to make themselves heard. To read the full story, [click here](#) or scan qr.

OUR SERVICES

Refuge and emergency accommodation

THIS YEAR WE SUPPORTED A TOTAL OF 93 WOMEN TO ACCESS SAFE EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION IN LAWAS FOUR REFUGES. Women received emotional and practical support in the form of risk assessments and safety plans, support to access and/or increase welfare benefits and support to write and make police reports, among others. We also supported women with other legal matters, including non-molestation orders and finding the right legal support for Child Arrangement Orders. Additionally, we support women to become more independant by seeking assistance from local authorities for accommodation. After being at LAWAs refuges, 97% of women have moved into safe accommodation.

Over the last year we have seen that women face significant challenges when submitting homelessness applications due to delays in processing, which have a negative impact in their mental health and wellbeing. They are often placed in unsuitable accommodation that do not meet their specific needs, including needs related to intersecting factors such as mental health needs and/or disability, which are frequently overlooked. This flawed system perpetuates women’s instability, abuse and insecurity, as well as for their children. We continue to put pressure on housing departments to adopt a more holistic and responsive approach, by providing women with timely, appropriate, and supportive housing solutions.

This year, we have faced growing challenges in Family Courts regarding the presumption of contact, a legal principle that assumes children benefit from having contact with both parents, and which is applied in the UK even in cases where there are serious concerns of domestic abuse within the household to both mother



and children, including maintaining contact for parents who have been accused of abusing their child directly. The courts often operate under the assumption that maintaining regular contact with both parents is in the child’s best interest, but this presumption becomes problematic when it overlooks the potential risks posed by an abusive parent. Compounding this issue is the increasing number of claims of parental alienation, where one parent is accused of manipulating the child against the other parent. These claims can obscure the legitimate concerns of the protective parent who is trying to safeguard the child from an abusive environment and/or direct abuse. Meanwhile, the vital role of refuges as safe havens for victims of domestic abuse is often underappreciated and the importance of their locations remaining secret has been previously threatened.

Family Support Work

We provide one-on-one support to mothers and children in the refuge, creating safe spaces to explore their experiences and emotions related to domestic violence. We offer tailored play therapy to help children

express feelings, develop coping strategies, and build resilience. When needed, we refer cases to Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) and other specialist agencies. We also organise group activities to foster supportive relationships between mothers and their children. Our focus throughout the year has been on healing, empowerment, and fostering resilience for women and children.



Case study

Jenny\* who is from Venezuela and has a 4-year-old son, James. She self-referred into LAWAs refuge after experiencing intense coercive control, psychological and emotional abuse. James’ father used him as a means of control and to further abuse towards Jenny, which thereby caused harm to James.

Jenny was assisted to apply for welfare benefits including Universal Credit and Housing Benefit and explained how this system functions as she’d never accessed these before. She was also supported in applying for a non-molestation order and making her police statement. Her case was referred to MARAC based on her risk assessment to ensure a multiagency approach to keeping her and her son safe.

She was referred to our counselling services and James had his session with our Family Support worker, where a lot of the abuse he experienced came out. When his father made an application for child arrangements, Jenny was supported to find legal and emotional support. Initially, it appeared the court did not recognize the damage the father had caused to the child and how the mother’s safety also affected the child and would order interim contact without Safeguarding checks. Thanks to LAWAs advocacy support this ended up not happening. Jenny was able to move directly into a private rented flat near her work and is settling with James.

## Violence Against Women and Girls Advice Centre

Our VAWG advice and support centre specialised in Latin American and black and minoritised women **ASSISTED 427 SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE THROUGH OUR CULTURALLY SPECIFIC AND TRAUMA-INFORMED SUPPORT.** Our support workers provide a holistic support including assisting women in accessing their rights on welfare benefits, housing, family law, immigration advice, advocacy support with social services, housing and police reports. Within this service we also have a specialist LBTQ+ support workers to address the specific needs of the community.

Latin American women leaving abusive relationships face significant challenges due to cultural issues that statutory services often fail to understand, largely because the Latin American community is not well acknowledged. Our service frequently deals with discrimination against these women, who are already vulnerable and in urgent need of support. We have seen an increase distrust from services regarding their immigration status, which impacts their access to support. Women with insecure immigration status are often denied emergency housing for themselves and their children, forcing them to choose between homelessness or staying in dangerous and abusive situations.

The post-Brexit environment has made job centres make unlawful decisions towards women with pre-settled status, refusing applications and making our support workers to increase their efforts for women to

access their welfare rights. This is a significant issue as often it leaves women without access to public funds even when they are entitled to. Additionally, the receipt of '28-days' notice to quit' by the Home Office to asylum seekers created unease on their risk of homelessness stretching our resources to provide housing drop-in sessions for those affected.

We have a drop-in service to assist women that are not experiencing domestic violence but are in need of support with housing, welfare benefits, education, employment, and related issues. We are available every Tuesday for walk-ins and pre-booked appointments. Over the past year, **WE SUPPORTED FURTHER 298 WOMEN AND PROVIDED 519 INTERVENTIONS THROUGH OUR DROP-IN SERVICE.** We have seen increased demand for housing support due to the housing shortage and unregulated market, putting vulnerable women and their dependents at risk of homelessness and inadequate housing.



## LBTQ+ specialist support

In the past year, we've seen more bisexual women facing domestic violence in heterosexual relationships with male perpetrators. Many have married men due to societal pressure or fear of discrimination, which harms their mental health. Their sexuality is often used against them, especially when children are involved. A key issue in our LBTQ+ Project is that these women must fit traditional gender stereotypes to be recognized as victims by authorities. Additionally, myths about LBTQ+ abuse and the lack of LBTQ+-specific risk assessments mean that abuse in same-sex or queer relationships is often misunderstood or underestimated.

Through our LBTQ+ Outreach project we aim to break these myths with our community and to inform about gender-based violence within the LBTQ+ Community, as well as spread the word that LAWA offers a by and for service for Queer Women. With the Outreach project we started to occupy important spaces for the community such as the Black Pride UK, Europe's largest celebration for LGBTQ+ people of African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American, and Caribbean heritage, that we have proudly been part of for the last 2 years. We reached over 300 people through the Outreach Programme in 2023, including training to external organisations and participation in the first Latin American Pride in England.

The increase of numbers of queer women contacting us as well as looking to join the organisation show us that being loud and proud of our LBTQ+ Latinx community and our LBTQ+ Specialised project is extremely important in the role of the organization to provide support for Latinx Women living in the UK, making sure that no woman is left behind.



## Immigration

This year, LAWA achieved an OISC certification level 2 and provides essential immigration support to Latin American and other BME migrant women who are victims of domestic abuse. We help these women secure indefinite leave to remain, allowing them to retain their residency rights independent of their abusive partners. Our focus includes women on spouse visas who can apply under the Domestic Violence Rules to remain in the UK safely. We also support women facing domestic abuse who do not qualify under these rules but have British children, assisting them with parent visas and fee waivers due to increased Immigration Health Surcharge fees. Additionally, LAWA supports women and children under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) in obtaining settled status or permanent residence after five years of continuous UK residence.

Our immigration drop-in service continues to witness a growing demand for immigration advice across the Latin American community. LAWA's commitment to providing accessible and effective immigration support is strong, ensuring that vulnerable women receive the assistance they need to secure a safe and stable future in the UK.



### Case study

Berta is a woman from Mexico that arrived in the UK in 2023 after her long-term Mexico British partner decided to settle in the UK. They have a child together. Over the years, Berta noticed that her baby development was not according to her age. Berta's child was diagnosed with a speech delay and there was no certainty over her development needs.

Berta's partner asked her to move to the UK with their daughter, promising immigration security, learning opportunities and health support for the child. Shortly after arriving to the UK, he started to be abusive, controlling and using different methods of coercive control. She also started experiencing physical abuse and felt she had to be constantly quiet as she was afraid of her daughter seeing the abuse. She never called the police out of fear of being deported as her perpetrator never did the visa paperwork.

Berta was a self-referral to LAWA helped by the perpetrator's sister. Upon arrival a RISK/DASH assessment was completed, she scored 21/24 being a very high-risk case. Her caseworker automatically referred her to MARAC, Children Social Services, Immigration advice, and NRPF support.

LAWA advocated for the family to access an emergency accommodation based on the high risk of Berta's case and the child having severe needs. Because of this, children social services acted promptly with the NRPF team and in 10 days, they were able to find a safe and appropriate accommodation for mother and child. After her immediate risk needs were addressed, Berta was supported with a police report a making the application for a non-molestation order to make sure that the perpetrator did not try to reach her.

LAWA's Immigration adviser processed the child's British Citizenship as a child of a British parent, and once that is successful, Berta can regularize her status. LAWA assisted Berta being registered at the GP, accessing ESOL classes and registering her child in the local nursery. Berta was also referred to our in-house counselling services which take place in her mother tongue and rebuilding her confidence.

Berta and her child are now safe living in an emergency accommodation and being supported by children social services whilst her immigration case is still ongoing.

## Counselling

**OVER THE LAST YEAR WE HAVE SUPPORTED 131 WOMEN THROUGH OUR COUNSELLING SERVICES** comprise of 16 sessions one-to-one in person, online and by-phone to adapt to women's needs. Our counselling service is trauma informed, culturally sensitive, therapy and women centred and is provided in Spanish, Portuguese and English.

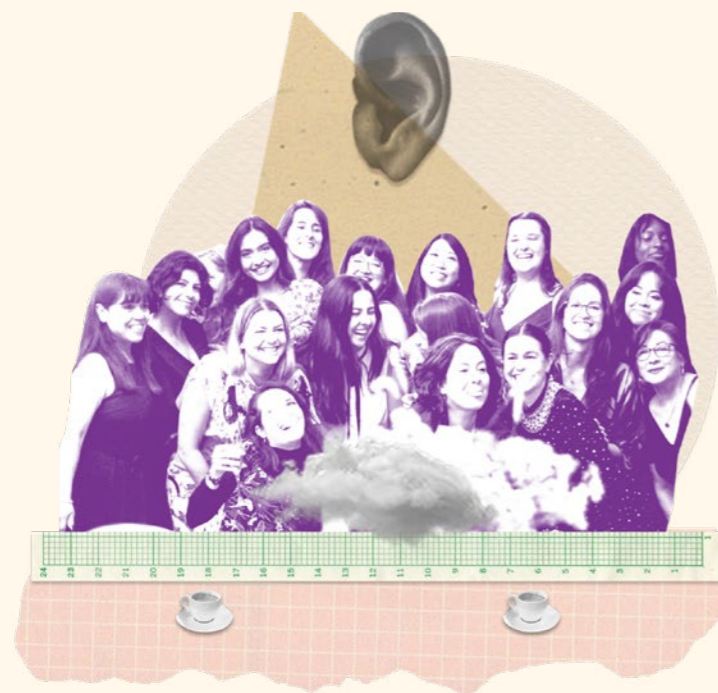
LAWA's counselling service acknowledges the impact of trauma on an individual's life and mental health. We pay particular attention to assisting women in retaking control of their lives, to foster healing and to find hope for their future. Our aim is to provide a safe, supportive and non-judgmental space for women survivors and victims of gender violence, domestic violence and any kind of violence.

We provide a safe space for women to think, reflect and to explore the violence they have suffered. We support them recognize and build their strengths to foster recovery and personal growth. Therefore, we highlight the strengths and resilience that women have developed despite their traumatic experiences. We assist women to develop insight about the negative impact of their experience in their life, mental health and general well-being. By understanding the physiological and psychological responses to trauma, we aim to assist them to cope more effectively with the aftermath of trauma.

Our service also incorporates an intersectional, approach which helps us to provide a better counselling support by offering a holistic understanding of women's overlapping identities (such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability) and how these intersections influence their experiences. This comprehensive perspective allows us to tailor the counselling service to meet the unique needs of each woman, ensuring rel-



evant and effective support. Acknowledging diverse and intersecting identities validates the women experiences of discrimination, privilege, and oppression. It also enhances cultural competence, preventing misunderstandings and biases, and helps recognise systemic issues and barriers, leading to broader advocacy and support.



### Case study

Ann was referred to the counselling service through the Advice Centre by LAWA's support worker. After living abuse for more than 3 years from ex-partner, she was able to separate from him. She experienced physically, emotional and financial abuse. Ann met the perpetrator in her country, as he went to visit as a tourist. When they met, they shared phone numbers, and the communication was kept through the distance. After a year of a long-distance relationship, they got married and Ann moved to the UK. Ann was hesitating to move as in her country she had a stable job and a successful career. However, he convinced her to move with him as he is British, and he will help her to find professional opportunities here. After a few months living together, his behaviour started to change with Ann. He became controlling, did not allow her to have friends nor to have contact with her family. Ann started to feel isolated and ashamed as she thought that her life with him would have been better. He did not help Ann to find a job as he promised, he told her that her place belongs in the house cooking and cleaning. The abuse started to escalate from verbal to physical abuse. Ann's mental health was negatively impacted as she became very anxious, hopeless, had frequent nightmares and low self-esteem. During the last incident he punched

Ann's face, she ended up in the hospital alone as he refused to take her.

Ann was able to share her story to one of the staff at the hospital who gave her information about organizations that support victims of domestic abuse. On the same day, Anna decided that she would not return with him. She went to the police and reported the abuse. Ann contacted a cousin who supported her and opened the door of her house to her. Ann contacted LAWA seeking legal support to divorce him. When Ann started the therapeutic work, she was feeling guilty and ashamed of the abuse that she suffered. During the sessions Ann started to open up as she felt safe in the therapeutic space. Ann was able to work with the feeling of guilt and learned coping mechanism skills that helped her to manage more effectively her emotions. Through the sessions, Ann began to recover her identity which led to the healing process.

Ann, with the help of her support worker, was able to find a job and move forward with her life. She also received support for the divorce process and securing her legal status to stay in the country. After enduring three years of abuse, Ann regained control of her life and began to have hope for the future.

## Outreach and community engagement at LAWA

**LAWA HAS GROWN QUICKLY NOT ONLY IN SIZE BUT IN THE DEPTH AND SCOPE OF ITS INTERLINKED PROGRAMME.**

Whilst the core of our organisation is, undoubtedly, our holistic offer of safe accommodation and VAWG Services, our non-VAWG specific community engagement initiatives also add tremendous value to our communities.

As part of our consolidated community engagement work, this year we developed a series of initiatives aimed at intentionally integrate everyone at LAWA through activities that create and celebrate a collective sense of community amongst us. The most significant one was the collective making of a banner for the International Women's Day march - Million Women's Rise, involving our staff, volunteers and community. Over the last year we have consolidated the following community and engagement programmes;

### Growing Together Programme

The Growing Together Programme is one of the few initiatives by and for elderly Latin American women in the UK and has now 5 years of uninterrupted success, it is currently composed by **48 PARTICIPANTS**. The eldest amongst the community have found in this group not only sisters and friends for life, but also a space of continued learning, where their wellbeing and integration into the wider UK society is paramount. The group carries out a variety of weekly activities, including growing vegetables at two allotment lots across London. Women have community lunches every week, I.T. and English classes as well as craft sessions where



### Latin Americans Londoners

they knit and have exhibitions of their work such as hats, scarves, socks, bags and beautiful dollies. A particularly salient initiative from the group this year was their involvement in the Just to Get Around project (<https://justtogetaround.cargo.site>), an artistic/learning initiative organised by one of our volunteers through which women from the group explored together different places in London while learning English.

### Change Makers Programme

Our Change Makers Programme is a space of personal and collective self-discovery by and for migrant women from Latin American origin living in the UK. Building in its widely successful phase one, the programme this year has benefiting **48 WOMEN** through 12 sessions of co-created popular feminist self-training plus various empowerment activities. Importantly, this year the programme archived a key milestone by translating and widely publicising a comprehensive toolkit into Spanish and Portuguese, increasing engagement sub-

stantially with Latin American communities in the UK and beyond.

The programme has been adapted to incorporate a specific area of work with young Latin American girls in a school in Lambeth, with high proportion of Latin American students. This adaptation ('Change Maker Chavitas') has proved to be a very useful space to address issues relating the girl's wellbeing, identity, empowerment etc. Importantly, we have developed specific workshops and activities on VAWG prevention with the groups, and in the context of the 16 days of activism campaign (to end VAWG), the girl's group had a very successful visit to Google Headquarters in the UK. This visit took place in the context of our ongoing collaboration with the 'Hola' group of Latin American Employees at Google. Currently the group is comprised of **34 GIRLS** between 13 and 17 years.

### Volunteer and Internship programme

Our volunteer's programme congregates talented women from the global majority who bring their experience, knowledge and skills to support LAWA's work. This year 19 volunteers participated of our programme across two cycles, providing invaluable support to our Advice Centre, Counselling, Community services, Administration and Policy and Research functions. The feedback we get from volunteers about their experience continues to be overwhelmingly positive and we have been proud to see many of them successfully integrating in the job market, whether inside or outside LAWA.

Our internship programme is our youngest initiative in the community engagement area and was built as a natural evolution of our successful volunteers' programme. We have created a model that considers the different pathways that both volunteers and external applicants can take within the internship program to fill in entry level positions within core service or organisational development areas at LAWA. These different directions



Chavitas visit to Google



Growing Together

include careers within the organisation as well as in external spaces, which acknowledges the importance of increasing the employability of Latin American women. This is part of our wider vision of women's empowerment and self-determination as a long-term strategy to end VAWG. This year we successfully recruited **4 INTERNS** to support our Advice Centre, Refuge and Research and Evidence work. The interns made a remarkable contribution to LAWA's success this last year, while allowing the organisation to pilot different service models and new initiatives.

## PARTNERSHIPS

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

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

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

### CASA Project

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

### CLAUK

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

### London VAWG Consortium

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

### OYA Consortium

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

### Samira Project

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

## WITH THANKS TO

BBC Children in need  
City Bridge Trust  
DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities)  
Great London Authority – MOPAC  
Impact on Urban Health  
Islington Council  
Ministry of Justice – MOPAC  
London Community Foundation  
The National Lottery  
Trust for London

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