



VOICES OF YOUNG LATINAS

PEER RESEARCH INTO TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG)

Melissa Munz , Young Women's Project Coordinator
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Supported by



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About this report

The findings presented in this report represent the views, experiences, and suggestions expressed by the peer researchers. They are a group of thirteen young Latin American migrant women aged 18 to 25 who live in London, members of the Latin American Women's Rights Service - **LAWRS' Young Women's Advisory Board (YWAB)**.

This report represents the YWAB members' commitment to exploring peer research, leadership, and advocacy as a form of activism to eradicate every form of violence against women and girls (VAWG). They participated in peer research, leadership, and advocacy training between the 9th and the 30th of September, 2023, carried out by Partnership for Young London. Their work was guided by the research question: **What are the barriers that young Latin American migrant women facing violence against women and girls (VAWG) encounter when seeking to access support?**

This work will inform LAWRS' policy work to ensure the voices and experiences of young Latin American migrant women are part of our campaigns.



The Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) is a 'by and for', feminist and human rights organisation with a mission "to provide Latin American migrant women with tools to assert our rights, and pursue personal empowerment and social change". Latin Americans are one of the fastest-growing ethnic minorities in the UK, but despite this, they remain invisible. Founded in 1983, we offer culturally and linguistically specialist advice, information, counselling and psychotherapy, advocacy, development programmes, and workshops.



Sin Fronteras is the LAWRS' project to support Latin American girls and young migrant women. We are a safe space for them to be empowered, express themselves, develop their potential, improve their critical thinking, take action to ensure their rights are recognised and engage in social change.



Partnership for Young London believes in a future where every young person's right to wellbeing is recognised and fulfilled. With young people making up a quarter of London's population, we have to respect that they are crucial to its future.

LAWRS' Young Women's Advisory Board (YWAB)

Who are we?

The YWAB is an initiative by *Sin Fronteras*, the Latin American Women's Rights Service's project for young women and girls. The YWAB programme provides young Latin American migrant women with **a space for policy and campaigning participation** where they develop their leadership and advocacy skills. The main objective of the programme is to develop a safe and collaborative space where participants increase their ability to influence decision-making to the benefit of young Latin American migrant women.

This is the first edition of the YWAB programme at LAWRS. The programme started on the 9th of September 2023, gathering thirteen young Latin American migrant women aged 18 to 25 living in London¹. They were selected to participate in the YWAB for a period of six months (Sep.2023 - Feb.2024). The program is in English and Spanish, and in-person meetings are in London. This first cohort of the advisory group has focused their work on advancing strategies to **tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) and advocate for the rights of young migrant women in the UK.**

The Advisory Board has been planned as a participatory and collaborative programme that is shaped by the voices and lived experiences of young Latin American migrant women. It seeks to train and accompany them for collective action at the intersection of migration, age, and gender and provide them with theoretical and practical skills in feminist leadership and advocacy that can be applied in their lives, careers, and community.

The YWAB allows members to gain skills, meet new people, and influence LAWRS' policy work, bringing youth voices to the centre of the organisation and the public debate. They get involved in LAWRS' policy work, get compensated for their time, lived experience, expertise, and involvement², gain valuable experience to include in their CVs, get trained in leadership and advocacy, and are invited to LAWRS' events and relevant opportunities.



¹ This includes the first and second generation of young women with Latin American ethnicity and European/UK nationality.

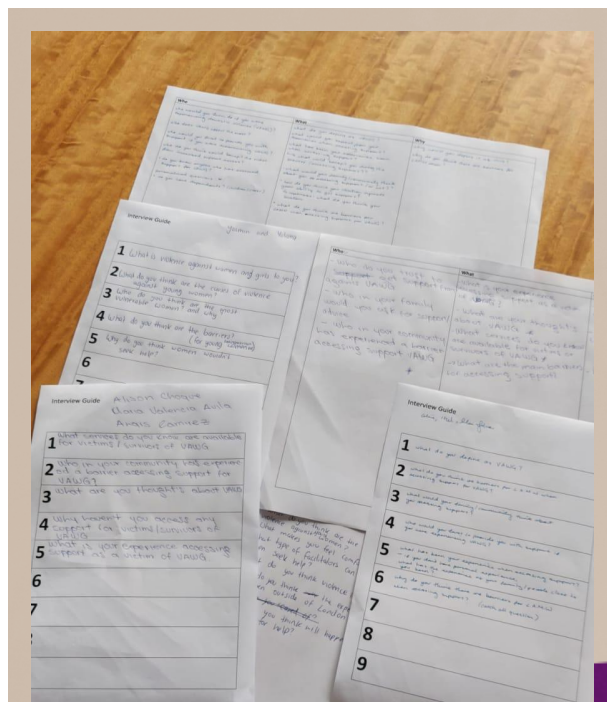
² They receive a stipend to support their engagement in the programme at London Living Wage levels. This represents a contribution to participation in LAWRS' Young Women's Advisory Board activities. It does not represent any form of employment with LAWRS.

Our research question

The YWAB members worked together with Partnership for Young London in designing the research question:

What are the barriers that young Latin American migrant women facing violence against women and girls (VAWG) encounter when seeking to access support?

Some of the barriers identified included being a young woman, the fear of not being believed, not recognise themselves as victims or survivors, peer pressure, discrimination and racism, education access, employment challenges, housing and financial struggles, social isolation, exposure to abuse facilitated through technology, immigration status, Latin American culture and heritage, language barriers, UK system, police procedures, UK public policies, amongst others.



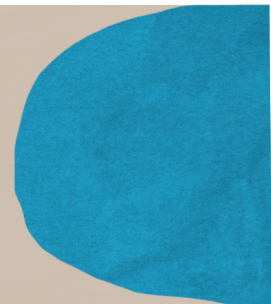
Our understanding of VAWG

As YWAB, a group of young Latin American migrant women, we understand that violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a complex societal issue, a worldwide public health problem, a threat to girls and women's liberty, and a social justice problem to tackle in society.

We agreed to use the UN declaration as our common definition of VAWG, understanding that it is not completely comprehensive and does not include all the intersections of different identities.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a gendered act of violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or private life.

United Nations General Assembly. 1993.
Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.



To complement this definition, we explored other issues, included here:



Methodology

The training programme used the Partnership for Young London methodology, using **peer research as a form of Participatory Action Research**.³

Peer research is research that is steered and conducted by people with lived experience of the issue being studied.⁴ In the context of the youth sector, it is a way to meaningfully involve young people in decision-making, research design and delivery, and policy-making.

In peer research, those in the researched group (in this case, young people) “adopt the role of the researcher and are empowered to participate in research by minimising power imbalances between researchers and participants, contributing to reducing bias and promoting improved understanding.”⁵

PYL (2021) *Involving Young Londoners: A toolkit for peer research*.

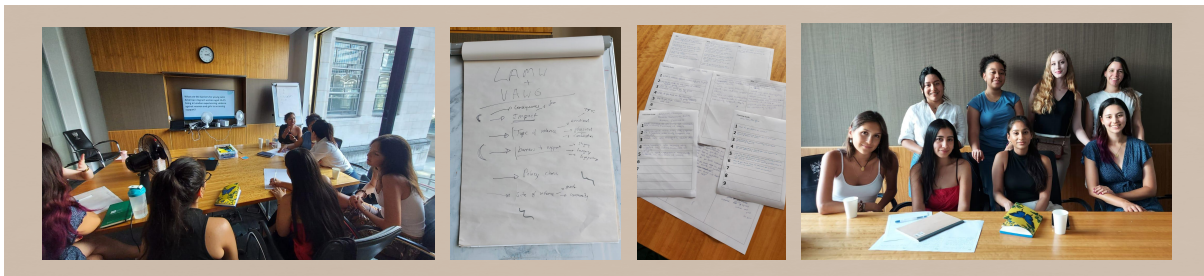
As a first step, we conducted exploratory research, using interviews and focus groups to collect data. Carrying out these methods amongst our YWAB members was beneficial to us in forming a collective concept of our research (the concept of VAWG and their impacts on young Latin American migrant women in London), to get extended answers and detail on our opinions, all in a safe space and being able to observe body language, tone, etc.

The YWAB members participated in four days of workshops on specific research methods.

Workshop 1 - Introduction to research

Peer researchers were introduced to the programme and taught about peer research and qualitative and quantitative research methods. They learned the role research plays in how decisions are made about young people and the importance of a specific research question. They were also taught about in-depth interviews and how to design guides and conduct interviews and focus groups.

- **Decisions made:** The peer researchers decided on a research question for their project and designed the interview guide they wanted to use.



³ Peer research methodology is described in PYL: 'Involving Young Londoners: A toolkit for peer research' (<https://www.partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk/post/involving-young-londoners-a-toolkit-for-peer-research>)

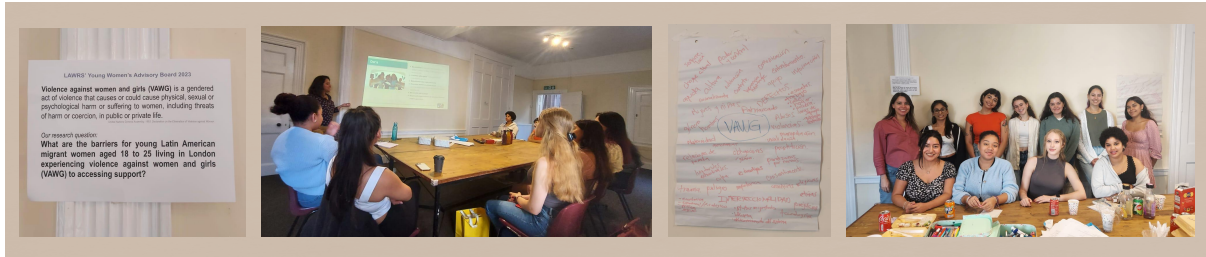
⁴ McPin Foundation.

⁵ Clare Lushey, peer research Methodology: Challenges and Solutions, 2017 (<https://methods.sagepub.com/case/peer-research-methodology-challenges-and-solutions>)

Workshop 2 - VAWG awareness, group discussion, and conducting interviews

Peer researchers were introduced to the violence against women and girls (VAWG) concept, different forms of abuse, its prevalence, the challenges faced by Latin American women and young people in the UK, and VAWG support services in the UK.

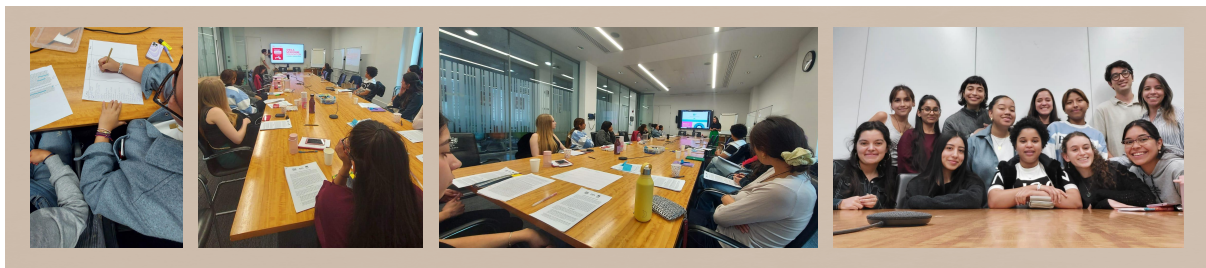
- **Decisions made:** The peer researchers conducted the interview guide between themselves and gathered the information they wanted to use.



Workshop 3 - Analysing data, key findings and recommendations

Peer researchers brought the data they collected and were taught ways to analyse their data using thematic coding. They also learnt about recommendations, stakeholders and how research can be translated into policy change. They were also introduced to how LAWRS do policy work, reviewing some examples of campaigns and policy briefings.

- **Decisions made:** The peer researchers analysed their data and decided on key themes that emerged from their research, some key findings, and what they wanted to recommend.



Workshop 4 - Sharing our work. Art as activism

Peer researchers were introduced to forms of creative activism, activism in social media, and campaign creation.

- **Decisions made:** The peer researchers translated their research findings into twelve campaign phrases or mottos representing their values and goals as YWAB. They also create a graphic design/collage for each one of those campaign phrases or mottos.



Key findings

The LAWRS' Young Women's Advisory Board worked on the analysis of the information and identified the following key findings.

VAWG is a phenomenon normalised in British society

- VAWG is normalised in society, making it difficult for women and girls to disclose their experiences and seek support

"We are women, and society just happens to normalise things like violence and abuse, just because we are women." Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).

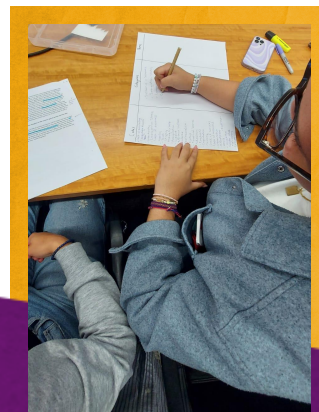
"There is a huge taboo to seek for support... [the abuse] can be misinterpreted as not really that serious." Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).

Migrant women don't have access to information about services and support available to VAWG survivors

- There is a lack of knowledge on the services available to support VAWG survivors and Latin American migrant women.

"I didn't know about LAWRS before... I don't think there's many places that help Latin American women." Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).

"I did not know any services. I only learned about these services recently... I learned about domestic violence rights from women's organisations." Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).



Migrant women face difficulties navigating the system and accessing services

- Young Latin American women find it difficult to navigate the British system because of the lack of support and resources (statutory services) due to language and cultural barriers of the systemic patriarchy.
- Being migrant and Latin American puts women and girls in a more vulnerable position due to their immigration status, being more easy to manipulate because of that.
- Communication is a prevalent barrier when accessing support.

“Asking for an interpreter is very hard in this country... they usually don't have an interpreter or translator that speaks Spanish.” Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).

“Having an accent. I think sometimes people don't take you as seriously... as you are not intelligent enough.” Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).

Latin American patriarchal culture and systemic failures of the British government prevent VAWG survivors from identifying and reporting VAWG

- The Latin American patriarchal culture appears to coexist with the systemic failure of the British government, which fails to provide tools to eliminate different barriers that Latin American women and girls face.
- The effects of the Latin American patriarchal culture on Latin American women and girls in the UK prevent them from identifying and sharing the abuse they are facing.
- The British government fails to provide solutions to the barriers that Latin American migrant women survivors of VAWG face.



Migrant women face bad experiences when seeking support for VAWG

- Power systems (patriarchy, immigration status, language, racism, discrimination) affect VAWG survivors' access to support, and are generating bad experiences when seeking support.
- Young Latin American women and girls are distrustful of services available due to the systemic discrimination they face when seeking to access them.

“Being a Black woman, there are two types of discrimination and types of violence against me. Obviously, being young, being Black, and being a woman has been really hard.” Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).

“I wanted to raise a formal complaint and they [police] said no, it's not the time and this is nonsense.” Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).

VAWG survivors face isolation

- The trajectory of VAWG survivors' seeking support is affected by their experiences of different forms of isolation, which perpetuates systemic silence, leading to victim blaming, distrust, and fear.
- Women and girls experiencing VAWG also experience various forms of isolation. One of the reasons they find it difficult to access support is due to isolation

“I was just really quiet about it. I just hold it inside me. I didn't like to talk to anybody, so I didn't have any support.” Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).

“When one leaves a country, you just leave your support system.” Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).

- Victim blaming is a barrier to accessing support due to fear of consequences and not being believed.

“In some cases, the support has been amazing. It has obviously helped some women to get out of the situation, but other ones have really, really been wrong because they just make the woman feel like it's their fault.” Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).

“As women, we are still scared to open up and we've scared.” Young Latin American migrant women (interview answer).

Policy recommendations

LAWRS' Young Women's Advisory Board identified the social changes they want to see in the UK at a national, regional, and local level.

Meeting four times in September 2023, they have come up with the following recommendations, which will be further discussed by the Board in the following months.

"I think it's really important we have an overarching policy on all forms of violence as none of them exist separately from each other. It's systemic and pervasive. To ignore one form of violence will limit any work you do as you're not getting the full picture of a person's lived experience."

Itzel, LAWRS' YWAB member.



National

- Establish a separate body to provide frontline support for victims of VAWG
- Ensure confidentiality for women who report abuse
- Make a reintegration programme for women who escaped domestic violence
- Acknowledgement of migrant rights and options of easy emancipation for women who rely on their partners for immigration status
- Free of charge support for victims of VAWG
- Education to young people on the different forms of violence and abuse
- Increase funding/investment into interpreters as well as training on VAWG with a focus on Latin American young women
- Better disaggregated data collection
- Ensure that people entering the country have the relevant information of where to access social services and how to effectively access it
- Ensure everyone has access to education, regardless of immigration status
- Always having access to an interpreter when using the NHS. Make sure GP has interpreters
- Access to social services (NHS, policing...) won't affect your immigration process if it's under contention
- Free charge when taking the exam for citizenship
- Internet connection be free and accessible for all

Regional

- Provide sufficient funding to women's services.
- Allocate specific funding to women's shelters.
- Create a "fast track" scheme for VAWG cases within adequate services.
- Make sure schools talk about issues of VAWG.
- Comprehensive support for bilingual children is needed.
- Have a day/cultural centre for Latin American women.
- Pamphlets, flyers and information material about VAWG should be distributed at GP surgeries, schools, social media and local media.
- More local health services established and infrastructure put in place.
- Termination of work contract due to VAWG does not deter survivors from jobseekers allowance.

Local

- Social integration activities and outreach by community organisations
- Funding to community-based services on peer-to-peer support
- Funding for community projects, such as the creation of informative material such as podcasts
- Ensure that adequate interpreters are present in social services for women using the service
- Information both in Spanish, Portuguese, and English when accessing services, e.g. housing
- Translate forms and documents
- Set up classes on gender-based discrimination in schools
- Set up classes on VAWG in other public spaces (work, kids creches...) for mothers victims of VAWG
- More advertisement about VAWG services provided in public spaces

Our campaign

Sharing our key findings and policy recommendations

As a result of the peer research process, during the leadership and advocacy training, the LAWRS' Young Women's Advisory Board created a social media campaign. This represents their commitment to explore the phenomenon and to advocate for young migrant women's rights and the eradication of every form of VAWG in British society.

The campaign was published in the *Sin Fronteras* - LAWRS project Instagram account: https://www.instagram.com/sin_fronteras_lawrs/ and on the LAWRS' website.

Introduction by Mai Jolie, LAWRS' YWAB member

It is imperative to have established campaigns, like the one we are creating with LAWRS, in the fight against one of the most insidious and persistent epidemics that affects humanity: violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Despite the courageous struggle for women's rights and the formalisation of these rights transcribed into the laws in the decade of 1920, women continue to suffer in silence around the world. This reality makes this fight more urgent and dangerous than ever before.

While the laws have advanced to recognise our equality, the reality falls far from this utopian vision because we are still far from being equal. The key realisation is that just because we are all equal in the eyes of the law, equality does not transcend into our daily lives. Discrimination, violence, sexual abuse, and many other forms of abuse continue to undermine our equality in practice. This is unacceptable and requires an unwavering commitment to action.

The importance of the LAWRS campaigns and initiatives in the fight against all forms of abuse against women and girls, particularly within the Latin American Community in London, cannot be overstated.

The Young Women's Advisory Board provides a platform for young Latin American migrant women to actively contribute to the eradication of violence against women and girls. It equips us with the knowledge, skills, and tools required to address the root causes of this violence and to advocate for change.

By empowering young Latin American women, LAWRS is not only inspiring and involving vulnerable demographics but is equally tackling the lack of diversity and intersectionality within the laws.

Campaigns like the LAWRS' Young Women's Advisory Board demonstrate that we cannot and will not remain silent whilst women and girls continue to fall victim to this epidemic.

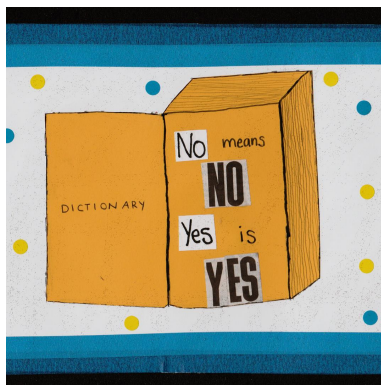
Mai Jolie, LAWRS' YWAB member.

The activism pieces and our message

Seeking help shouldn't be an obstacle course

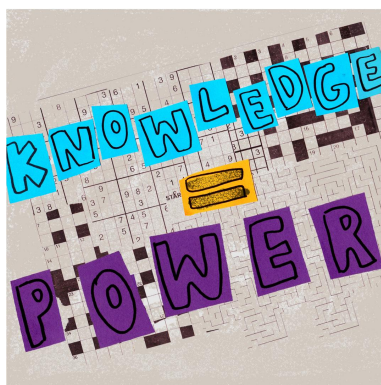


"In this collage I wanted to represent the various barriers young Latin American women face when trying to seek support after facing gender-based violence. I choose a symbol to represent each 'obstacle' such as books, for those with limited English who face difficulties navigating a system in a foreign tongue or eyes for the societal judgement which shames and silences women into not reporting or seeking help after abuse. These barriers are unjust and have clear solutions. Our work at the Young Women's Advisory Board is to campaign for better policies to support survivors." Jasmin, LAWRS' YWAB member.



No means no. Yes is yes. Don't try to find another definition that suits you

"What inspired me to create this piece: a dictionary with the meanings, yes is YES and no is NO! It was the women who said "no" but still got harassed. Men just want to listen to what they want to hear." Yuliana, LAWRS' YWAB member.



Knowledge/access = Power

"Young migrant women face a deliberately confusing legal system. I believe that sharing knowledge of this system is essential in order to empower women, enable them to access support, and help end violence against women and girls." Isabella, LAWRS' YWAB member.

Try to walk a mile in my shoes



“What inspired me is the conversations that me and the group had around intersectionality, and how important it is to recognize that we all have lived different experiences and have different levels of privilege. The art piece wants to say that we should listen and try to understand one another in order for our work to have a meaningful impact.” Sofia, LAWRS' YWAB member.

“It's crucial to try to fully understand every woman's perspective on this issue. Every woman has had a unique experience and a unique viewpoint on life, and that is correct. It is acceptable to hold different opinions. However, it is immoral to try to force someone to think and behave the way you want them to. We must be liberated from our actions and thoughts and be free.” Anais, LAWRS' YWAB member.



Break the patriarchy blindfold

“What inspired me to create this piece was thinking that one of the barriers to accessing support when suffering abuse (VAWG) is the patriarchal society in which we unfortunately live today. But we are here to eradicate that.” Milord, LAWRS' YWAB member.



Migrant women deserve freedom. Your visa is not a cage

“Why do we feel that we don't have freedom? That we can't give our opinion? That we cannot do things just because we are Latin American women? Why do we have to live in fear? I felt inspired to create this piece because I feel that with this we can raise our voices and help all women. Women's rights is what inspires me, and the idea that we can do more things, together.” Sarah, LAWRS' YWAB member.



Together we break barriers

“What inspired me to create this piece is why we as women are breaking barriers that were impossible a long time ago and we no longer cross them but rather break them so that future generations no longer have to cross them.” Milord, LAWRS' YWAB member.



For one of us. For all of us

“I was inspired to create this piece of art because I believe that an intersectional approach is crucial to support all women and girls. I fundamentally believe in the power of sisterhood and the radical care and love that is experienced within this beautiful social dynamic. I grew up witnessing the power of my diaspora Ecuadorian community firsthand. Much of what I witnessed has been the revolutionary compassion extended for women, by women.” Celine, LAWRS' YWAB member.



Abuse is not a family secret

“Violence against women and girls is not a family secret, we are not quiet anymore.” María de los Ángeles, LAWRS' YWAB member.



Latinas solidarity es el pueblo unido

“We women, all women, especially Latina women, who have gone through similar difficulties, as immigrants or daughters of immigrants, know how difficult it is to live in a country that is not ours. We have to be united, love each other, support each other, and fight together for the same rights and obligations.” Anais, LAWRS' YWAB member.



Support is not a privilege. It is a right

“We all have rights, we all need support. Support is our right not a privilege. I am inspired by all women to create this phrase. I wanted to support and let it be known that we all have our rights and we are not alone, we raise our voices to inspire confidence in all women and let it be known that we are not alone, we are women and we have rights”. Sarah, LAWRS' YWAB member.



The British Government is failing us

“Anger shaped much of my inspiration for this piece. The systematic underfunding and cuts to vital services for women have had lethal consequences for those experiencing VAWG. It is infuriating and exhausting to watch the British government deliberately de-prioritise the safety of migrant women and girls under the guise of ‘not enough money.’ The British government is aware of the devastating consequences of their actions and I wanted to make that clear with this piece.” Celine, LAWRS' YWAB member.

Our next steps

The research findings will be used to shape the LAWRS' YWAB programme.

In particular, we look forward to:

- Sharing our findings and recommendations through our peer research report and social media campaign.
- Sharing our findings and recommendations with LAWRS' Policy team to help shape their work.
- Sharing our findings and recommendations with the government, services, and relevant stakeholders to make some improvements within services and support for young women who are survivors of VAWG.
- Continuing our work and training to become advocates to support young Latin American migrant women.



LAWRS

Latin American Women's Rights Service

Pursuing equal rights and social justice for all
Latin American women and migrant women in the UK

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