



Latin American Women's Rights Service Annual Report 2023/24

Thriving in a challenging context

As a 'by and for' migrant women's service, we are operating in an increasingly difficult environment of erosion of migrants rights, challenges to women's and ethnic minorities rights, crisis in public services and the economic effects of the cost of living and Covid crises of the last few years. This combination of factors had led to increasing the precarious living and working conditions of Latin American women, making them more vulnerable to gender-based violence and exploitation.

This makes our role in supporting our community more critical than ever, as we provide culturally sensitive support, and often the only safe space for our beneficiaries to receive help in their native language. Whilst making our services indispensable, it also means we are facing immense pressure to meet the needs of the women we support. As need continues driving up demand and restrictive and regressive rights measures close avenues for safety and support we continue working holistically and creatively to help Latin American women navigate these challenges, with trauma informed and beneficiary-centred services that address the complexities of their lives.

As before, we continue to reflect our beneficiaries' experiences in policy, advocacy and campaigning spaces to demand changes to the structures and systems that disadvantage migrant women, for the benefit of all. Our policy and campaigning work continues maturing and the recognition of our vital message continues to grow as more spaces are open to us to demand social justice. Our partnerships and collaborations also reflect this maturity as we are able to deepen our intersectional work to support those women who are at the margins of society.

As an organisation we continue to experience increasing challenges that come with supporting minoritised migrant women, including the current housing and immigration advice shortages and the increased competition for the funds that are necessary to support our work. However, we haven't allowed this to deter us, as we continue to change and adapt, demonstrating resilience and finding new ways of providing a vital lifeline for our community. As a result we continue building deep trust within our communities, providing safe spaces where our service users feel heard and supported and providing opportunities for them to raise their voices, make their struggles known and imagine a better future for themselves, their families and communities.

Achievements and Insights



1. Specialist services for Latin American migrant women in the UK

LAWRS successfully continued to deliver its frontline services on general advice, prevention of VAWG and counselling, following a holistic approach. This implies delivering multidisciplinary casework, creche services, peer to peer support, access to empowerment and social change programmes, whilst recognising the intersectional needs of women and girls due to their identities and social position.

We continue to offer a hybrid model of support, providing more flexibility for the women who access our services. For many, remote support continues to be beneficial in terms of convenience and reduction of travel costs. For others, it provides a safe space to access our services, including creche for mothers of young children.

Our approach and methodologies enable women and girls to access information on various issues and concerns that directly impact their rights, find safety after surviving violence and gain support from their peers and counsellors to overcome trauma caused by violence in all its forms.

In the reporting period 2023 - 24, LAWRS supported 1,473 Latin American women. The following key figures illustrate the many ways in which we provided support:

- Case working

Domain of change	Indicator progress ¹
Women accessing general advice and information	<p>576 women accessed 996 advice sessions provided by LAWRS advisors.</p> <p>Advice was given on the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 236 cases on housing (289 sessions) • 222 cases welfare benefits (303 sessions) • 93 cases on employment and employment rights (151 sessions) • 107 women accessed the EU settlement scheme service (213 sessions) • 233 women access advice on other services <p>217 women accessed our legal surgeries with ITN and Duncan Lewis solicitors:</p>

¹ Figures should not be read accumulative. A woman may consult LAWRS on a variety of issues. Following our holistic approach, each team will refer cases to another team when a woman requires more information or support once she has given consent to pass forward her case.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96 received immigration legal advice • 121 received family and children's rights legal advice <p>In total, 247 sessions were provided.</p>
Women supported through counselling and overcoming trauma	<p>154 women accessed our counselling services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90 women received an initial need assessment • 94 received 1-2-1 therapy • 75 women accessed emotional support sessions <p>In total 799 sessions were provided.</p>
Women survivors of violence supported to find safety	<p>259 women accessed 1,046 sessions of VAWG advice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 84 of the women supported have No Recourse to Public Funds <p>15 women accessed 15 sessions of peer-to-peer support.</p>
Women accessing services through the Helpline ²	704 women accessed initial advice and referrals to services through the Helpline (1,216 sessions).

The helpline has continued to provide an entry point to our services, with agents delivering outstanding service driven by their commitment to support the community while expanding their knowledge and experience. Many of our volunteer agents have successfully moved on to secure employment, a testament to the mutual benefit of the program, where we invest in their development, and they project excellence in their roles. Unfortunately, growing demand, fueled by word of mouth and LAWRS' reputation for excellence, poses challenges. As expectations rise, agents often encounter frustration from service users when services are unable to meet the increasing demand.

- Workshops and training

Objective of workshops and training	Indicator progress ³
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² Running from Monday to Friday between 11 am and 1 pm.

³ Figures should not be read accumulative. A woman may consult LAWRS on a variety of issues. Following our holistic approach, each team will refer cases to another team when a woman requires more information or support once she has given consent to pass forward her case.



<p>Women participate in workshops to strengthen their knowledge, skills, and capacities</p>	<p>Number of workshops per theme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 4 on Employability ● 6 on Financial Awareness, and Employment, Tax, Housing and Welfare Benefits System ● 5 on EU Settlement Scheme ● 5 on mental health and wellbeing ● 2 on school registration in Southwark <p>200 participants benefited from 22 workshops.</p>
<p>Raising awareness workshops with the Latin American community and professionals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 15 presentations of the VAWG service to external stakeholders ● 4 training sessions for professionals on VAWG ● Healthy relationship workshops for 224 students ● Workshop for professionals in school settings supported 116 professionals ● 123 members of the Latin American community were reached through community outreach activities aimed at supporting young people's healthy relationships
<p>Supporting women to overcome language barriers</p>	<p>194 women participated in the Language Café</p>

Migrant women are facing multiple, intersecting crises that compound their disadvantages, particularly in areas such as immigration, housing, and violence against women and girls (VAWG). These overlapping issues create complex challenges that make it difficult for women to navigate services and access the support they need. The combined impact of these crises often leaves them in precarious situations, vulnerable to further harm, and without adequate protection or resources. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to ensure that migrant women receive comprehensive and effective support.

Below we outline the main issues our teams have been dealing with over the last year:

Housing

The increase in destitution and homelessness, particularly among entire families, has become a growing concern as local authorities reduce their involvement in providing essential services. Citing a lack of resources, authorities have delayed decision-making processes, with cases taking anywhere from 4 to 6 months to resolve. Many families are forced to share inadequate living spaces or, in more extreme cases, share communal accommodations. This prolonged



uncertainty has led to a rise in frustration among service users (SU). These delays are also affecting our service, as many cases require ongoing advocacy with multiple instances of contact with local authorities.

Despite these challenges, advocacy efforts have seen some success, with 35% of cases achieving positive outcomes, securing stable housing without the need for shared facilities. These successes have motivated the team to continue, while also encouraging us to refine our strategies for more effective interventions.

Immigration

The service faces significant challenges due to limited capacity and legal restrictions, which only allow us to take on certain cases. This makes it difficult to meet the growing demand from service users, which also has an emotional toll on the team as there is sometimes no other option but to turn people away. Furthermore, there is a general shortage of capacity within the sector, meaning that even signposting to other organisations is challenging when LAWRS lacks the resources or expertise to assist. Despite these hurdles, the immigration casework has grown, thanks to our collaboration with Refugee Action, who have been supporting our work. While the range of services remains limited, the cases we have handled have led to successful outcomes, with clients securing the correct legal status.

Welfare benefits

We have achieved significant success in handling appeals, with favourable outcomes for many service users. Additionally, welfare benefits cases have generally been straightforward to manage, allowing us to provide efficient and effective support to those in need. This success reflects the expertise and dedication of our team, as well as the strong processes we have in place to guide users through complex systems with ease.

Mental health

The immense pressures our beneficiaries face are intensifying an already critical mental health crisis, particularly within the context of overstretched services, including our own. In response, our counselling team has been providing emotional support sessions as one-off resourcing appointments for women on our waiting list, in addition to offering wellbeing workshops for the wider community.

Many of the women seeking our counselling services are juggling multiple jobs, often in exploitative and unsafe environments such as the higher-paying informal market or the sex industry, which significantly increases their stress levels. Despite their need for mental health support, the financial pressures they face and the constant need to secure income leave them



with little mental space. This difficult choice between attending counselling or working additional hours has, in some cases, resulted in disengagement from our services.

For Latin American migrant women, who are often the primary breadwinners supporting both children and extended family members, these stresses are not limited to one generation. Through our young women's project, Sin Fronteras (SF), we have seen how mental health issues are becoming even more urgent for Latin American young women and girls. Their home life, social life, access to healthcare, educational progress, and their families' financial stability and job security have all been impacted since the pandemic, making mental health a critical issue across multiple generations.

VAWG

The increasing precarity faced by many Latin American women continues to heighten their vulnerability to violence. Women seeking to leave abusive relationships are confronted with impossible choices: staying with their abuser for financial security or leaving and being forced into exploitative situations such as so-called "sex for rent" (a form of sexual violence) or other survival mechanisms. These strategies often expose them to further abuse and exploitation. The most vulnerable women, particularly those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), including undocumented and asylum-seeking women, are frequently denied access to safety and support.

To effectively support these women, our specialist Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) team, alongside all LAWRS service teams, operates with a clear understanding of how immigration status intersects with every aspect of their lives. This awareness enables us to advocate effectively within a system that discriminates against and dehumanises migrants, placing their safety at further risk.

2. Speaking up: Working for Social Justice

The UK's political landscape has been challenging, with fewer opportunities to lobby and influence a government that had doubled down on anti-migrant rhetoric and legislation and that was decreasing interest in the evidence presented by the charity sector and in complying with international law.

This year's policy work was also impacted by the General Election. This made engagement with the main political parties difficult as controlling migration and anti-migrant discourses were featured heavily in the narrative of the campaigns.

Despite these challenges, LAWRS has continued its advocacy work in the areas of Violence Against Women and Girls, and Labour Exploitation.



Safe reporting mechanisms for migrant women

Throughout this year, we remained committed to advancing our goal of establishing safe reporting mechanisms for migrant victims of crime by advocating for the implementation of a firewall between the police (and other statutory services) and Immigration Enforcement.

As the Victims and Prisoners Bill, on which we began our work the previous year, continued to progress through Parliament, we deepened our collaboration with key stakeholders. In December 2023, the bill returned to Parliament. While the long-anticipated bill aimed to improve access to justice and support for all victims of crime, it notably excluded migrant women. We worked closely with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner to introduce a firewall amendment that would put the needs of migrant victims of VAWG and modern slavery on the agenda. Although our efforts to amend the Victims and Prisoners Bill were initially affected by the upcoming General Election and Labour's shift in support for migrant victims, particularly as the bill moved to the House of Lords, we successfully tabled and debated the amendment in both Houses, securing cross-party support and ongoing backing from the London Victims' Commissioner.

As part of the advocacy work to influence the Victims and Prisoners Bill, in November 2023 and February 2024, we launched a successful social media video campaign asking people to contact their MPs, which featured key stakeholders that are supportive of the firewall. The campaign also included the testimony of Melanie (name has been changed to protect the woman's identity), a victim/survivor and of both LAWRS Policy and Communications Managers. It was shared by over 40 organisations from the VAWG and modern slavery sectors.

Our work on the Victims and Prisoners Bill during this reporting period has been a valuable opportunity to strengthen our presence in Parliament, shape the discussion on this critical issue, and further enhance our relationships with key parliamentarians in both Houses.

Recognising the challenges of influencing national policy, we have also expanded our efforts at the local level and seized opportunities to lobby and advocate at the international level.

At the local level, we deepened our collaboration with Surrey Police, supporting their Domestic Abuse lead in drafting a firewall policy, which has been presented to the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC). This growing recognition of the need for a firewall is largely due to LAWRS' pivotal role in connecting various police forces at the local level, ensuring equal protection for migrant victims.

At the international level, LAWRS took a leading role in the campaign to evaluate the UK's implementation of the Istanbul Convention. In December 2023, we co-submitted a joint shadow report to GREVIO, the independent monitoring body overseeing the Convention's implementation, supported by a coalition of 58 organisations. We played a key role in coordinating the drafting of Chapter Seven on migration and asylum, alongside Rights of



Women, where we reiterated our call for a firewall. The report highlighted systemic failures by the government in addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG).

As part of this process, we engaged with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to influence their evaluation report. In March 2024, the EHRC published their report, urging the government to fully ratify the Convention. Notably, the report included a section on migrant victims and data-sharing practices, recommending an end to sharing personal data for immigration enforcement purposes.

In February 2024, we participated in a roundtable discussion during the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on VAWG to London, where we presented both oral and written evidence. We underscored the harmful effects of data-sharing practices with immigration enforcement and advocated for the implementation of a firewall.

Earlier this year, we also contributed to a joint submission with Advocates for Human Rights and Hibiscus Initiatives to the Human Rights Committee, addressing the UK's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The report emphasised the detrimental impacts of hostile environment policies on the rights of Black, minoritised, and migrant women, including the need for a firewall, and recognised LAWRS' leadership in advocating for these essential changes.

New areas of work

Introducing a firewall has been and will continue to be our policy key priority. Through our frontline work, LAWRS has access to very powerful qualitative evidence of the harms to migrants of data sharing, but we also recognise the power of quantitative data in creating leverage for change. Our successful recruitment for our new Research and Engagement Officer role is facilitating work with our frontline teams to improve our data collection to capture the extent of the number of women we support who fear reporting to the police. To complement this frontline data we will also be looking to increase the use of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests in our policy work and we are looking to collaborate with organisations that have experience of submitting successful FOI requests.

Work to highlight the particular experiences of migrant women in the Family Court is recent for LAWRS; our frontline colleagues share evidence and trends. This year, we continued progressing our presence by joining a working group focused on VAWG and the Family Courts, which are coordinated by Women's Aid and Rights of Women.

Partnership work



In April 2023, as lead members of the Communication Barriers Working Group, we published the 'Listen To Us!' report. This report highlights how statutory bodies are failing black, minoritised, migrant, Deaf and disabled women and girls victims-survivors of VAWG.

This year, alongside Southall Black Sisters, Safety4Sisters, The Angelou Centre and Ubuntu, we've continued to work on bringing attention to the endemic harm of VAWG and the effects of migrant victim-survivors with NRPF. As part of our project we worked on gathering evidence which will be published in a report later in the year.

We continue to participate in the Victims' Reference Group coordinated by London's Victims Commissioner, Claire Waxman. The group was very active in coordinating the response to the Victims and Prisoners Bill and advocating for safe reporting mechanisms.

We continue to chair the Labour Exploitation Advisory Group (LEAG) coordinated by FLEX. This has allowed us to better coordinate influencing for party manifestos, making the case for safe reporting and protecting migrant workers' rights. The group also published a joint research project, "So I decided to carry on...": The Continuum of Exploitation in Practice, which unpacks the factors that produce the risks of labour exploitation and submitted a joint response to the House of Lords Select Committee's call for evidence on the impact and effectiveness of the 2015 Modern Slavery Act which included a LAWRS case study.

Survivors engaging in policy work

This year, we completed our research on the experiences of Latin American domestic workers in the UK, building on our 2019 report, [The Unheard Workforce](#). This research is deeply rooted in the voices and lived experiences of Latin American migrant workers in domestic work. The findings were published in October 2023 in a report titled [Behind Closed Doors: Experiences of Latin American Domestic Workers in the UK](#).

We have been able to include the testimonies and experiences of Latin American migrant women facing the cumulative impacts of the cost of living crisis, ever more hostile immigration legislation and the crumbling of statutory services provision as evidence in response to the consultations the government has published during this reporting period, such as their proposals to increase employment tribunal fees, to introduce fees for OISC advisors providing free immigration advice, and British Home for British People etc. If these proposals go through, they will serve to make migrant women even more vulnerable. Partnership work has been crucial to submitting evidence of the harm they would bring.

Communications



Since Covid, LAWRS has transitioned to hybrid working conditions. To address the challenges of maintaining and improving communication and LAWRS's holistic approach we introduced an internal monthly newsletter. Our newsletter has permitted each team to share their work and achievements. This has had a positive impact on our external work, considering that all the evidence we base our campaigns on comes directly from the trends we identify.

During this year, LAWRS completed 40 years of existence. A [video was created](#) highlighting the importance of why LAWRS first began and how this is still relevant today. It shares the experience of current and past colleagues and service users and the impact LAWRS has had for the community. LAWRS remains committed to increasing the visibility of the issues we work on.

Our Communications Officer has also started to develop a media engagement strategy and plan.

Expanding our scope

In the last year, our service has seen an increase in the need for support from Latin American women coming from Central America who are seeking asylum. Many of them have been placed in unsuitable accommodation such as hotels. The policy team is currently undertaking research to understand the particular experiences of these women in order to influence policy-making.

As migrant communities have been made more vulnerable by the dismantling of support services and their exclusion from them, we have seen a rise in cases of exploitation, especially in complex cases where VAWG and exploitation intersect, yet specialist support services for migrant victims of labour exploitation and modern slavery are few and far between. LAWRS has the expertise of working across and at the intersection of these issues - VAWG, modern slavery and immigration - but we are lacking the capacity to meet the demand. Investment in this area of frontline work would help us provide unique evidence for our policy work on the needs of the most vulnerable migrant workers.

Survivor's story

Teresa* arrived in the UK on a tourist visa with her child. They were fleeing persecution in their home country and arrived in the UK with very limited funds. In trying to seek help, Teresa was introduced to a family that offered them a room in exchange for taking care of the family's children, cooking and cleaning the house. With no other options available to her, Teresa accepted the offer.

Teresa worked 18 hours a day, from 7 am to 1 am. She was not able to take breaks and had to cook and clean even on weekends. Teresa was not allowed to leave the house, apart from when taking the kids to school. She was threatened with being arrested whenever she tried to

leave. Teresa and her child became overstayers during her exploitation and Teresa was repeatedly told that she would not be able to find a job or receive any help because of her immigration status. She was told that if she did not follow orders, she would be deported and have her child taken away from her. Teresa was also told she was not allowed to register with GP because she was undocumented despite needing medication for a thyroid condition.

Only when Teresa met another woman who invited her to come and live with her were they able to finally leave. They moved in with this woman, and both slept on sofas in her living room. Teresa was given LAWRS' number by someone at a food bank who explained to her that she had been a victim of modern slavery. LAWRS helped Teresa get a referral into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), but faced a huge backlog from First Responders.

Whilst LAWRS was trying to secure support for Teresa, a tenant at the host's house tried to rape Teresa in front of her child. Teresa was told by her host not to report the assault to the police as she was undocumented and they would deport her. For this reason, Teresa was afraid of any engagement with the police, including for a referral to the NRM. The host then asked Teresa and her child to leave as she did not want any trouble.

With Teresa and her daughter at risk of destitution, LAWRS referred them to Children Social Services (CSS) under section 17 of the Children's Act, but CSS did not respond to the referral. CSS were notified that Teresa was a victim of modern slavery, but they did not make a referral to the NRM. NRM referral requests sent to the local authority also went unanswered. During this time, the person that had introduced Teresa to the family that exploited her got in touch to say he knew someone else that could help her. Teresa knew she could not trust this person, but was also facing limited options. An NRM referral was finally submitted two months after LAWRS began searching for a first responder to support Teresa. Teresa received a positive reasonable grounds decision and was finally able to access safety. Three weeks later, Teresa was rushed to hospital with symptoms of cardiac arrest, having still not been supported to register with a GP.

The difficulties and delays Teresa faced in accessing the support she is entitled to as a victim of modern slavery put her at severe risk of destitution and re-exploitation and exposed her and her young daughter to gender-based violence. It also delayed the support she required to register with a GP which led to health complications which put her life at risk.

*name has been changed to protect the woman's identity

Survivor's story

Carola* was brought to the UK under a lie, having been told that she did not need a visa to work here as a domestic worker for 6 months. She worked 6 days a week, 16 hours a day, and received £1.92 an hour. She was isolated, did not speak English and did not know what the National Minimum Wage was in the UK. She was paid twice: once after the first 3 months, and again after the second 3 months, and deductions were made for the flight that the employer had paid. After sending money back home she was left with no financial safety net



to leave this exploitative situation. After the first 6 months were up, Carola was not allowed to leave the house and her passport was taken from her without her knowledge. Carola only managed to escape when her employer went out and forgot to lock a door. She was owed 3 months wages when she escaped.

After a while Carola found LAWRS via a friend. LAWRS explained that she had been a victim of exploitation and that she could be referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Her case was referred to a first responder and Carola initially received a negative reasonable grounds decision. LAWRS made a reconsideration request to the Single Competent Authority and Carola finally received a positive decision and is receiving support.

Carola had a baby in the UK and as a result of being undocumented she had accumulated a debt with the NHS of over £9000. The hospital refused to recognise her as an exempt patient as per NHS guidance, despite her receiving a positive reasonable grounds decision. She was referred to Maternity Action and after four months of advocacy her debt was cancelled, but only after her case was escalated to Public Health England. Carola was also offered the opportunity to be referred to the Unpaid Wages Project so she could recover unpaid wages from her exploiter, but chose not to go ahead with making a claim at the employment Tribunal for fear of having to re-engage with her exploiters.

*name has been changed to protect the woman's identity

3. Migrant women as agents of structural and systemic change

In this strand of our work, we also continue strengthening the opportunities for women from the Latin American community to organise and act as agents of social change through the Sin Fronteras and WARMI projects and the Volunteer programme.

Sin Fronteras

The Sin Fronteras project focuses on empowering Latin American girls and young women (LAGYMW) aged 14-24 in London. Over the first year of our new three-year project (April 2023 - March 2024), the initiative provided 22 activities, including group sessions, one-to-one support, and educational advice, to help participants develop critical thinking, well-being, and peer support networks.

Key activities included 6 group sessions on topics like wellbeing, critical thinking through the use of art, and campaigning work. They were also offered 25 one-to-one appointments, 13 internal and external referrals, 6 university access appointments, 5 youth therapy processes, and 13 policy and advocacy activities. The project also published a peer-research report titled "Voices of young Latinas: Peer research into tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG)" alongside a social media campaign using illustrated images to promote gender equality and social change.



A key part of this project, the Young Women's Advisory Board (YWAB), launched in September 2023, provided 13 young women with leadership and advocacy training, focusing on tackling VAWG and addressing the needs of migrant women. 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 and to co-create LAWRS' advocacy work on young migrant women. The YWAB members engaged in practical learning, producing a policy brief and a social media campaign.

Despite some engagement challenges, particularly due to the post-pandemic effects on young people's social skills, the project has positively impacted participants by boosting their confidence, leadership, and advocacy skills. The project plans to expand its work by introducing more regular sessions, increasing outreach, and advocating for migrant women's rights through policy recommendations and campaigns.

Sin Fronteras in numbers:

- 29 participants
- 47 sessions delivered
- 24 one-to-one appointments
- 4 individual educational advice sessions
- 8 YWAB Board Meetings
- 4 YWAB Leadership & advocacy training
- 4 wellbeing sessions
- 2 critical thinking sessions
- 1 activism event (YWAB Partnership event)

WARMI

WARMI, our community activist group, has been an important space for Latin American women from diverse backgrounds to meet, engage in intersectional feminist discussions and to use their lived experiences as foundation to create campaigns and to inform the wider Latin American community.

The beginning of this financial year found Warmi in the final stages of a project in partnership with Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX), aiming to develop more sustainable corporate responses to the inequalities exacerbated by COVID-19 and a corporate human rights due diligence framework for domestic service sector supply chains that is informed by workers' experiences during the pandemic. For this project, Warmi carried out 8 online focus groups on different topics such as working hours and National Minimum Wage, different types of leave, immigration and discrimination, health and safety, freedom of association, grievance



mechanisms, sexual harassment and forced labour. The project engaged 13 Latin American cleaners, whose participation was paid.

In 2023, WARMI attended the International Women's Day banner-making workshop and the Million Women Rise March. We have also had two sessions on the sick pay campaign led by the Centre for Progressive Change. These initial activities made clear the impact of the cost of living crisis in our community. For example, in the first sick pay session participants had to cover their transport fare, and 2 participants attended the session. For the second one, refreshments and participation were paid. 25 people subscribed in a couple of days and we selected 8 of them due to budget limitations. They all attended and arrived on time for breakfast. Session was on the sick pay campaign but we had participants sharing heartfelt stories and crying of sadness and in search of comfort.

This is just an example of many others where members of our community come to us sharing despair. Like a 62 years old woman from Ecuador described *'After all I have experienced, my mental and physical health are on the floor but I can only keep going'*.

In collaboration with one of LAWRS' former volunteers, Nickolle Mahaleth Carrasco, WARMI and the outreach team delivered of 6 wellbeing sessions, consisting of 3 on self-defence, 1 on Gong Bath and 2 on healthy relationships to support survivors of VAWG's journey to recovery. In each session, LAWRS offered transport fare for each participant, snacks and lunch. We had over 70 people attending the sessions and 55% attended more than one session.

The numbers and feedback show that our community still appreciates spaces where they can safely share experiences, learn, grow and plan a brighter future together but that more than ever, they need support to be able to do so. *'It helps that we receive £10 every time we come and that we can eat together as transport and food are so expensive at the moment'* said one of the participants. During lunch time, WARMI Coordinator talked about Community Organising and asked participants about their pressing issues and about the changes they would like to see for our community. Most expressed difficulties in accessing services such as the NHS and mentioned discrimination in those spaces.

4. Supporting Latin American Migrant Women's integration

Southwark Outreach Project

The Southwark Outreach project seeks to improve access to community services, community support, well-being resources, and volunteering opportunities for Latin Americans in the borough. This project is delivered in partnership with Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation (IRMO), who delivers the support needed for accessing volunteering opportunities.



This year, LAWRS' outreach project in Southwark engaged with 1,638 Latin American women through a range of channels, including 281 referrals, 431 workshops and events, 249 wellbeing sessions, 47 debt surgery, 53 yoga sessions, and 297 one-to-one appointments, and inquiries via telephone, text and email. The project stays in touch with the community by disseminating information about our services and activities on a weekly basis through social media and WhatsApp.

The outreach project provides another channel for LAMW to access support, such as one-on-one appointments with the Southwark Outreach Coordinator or with our specialist advisors on VAWG, Welfare Benefits, Housing and Debt (WBHD), and mental health.

Additionally, the project provided informative workshops and webinars on the most relevant issues facing LAMW. This year 32 workshops held during the reporting period contributed to increasing women's awareness of numerous topics (e.g., mental and physical well-being, access to Generalist Advice, employability, VAWG and healthy relationships, tenants' rights, voting rights, vaccinations and access to the NHS, employment rights, energy advice, identity and motherhood, the importance of volunteer work, cost-of-living crisis, and managing stress and anxiety and digital assistance). These were delivered in collaboration with other LAWRS teams and with external organisations such as Citizens Advice Southwark, IRMO, Southwark Latin American Network (SLAN), Streatham Primary Care Network, NHS South East London, UK Chagas Hub, Davis Peace Project, Migrapreneur, Aymara, SELCE, Money A+E, Cancer Research UK, Maternity Action, Parent Action, and CLAUUK.

Alongside this, the project also engages in advocacy work at the local level in Southwark to bring attention to our community's needs and communicate how our organisation is working to address those needs.

Over this year, 194 women accessed the Language Cafe, our weekly informal English conversation classes. It continues to be the most attended activity reflecting the continued need amongst the community to learn English and to access free classes.

At Espacio Mamá, our Latin American mums group, we ran workshops related to Mental Health; Vaccination and access to NHS; Employment Rights; Energy information; Healthy Relationships; Identity and motherhood; Managing stress & anxiety; and Digital assistance.

LAWRS Volunteer Programme for Latin American women

This year, our volunteer programme recruited and supported 39 Latin American women as volunteers for LAWRS, playing a crucial role in expanding the capacity of our organisation. Volunteers are integral to every area of our work, and during this reporting period, they generously contributed 1,025 hours of counselling, 4,125 hours of casework and administrative support, 3,037 hours of helpline support, and 2,627 hours of interpretation. Without our



volunteers, we would not have been able to continue running our helpline, originally set up in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has since transformed how we operate.

Volunteering with LAWRS offers Latin American women valuable work experience and professional skill development, helping them transition into better-paid and more secure employment. Our volunteer programme serves as a pathway out of exploitative, low-paid sectors. During this reporting period, 27 volunteers secured employment and 6 pursued further education.

Our Volunteers Coordinator continues to improve our monitoring tool to help supervisors better capture the breadth of volunteer work and the skills they develop. This tool goes beyond simply recording hours, documenting volunteer tasks, training completed, and supervisor feedback, which allows for richer reference letters and demonstrates the effort involved in both volunteering and supporting volunteers. With the increased need for supervision, debriefs, and care for volunteers, this tool will help us showcase the importance of funding for the programme. Despite a high number of volunteers, we have not yet been able to scale up the capacity of our Volunteers Coordinator, making this support even more critical.

Training in the community

Healthy London Healthy Relationships - Schools Prevention Project

Healthy London Healthy Relationships is a project that supports young people to understand and develop healthy relationships from an intersectional perspective. The project aims to take a whole school approach, by including students, staff, and parents, in trainings about healthy relationships looking at issues such as domestic abuse, sexual abuse, consent, and toxic masculinity with information on how to find help.

LAWRS works with schools with high levels of diversity such as Lambeth, Southwark, Croydon, and Lewisham. In this reporting year LAWRS engaged 224 students in workshops about healthy relationships, trained 116 professionals, and reached 123 members of the school setting community through outreach activities.

This project continues to reveal how important it is to work with young people on this topic. Many of the students we engaged had not heard about healthy relationships but knew from experience what was not healthy. Young women and girls have a better understanding about sexism and violence against women and girls, either through their own experience or via their mothers. However, this is not mirrored by an understanding of sexism and toxic masculinity by boys, reinforcing harmful patterns of behaviour. By addressing these issues at younger ages LAWRS supports a preventative approach to eliminating violence against women and girls.

5. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion



When engaging with our services our clients must complete an equal opportunities form. This helps us keep track of the composition of the women we support. Over the last year, the majority of women we supported were from Colombia (24%), Brazil (21%), and Ecuador (19%). Most of them were aged between 25 - 54 years old (80%). The women we supported identified with the varied ethnic identities that make up Latin America in the following ways - mixed Latin American (49%), white Latin American (22%), indigenous Latin American (20%) and black Latin American (4%).

We are a trans-inclusive, women-only organisation. Only 0.54% of the women we supported identified as trans. Most women we supported identified as heterosexual (95%), with 2.81% identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Additionally 22.51% of our beneficiaries experience disabilities including mental health conditions, physical impairment, sensory impairments and learning difficulties.

The majority of the women we supported were single (37%), married or in a civil partnership (33%), or divorced or separated (26%), with 48% as the primary carer of a child/children under 18.

Language is one of the biggest barriers for our community and 70% of the women we supported indicated they needed an interpreter.