

# Government Statistical Service Harmonisation: Consultation on user needs for additional response options in a future ethnicity standard



Government Statistical Service (GSS) and Office for National Statistics (ONS)

## Response by the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)

February 2026

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### About the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)

LAWRS is a human rights, feminist organisation run by and for Latin American migrant women living in the UK. We support women who are exposed to violations of their fundamental human rights, facing violence against women and girls, exploitation in low-paid sectors, trafficking, and/or enduring severe poverty and deprivation.

We also advocate for women's rights, migrants' rights and the rights of ethnic minorities at local, national and EU levels, working with sister organisations in the women, anti-trafficking, immigration and racial justice sectors, to tackle the vulnerabilities faced by Latin American women who are affected by intersectional layers of discrimination.

For further information, please visit our website: [www.lawrs.org.uk](http://www.lawrs.org.uk)

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***Are you answering on behalf of an organisation or as an individual?***

On behalf of an organisation

***What sector do you work in? Select all that apply.***

Charity or community sector

***What is the name of your organisation?***

Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)

***Which part of the UK does your organisation represent? Select all that apply.***

England

***Do you need data on any additional ethnic groups, which are not included in the current census ethnicity questions?***

Yes

***What additional ethnic groups do you need data for, which are not included in the current census ethnicity questions?***

Latin American

***Which UK nation would you expect to use this additional ethnic group data for? Select all that apply.***

- England
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland

***Do you need data on the additional ethnic groups you are requesting for policy development?***

Yes

*Thinking about policy development, explain why you need data for each of the additional ethnic groups you have requested. Include links to published research, case studies or other supporting evidence.*

LAWRS supports women experiencing a wide range of issues, including homelessness, barriers to accessing healthcare, breaches of employment rights, trafficking and exploitation, and gender-based violence. While our frontline work allows us to gather extensive anecdotal and case-based evidence, there is a significant lack of information and research into the specific needs of the Latin American community—research that is essential to inform effective policy development.

The limited research that does exist nevertheless shows a consistent pattern of disadvantage. Latin Americans, despite being a growing community in the UK and particularly in London, are overrepresented in temporary accommodation (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016) and concentrated in low-paid employment (Nahir de la Silva et al., 2019), where they experience high rates of employment rights breaches (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2019). Evidence also points to disproportionately high rates of certain health conditions, including HIV, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, and Chagas disease, which requires specific screening and awareness within health services (Scuffell et al., 2024).

However, the absence of a recognised ethnicity category for Latin Americans severely limits the ability of public bodies to respond effectively. Without robust ethnicity data:

The scale of homelessness, overcrowding, and reliance on temporary accommodation within the Latin American community cannot be accurately measured, nor can discrimination in access to housing be properly assessed.

- Workplace exploitation and employment rights violations affecting Latin American workers cannot be systematically tracked, and tailored support for survivors of exploitation cannot be adequately planned or resourced. This gap is particularly concerning in the context of the development of the Fair Work Agency, where accurate data is critical to effective enforcement.
- The NHS is unable to plan or commission services that respond appropriately to the specific health needs of the community.
- Schools are unable to fully identify and address the needs of Latin American children, including bilingual support that is essential for meaningful parental engagement.

By way of illustration, LAWRS has recently supported several survivors of sexual exploitation who required intensive additional support from our services, despite having been referred into

the National Referral Mechanism and allocated specialist support workers. In these cases, a lack of understanding of survivors' basic needs—such as language, cultural context, and immigration-related vulnerabilities—meant that statutory support was insufficient, placing additional strain on specialist community organisations and leaving survivors at risk of falling through the gaps.

***Do you need data on the additional ethnic groups you are requesting for equality monitoring?***

Yes

***Thinking about equality monitoring, explain why you need data for each of the additional ethnic groups you have requested. Include links to published research, case studies or other supporting evidence.***

Our frontline work consistently reveals high levels of discrimination experienced by the Latin American community across multiple areas, both within the private sector—particularly employment and housing—and in interactions with statutory services, including pregnancy and maternity services, the police, adult and children's social services, and local authorities. In the absence of an appropriate ethnicity category, these experiences cannot be accurately measured, monitored, or addressed.

This data gap undermines the ability of employers, local authorities, and public bodies to meet their equality duties under the Equality Act 2010. As a result, Latin Americans continue to be rendered invisible within monitoring frameworks, and their specific needs remain largely unrecognised and unmet.

Research on 'The Other Checkbox' (Noria Collective, 2023) also shows that being forced to tick 'Other' makes Latin Americans feel invisible and excluded.

***Do you need data on the additional ethnic groups you are requesting for service delivery?***

Yes

***Thinking about service delivery, explain why you need data for each of the additional ethnic groups you have requested.***

When Latin Americans in the UK attempt to access services, they frequently encounter language barriers. Data from 2016 indicates that around one in five Latin Americans has difficulty with

English (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016). As a result, Latin American community organisations are often required to step in to support individuals with accessing essential services, such as registering with a GP or attending medical appointments, because appropriate interpretation is not provided—despite this being a requirement under public bodies’ equality duties. Research also shows that approximately one in six Latin Americans is not registered with a GP, and nearly seven in ten have never accessed dental services (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2016). Without accurate data, services are unable to identify or address these gaps effectively.

Spanish is the second most spoken language in London, yet without accurate equality data, services are unable to plan adequately for language support, including the provision of interpreters and translated materials. In addition, Latin Americans have specific cultural and linguistic needs that remain invisible without recognition of the community. For example, LAWRS regularly supports Brazilian women who are offered a Portuguese interpreter but are unable to communicate effectively because the interpreter speaks European Portuguese rather than Brazilian Portuguese.

Finally, the lack of official data severely limits the ability of Latin American organisations such as LAWRS to evidence need and secure adequate funding. As a result, we are expected to support a growing community while remaining under-resourced, within an increasingly hostile environment that pushes migrants further to the margins.

*Do you need data on the additional ethnic groups you are requesting for resource allocation?*

Yes

*Thinking about resource allocation, explain why you need data for each of the additional ethnic groups you have requested, if applicable.*

In the absence of official data, funding for services supporting Latin Americans is routinely denied because need cannot be formally demonstrated. Local authorities are unable to allocate resources effectively without knowing how many Latin Americans live in their areas; current estimates suggest a population of between 250,000 and 450,000 people in the UK, though this is widely understood to be an underestimate.

As a result, community organisations applying for grants are frequently told there is insufficient “evidence” of Latin American need, simply because the community does not appear in official statistics. The continued use of the broad “Other” category, which groups Latin Americans together with dozens of unrelated populations, obscures the specific challenges faced by the community and makes targeted funding and resource allocation effectively impossible.

***Do you need data for each of the additional ethnic groups you have requested for any other purpose?***

Yes

***Explain why you need data for other purposes for each of the additional ethnic groups you have requested. Include links to published research, case studies or other supporting evidence.***

Academic research: Researchers cannot study the experiences of the Latin American community without official data.

Community representation: Without data, Latin Americans cannot advocate for political representation.

Cultural recognition: Official recognition in statistics is an important step towards belonging and integration.

***At what geographical levels would you expect to use this information?***

- Nacional
- Regional
- Local authority level or Local government district

***Thinking about government statistics, do any other survey questions provide data that measures the additional ethnic group you have requested?***

No

***Do you use any official data to measure the additional ethnic groups you have requested?***

No

***Do you have any other comments on the additional ethnic groups you have requested?***

While some survey questions may partially indicate Latin American identity, none of the current categories are appropriate or accurate for reliably identifying Latin Americans as a distinct ethnic group.

- Data based on **country of birth** excludes Latin Americans born in the UK—a rapidly growing second generation—and misclassifies those who migrated via European countries.
- **Language** data fragments the community into Spanish and Portuguese speakers, fails to capture those who are fluent in English, and includes people from European countries such as Spain and Portugal, whose cultural and social backgrounds differ significantly from those of Latin Americans.

Only the inclusion of a specific Latin American ethnicity category can provide a consistent and accurate basis for equality monitoring, service planning, and the effective allocation of resources.

Latin Americans have been calling for official recognition as a distinct ethnic group in the UK since 2012. Despite being a growing community, we continue to be rendered invisible within national data collection. As outlined above, this invisibility has serious consequences not only for individuals who are forced to identify as “Other,” but also for the organisations that support them, which remain under-resourced while facing rising demand for services.

A number of local authorities have already recognised Latin Americans as an ethnic minority and included a dedicated category within their equality monitoring frameworks. It would therefore be both timely and necessary for the Office for National Statistics to follow suit ahead of the next census.

## ***Bibliography***

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The Other Checkbox: <https://www.wearenorcia.com/the-other-checkbox>