

HOMES



FOR HEALING

Research Updates from the WAHA initiative



CONTENTS

RESEARCH UPDATES FROM THE WAHA INITIATIVE

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FOREWORD

We would first like to thank all the Black and minoritised survivors who have been assisted by this project and who have participated in this research. We would also like to thank Trust for London for funding this project and believing in our vision for the next phase of its development. A very special mention to the LAWA staff team that has been participating actively in our policy and practice meetings, many of the lively discussions we routinely have there provided very helpful insight into the complexities and challenges of providing this service.



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In terms of data management, conducting service users interviews and case studies analysis, a very special mention to Fernanda Martins for her invaluable support in this.

Also, a special mention to our partners of the OYA Consortium:

The OYA consortium, founded in 2016, is a membership consortium of four by and for Black and minoritised ending VAWG organisations delivering frontline, capacity building and sustainability support services across London: LAWA, London Black Women's Project (LBWP), Asha Projects and Ashiana Network. Together, we currently manage/deliver 117 bed spaces for Black and minoritised women and children, which is 84% of all capacity in London. OYA comes together in solidarity to address the structural and institutional nature of inequality, disadvantage and under-representation by addressing critical needs of Black and minoritised women, their children and young women and girls, which have systematically been neglected by the state. OYA is also aware that 'competition from within', encouraged through tendering processes have favoured generic women's organisations. OYA commits to a non-competition framework and promotes collaboration in terms that are fair and equal, open and transparent, participatory and inclusive.

Finally, we would also like to acknowledge and thank all who have been part of the WAHA project team from its inception to date, Angie Herrera (Director, LAWA), Baljit Banga (former Director of Imkaan and current CEO of Hibiscus initiative), Yenny Tovar (Former Director LAWA), Christina Ioannou and Kaveri Sharma (Former WAHA Advisors), Rosa Heimer (Former Policy Coordinator, LAWA), Alexandra Molano-Avilan (Former Knowledge Officer, LAWA).

The report and infographics have been designed by Verónica Posada Álvarez.

Thank you.

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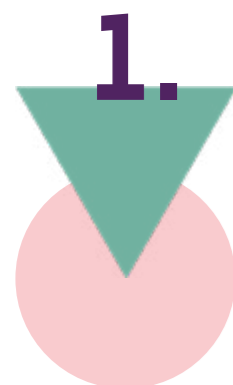
December 2023

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION



This report addresses the housing experiences of Black and minoritised women survivors of gender-based violence. It draws on the insights gained after 5 years of continued work of the Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) initiative funded by Trust for London and run by the Latin American Women's Aid (LAWA) in collaboration with the OYA consortium of by and for specialist Black and minoritised ending refuge providers in the capital. The data analysis presented in this report focuses on the last three years of delivery, (June 2020 to June 2023) as the first 2 years are looked at under the ['A Roof, not a Home'](#) publication in 2019. However, the overall conclusions and recommendations bring together the lessons from the 5-year timeframe.

The WAHA initiative addresses Black and minoritised women's intersecting pressures of poverty, homelessness and gender-based violence, through promoting changes in housing policy and practice in the UK using a rights-based approach. It is policy-change focused, but it is also (and substantially) a frontline project advising women and acting on their behalf to help them access, secure and sustain safe, suitable and stable homes where they can heal from violence and rebuild their lives. WAHA also seeks to build our collective capacity to better respond and advocate for women at risk of homelessness or homeless due to gender-based violence, engaging in conversations with commissioners, colleagues in the women's and housing sector, housing officials and authorities in senior level positions of responsibility about the significant challenges but also opportunities we have identified to enhance best practice (where it exists), and address failings to adhere to current legislation. Through WAHA, LAWA facilitates updates and improvements of the knowledge base around housing policy and practises at the case work level in support of LAWA service users and users from member organisations of the [OYA consortium](#), with a view to utilise this knowledge base in targeted advocacy initiatives. Where new evidence (best practices, areas of improvement) emerges, we use it to influence key Local/National government stakeholders to create better recognition/understanding of the intersections of poverty/violence/race/homelessness and how this affects Black and minoritised survivors of violence and to contribute to improvements and better responses from statutory services to meet the housing needs of survivors.



A NOTE ON WOMEN'S HOMELESSNESS DATA, METHODOLOGY AND WAHA DEVELOPMENT PLANS:

London Councils latest estimates show that 1 in 50 Londoners are currently homeless and living in temporary accommodation.¹ But the experiences of homelessness for women differ from those of men. For instance, women are more prone to experiencing “hidden homelessness,” such as couch-surfing or living with extended family in overcrowded conditions, as well as residing in temporary housing, rather than being visibly homeless on the streets. Even when women do find themselves sleeping rough, they tend to seek hidden and safer locations, making them less likely to be counted in street homelessness surveys. Homelessness and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) are, therefore, inextricably linked: a large proportion of women that are either homeless or at risk of homelessness would have faced some type of gender-based violence. Conversely, all women fleeing gender-based violence are at risk of homelessness and/or become homeless in the process they go through to escape abuse.

For Black and minoritised women survivors, the risk level increases due to additional vulnerabilities they face, such as lack of knowledge of their rights, basic to zero English skills, lack of understanding of how to navigate the system, their migration status being used as a coercive tool, lack of housing options, poverty, among many others. It has been found that Black and Minoritised women, such as Latin Americans, are generally trapped in violent relationships for about 40% longer than their British equivalents (Imkaan, 2012, Vital Statistics 2).

This is why the WAHA initiative is committed to build on our own available local data and combine this input (based on the casefiles of our internal database), to match it in the new phase of development with input related to the lived experience of women using Black and minoritised women-led services nationally.

In addition, we are now gathering in systematic ways the knowledge and expertise of our staff, and that of those colleagues that take part of our monthly Policy and Practice learning hub to feed into local and national advocacy initiatives. We are doing this following our Policy and Practice method (described below).

¹ Calculated by dividing London's population (8,796,628 at the 2021 census) by London Councils' latest estimate of the number of homeless individuals in temporary accommodation (169,393).

The methodologies used to gather the information we present in this report include:

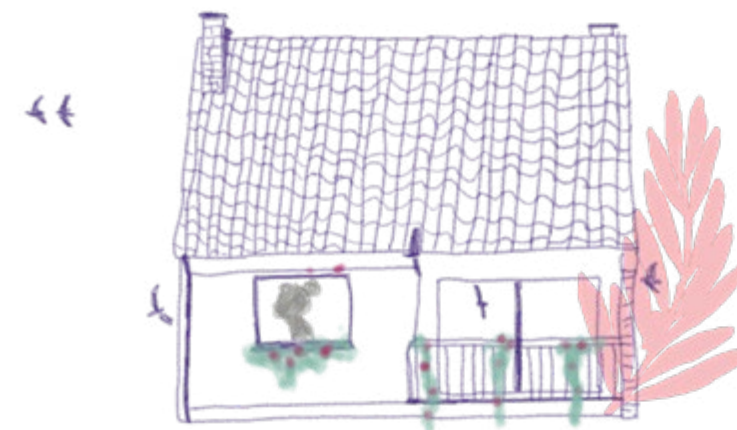
* Quantitative analysis of WAHA case records between June 2020 and June 2023: we are referring to a total of 193 complex cases of Black and minoritised survivors, of which, at the time of writing, 152 are closed and 39 remain open. We collect detailed information on the survivor's situation, including: a comprehensive gender-based violence record, legal remedies used, demographics and immigration history, among others. As it pertains to housing, we collect details on the type of accommodation survivors were living at before contacting us, at the point of exiting the service, and then after 3-6 months, through our regular WAHA evaluation survey. At the point of exiting the service we also conduct a short end of service feedback questionnaire.

* Qualitative analysis of WAHA Case files: a selection of our most salient complex cases is studied monthly during case file review meetings which regularly occur in our team. Lessons from the issues arising, barriers and actions taken in those selected cases, apart from being documented in our internal monitoring system, are also systematised in a shared learning document which summarises concisely key information. This tool allows us to easily consult and bring up any examples at partners or other advocacy spaces. This tool contained 78 cases which were analysed in depth.

* Using this detailed analysis, we selected a small sample of survivors whose case presented the most salient/recurrent issues across the data set. In total, 6 survivors agreed to speak to us through 1-hour in-depth interviews.

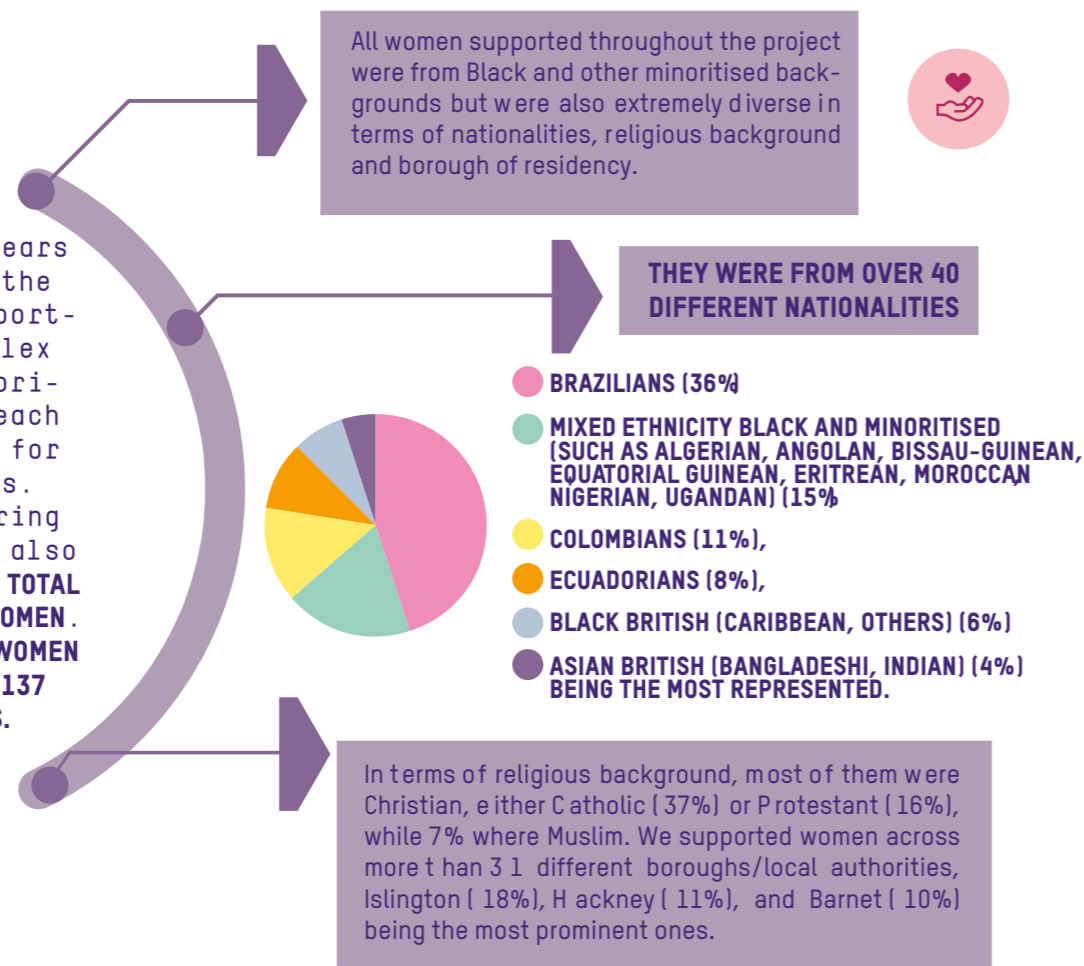
* We reviewed the meeting notes from our monthly policy and practice space (an internal cross-team meeting that LAWA holds every month to discuss live cases and complex challenges). Some of the analysis and support workers testimonies come from the conversations we had in that space, which sometimes is joined by our OYA partners and other allied organisations.

* Additionally, we conducted a non-systematic literature review of the most salient high-quality articles and publications available about homelessness assistance and VAWG in the UK. This informed our contextual analysis, and substantiated our policy and practice recommendations.





During the last three years of the delivery under the WAHA initiative, we supported a total of 193 complex cases of Black and minoritised survivors, with each case receiving support for an average of 5 months. Advice was provided during weekly drop-in sessions also on an ad-hoc basis to a **TOTAL OF 900 BLACK AND MINORITISED WOMEN**. During this period, **156 WOMEN MOVED INTO OUR REFUGES AND 137 MOVED OUT OF OUR REFUGES.**

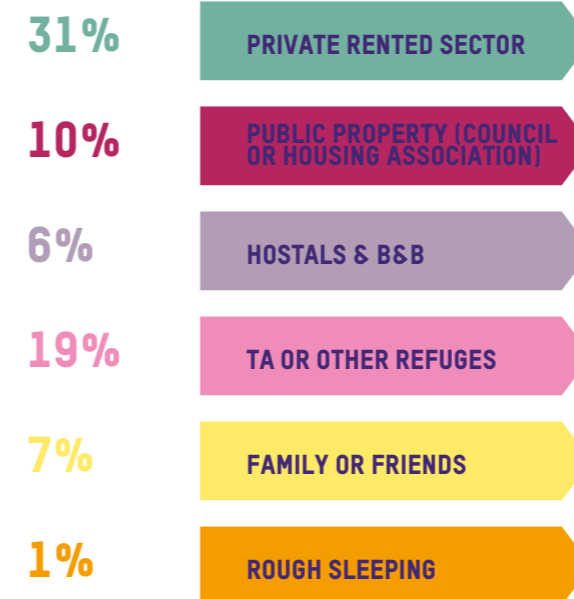


² Table A figures are retrieved from our Service Users Profile information at the point of entry to the WAHA service.

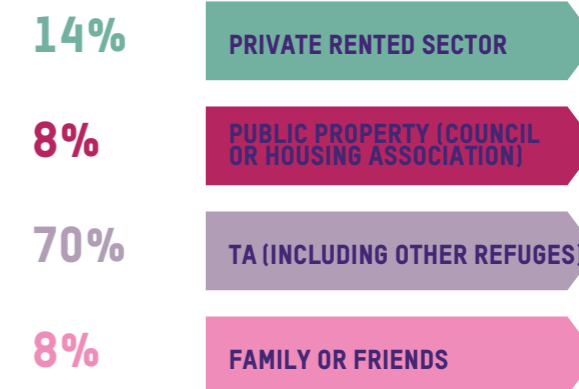
³ Table B figures are retrieved at the point of exit of our service (typically when the case is closed or moved to resettlement support).

WHAT TYPES OF HOMES ARE AVAILABLE TO SURVIVORS?

PRIOR to being supported by the WAHA project, in terms of the types of homes survivors were living at: TABLE A²



AFTER being supported by the WAHA project, these were the types of homes that the women could access: TABLE B³



What this data tells us is that, while homelessness is prevented effectively through our interventions, unfortunately the precarity of the housing journeys for survivors does not subside to the degree we would hope to see. This results in a recurring loop of issues that keep coming up for women, even after they have reached some stability by escaping violence and ensuring a roof over their heads. Unfortunately, it is increasingly more challenging for them to secure homes that are safe and affordable, as well as stable during the long term, which is why we see a large majority of survivors allocated to Temporary Accommodation after fleeing a situation of abuse. The state of TA is increasing needs in support after the move-on and it is creating further harm that women are being offered to move from one refuge to another.

There are several external factors that unfortunately hinder our ability to facilitate positive outcomes for women to the extent that we would like to. Below a summary of the most directly salient issues from our perspective, and which basically constitute our key focus areas for institutional/high level advocacy:

Changes in legislation that do not go far enough given structural issues connected to the systemic housing crisis in the UK and the retraction of the welfare state: While the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has brought along a direct duty for Local Authorities to provide safe accommodation for survivors (and thus strengthening existing legislation that already considered this group in priority need), the reality is that the lack of social housing stock and the prevalence of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) as the de-facto choice for relieving homelessness, plus the inadequacies of the Housing benefit system, creates a near to impossible scenario for vulnerable women to afford suitable and stable accommodation at move on stage if it is unsafe to stay at their homes but do not require to go to refuge (or indeed if they have gone already to a refuge and want to start re-building their lives). This is why we have been calling the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to re-assess caps on Local Housing Allowance to ensure they realistically match the cost of private rented accommodation. Concurrently, we have also made calls for the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority to regulate the PRS in London: The PRS needs to be substantially regulated in London to ensure that it is affordable and safe for women, should this be the only option available to them.

Failures in the housing benefit system: The obstruction to financial independence through misunderstood or inadequately assessed benefit applications leaves women in high risk of becoming homeless after escaping their perpetrator, or worse, further compels them to stay as they cannot receive the support, they need to escape their abusive situations.

⁴ On the 22nd of November, as this report was being finalised, the Chancellor made an announcement in the 2023 Autumn Statement where it increased the Local Housing Allowance in line with the cheapest 30% of rents. This is of course positive, and we welcome the well overdue measure, but for this measure to work long term needs to be an annual increase to keep up with rising rents. Further, this measure would in practice be insufficient if not coupled with a lift to the benefits cap. For more information on this, see: <https://wbg.org.uk/>

Hostile environment against migrants: There is a lack of long-term support for migrant survivors and increasingly narrow pathways for support and regularisation of their migration status, which hinders our ability to support a larger section of our community (those with Non-Recourse to Public Funds). This is why we call for the Home Office to extend the Domestic Violence Rule and Destitute Domestic Violence Concession to provide greater protection to survivors with NRPF and enable them to access domestic abuse services, particularly refuge.

Cost of living crisis: In general, domestic abuse and economic abuse are already deeply connected, which means that the cost-of-living crisis is likely to exacerbate barriers for survivors of abuse. A survey by Women's Aid Federation found that two-thirds (66%) of survivors said that abusers are now using the cost-of-living increase as a tool for coercive control e.g., to justify further restricting their access to money. The same survey found that 50% of survivors were prevented from fleeing by the stark reality of not being able to support their children, 52% were afraid of getting into debt and 48% were concerned that benefits wouldn't cover increased living costs. With inflation and household energy prices soaring, we are seeing a devastating impact on women even greater from minoritised communities, such as those that we support.



1.3

WHY HOMES
FOR HEALING?

Beyond discussions centred on affordability, as important as they are, being so exposed to understanding the root causes of violence and how this is overcome, has made us reflect on the importance of contextualising more candidly why the qualities of our homes matter, and the immense impact that this has in our overall health and wellbeing. Good quality, stable homes are essential to a decent life and to heal from the trauma of gender-based violence.

In various ways, the presence of inadequate housing conditions can have an impact on health. For instance, hazards categorized as Category 1 (as evaluated by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System -HHSRS-), such as tripping risks, have the potential to cause injuries. Additionally, homes with insufficient insulation may contribute to a cold living environment, something which in turn can be detrimental to several physical health conditions. Mental health and trauma cannot be left out of this analysis, less so for survivors of abuse. We have witnessed many instances of re-traumatisation and worsening of mental health conditions for survivors as a direct result of the poor conditions of the housing that is available to them. Instead of finding homes for healing, women and children surviving violence can become even more ill both mentally and physically given the material state of their accommodation. When examining health in relation to housing tenure, it is therefore crucial to recognize a bidirectional causality: individuals with poorer health may experience unfavourable employment outcomes, resulting in reduced income for obtaining high-quality homes.³

Case study 1

ANDREA



Andrea was a resident in one of our refuges. After supporting her to move on into permanent accommodation, unfortunately the home she could access in the private rented sector had severe repairs issues. The most dangerous situation arose when the ceiling completely fell. Luckily neither Andrea nor her 4-year-old daughter were hurt in the incident but as a survivor of abuse, this experience affected greatly her mental health. LAWÁ's WAHA Advisor established communication with the property owner landlord to ensure that the items destroyed were substituted and that the relevant repairs took place while the survivor was in a hostel paid by the landlord.

Andrea's trust in her landlord was shaken, and with good reason, so she relied on LAWÁ's support to advocate on her behalf. Thanks to our advisor's intervention, the destroyed items were substituted, and repairs took place. Our advisor also provided emotional support to Andrea to ensure she would progressively move on from this trauma and rekindled her relationship with the landlord.

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Reflecting on the lessons arising from this case, our WAHA advisor said:

“This case showed that the trust of our women towards landlords can be shaken in incidents where negligence might be involved. Andrea’s flat was generally in good state, however it did have some mould issues. If it wasn’t for the incident of the ceiling falling, and our intervention supporting communications between Andrea and her landlord, in her desperation she would have wanted to leave, which probably would have put her again at risk of homelessness. I explained to her that since the landlord had followed all the reasonable steps to restore the situation there was a possibility that the council wouldn’t be able to help if she took that decision, but she still had the right to approach them for support and advise, which I also presented to her as an option, and supported her with. It was not entirely clear from the evidence we had at the time if the incident was an accident or if it was due to negligence, but in legal terms, Andrea could have attempted to make a claim for damages. As the landlord took action promptly to resolve the situation, in the end she decided not to take this any further. We advised as well to come back to us if she needed separate help with the mould issues if this became more concerning, or in general if she had any other support needs. She did come back few months later seeking support with rent arrears, which we provided via our drop-in service”.

Unfortunately, negligence from landlords is not an uncommon problem. In other cases, we have seen survivors staying in ‘Temporary’ Accommodation for over two years without having their repairs issues fixed and with poor to zero communication between themselves and the housing officers from the Council.

In one recent case, we saw a survivor re-traumatised due to recurrent mice infestations, which has worsened her depression due to the severe trauma she went under.

As our WAHA advisor described to us:

“The lack of response from the Housing team is contributing greatly to her mental health issues, and unfortunately any work that she does to ameliorate her situation will be undermined if her living situation does not change”.



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Case study 2

ALEXANDRA



Alexandra is a 58-year-old woman from Ecuador, who fled Spain due to domestic abuse incidents suffered by her partner during the 30 years of living together. She arrived in the UK in 2019, and due to serious medical problems as well as the pandemic she lost her job. She left the family house, fearing that her ex-partner could find her by using their daughter to get information of her whereabouts. In the UK, she was staying at her sister-in-law’s place where the perpetrator could easily come and visit at any time.

Alexandra’s sister and niece threatened her with killing her if she decided to go back to Ecuador.

Alexandra stayed for 10 months at one of LAWAs’ refuge and was supported to make a housing application. Although she was granted Temporary Accommodation by the council, the property was unsuitable to live in due to a rat infestation. The neighbours had also reported having rats in their flats, which meant it was something affecting the whole building. Despite her reporting the situation to the letting agent, it took a while for them to find a proper solution forcing Alexandra to sleep at the floor of one of her friend’s homes. Overall, it took four months for her to be offered a private and secure rent.

Andrea’s and Alexandra’s experience with social accommodation in poorly hygienic conditions is not isolated. In recent years, council housing conditions in London have been questioned and even described as “appalling”, “unliveable” and “dangerous” by many residents who complain to their landlords without significant action being taken.

According to data from the London Assembly, 15 % of London’s social properties fail to meet the Government’s Decent Homes Standards, namely: meeting the statutory minimum standards for housing; being at a reasonable state of repair; having reasonably modern facilities and services; and providing a reasonable degree of thermal comfort. The Housing and Land department of the Greater London Authority has recently published research^{xx} where they establish how the prevalence of poor condition in London housing varies by tenure, with private rented and social rented homes more likely to be in poor condition than owner occupied homes. This reality locates the problem not only as a public health issue, but also as one of cost efficiency: The same research established that it would cost £1,203.8m to repair London’s poor housing across all tenures, and that the estimated per annum cost to the NHS of poor housing in London is £100.1m.

Andrea’s and Alexandra’s case highlights a reality that, unfortunately, is shared by a large number of vulnerable people at risk of homelessness and/or that are supported by various forms of social housing: the fact that the standards of habitability and facilities of those properties is found lacking, if not severely compromised. We have seen this kind of issue having fatal consequences in the UK in a number of cases, so it is vital to raise awareness and take prompt action in support of survivors in effective ways.



1.4

HOMELESSNESS IN LONDON: SYSTEMIC ISSUES

According to the Centre for Homelessness Impact, there is strong evidence that suggests that risks of homelessness are much more prevalent amongst people who experience poverty and adversity. And while trauma, especially coming as a result of gender-based violence, can be experienced by people from any socio-economic background, it is a well-established fact that structural inequalities experienced by people of mixed ethnicities in the Midlands and in London are significantly overrepresented among people impacted by homelessness. ^{xxx}

Unfortunately, there is a sharp lack of evidence on what types of interventions work best to relieve and prevent homelessness among people from ethnic minorities, and within that, even less data on what works to prevent and address homelessness amongst black and minoritised survivors of violence. In this scenario, where could we start looking?

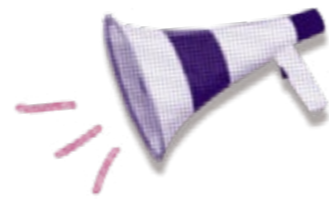
Addressing racism and discrimination, focusing on systemic inequalities in housing provision and building trust between people from ethnic minorities who are affected by homelessness and providers of services seem like an important starting point.

Key drivers of ethnic inequalities include migration history and integration pathways, racism and discrimination and cumulative, intersecting

disadvantage. Individual vulnerabilities and behaviours, of course, play a role in the issue of homelessness, but it is crucial that we understand the subject from the standpoint of social circumstances and social systems.

All these conditions are compounded by the cost structure of housing in the capital, which renders the system unsustainable and unaffordable for the majority of Londoners, even more so those facing increased vulnerabilities, such as survivors of gender-based violence.





KEY STATISTICS ON LONDON'S SYSTEMIC FAILURES AROUND HOUSING:

1. 300,000 households in London are waiting for social housing. In several London boroughs, more than 10,000 households are on the waiting list.

2. Numbers of occupants in **TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION (TA)**^v **HAVE HAS DOUBLED IN THE LAST TEN YEARS** and are now over 100,000 in England. London has relatively more family households in temporary accommodation than elsewhere in England (65% as compared to 45%). At the end of March 2023, figures from DLUHC indicated that there were 60,040 London households in TA.^v However, based on London Councils latest survey of boroughs' homelessness data, the estimated number of homeless residents in temporary accommodation has risen to almost 170,000.^{vii} The increase in numbers shows that many more households need additional help.

3. London homeless stay longer in TA than elsewhere in the country, especially larger households, and those with accessibility problems.

4. Reliance on private renting is increasingly high amongst Londoners. This increases precarity amongst the most vulnerable and is unsustainable, because:

A) The cost of renting in London has gone up 5.5% since 2021 – the sharpest increase since records began.

B) The total number of private rental properties available has reduced by 41%.

C) Only 2.3% of London listings in 2022-23 were affordable to those relying on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to cover their housing costs– this is down from down from 18.9% in 2020-21.

5. It's not just about cost and availability. 1 in 5 privately rented homes in London don't meet basic health and safety requirements. Rates of overcrowding are higher in London than anywhere else in the country.⁶ ^{viii} Households with children more likely to be overcrowded than households with no children (English Housing Survey, 2016/17 to 2018/19).

⁵ London Councils surveyed all London local authorities for their latest homelessness data, which covered March and April 2023. London Councils received survey responses from 28 boroughs. To ensure a pan-London assessment of the capital's homelessness pressures, London Councils supplemented the 28 responses with estimated figures for the remaining boroughs by applying the average year-on-year increase from the responses received to the official homelessness statistics for March 2022. The official homelessness statistics for March 2023 are missing data from nine boroughs so London Councils considers this estimate a more accurate representation of the capital's homelessness population.

1.5 HOW WE DO POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL ADVOCACY WORK AT LAW

Homelessness prevention is typically addressed at three levels:⁷

- Primary prevention: this is about preventing new people from becoming homeless.

- Secondary prevention: this is about quickly identifying people facing homelessness and working to end it as soon as possible.

- Tertiary prevention: this is about developing targeted measures that address the housing and wellbeing needs of people that have already faced homelessness, to help them begin or sustain a path to stable housing.

LAWA's model of work through the WAHA initiative works across all these three levels of homelessness prevention. In addition to this, from the policy and practice standpoint we develop our interventions through the following strategic stages:

⁶ 20% of all households with children are considered overcrowded according to the bedroom standard measure, compared to 8% in the rest of England. [Full reference – End note VI.](#)

⁷ Dawson, Alice; Glover, Ben and Anderson, Rob: [Opportunities to better prevent homelessness in England. A Demos-Centre for Homelessness Impact Discussion Paper](#) (July 2023)

⁸ As *accommodation options* we deem refuges, council houses, social housing and private-rented properties.



CHAPTER I

1. HOLISTIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT: At first, the WAHA team establishes the service user's current housing status. This initial (baseline) evaluation also includes a systematic VAWG risk assessment to determine the appropriate steps to be followed, in order to safeguard the lives of women and their children.

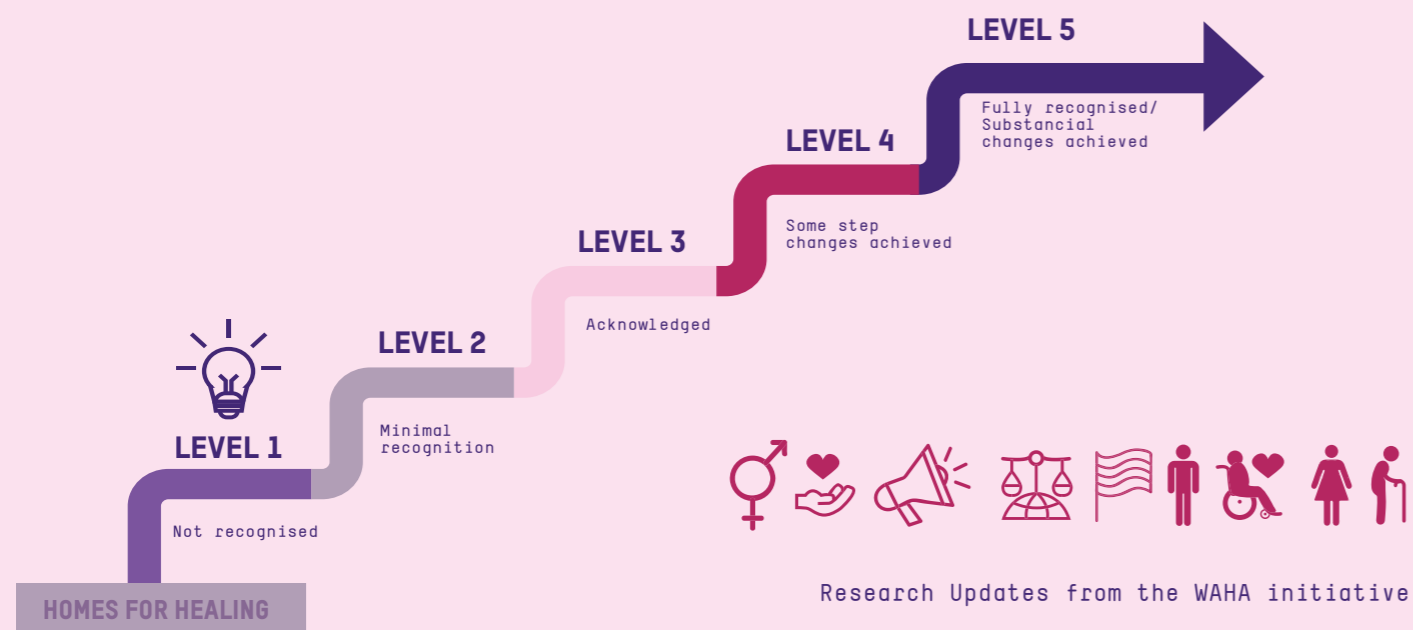
2. STAKEHOLDERS MAPPING AND ENGAGEMENT: This refers to the identification of all authorities with the statutory duty [VIII](#) to address our service users' needs, as well as key partner organisations with supporting capacity. This knowledge (which is revisited and updated on an ongoing basis) informs our organisational gap analysis, which helps us refine/adapt our institutional advocacy goals and connect them with other change demands aligned with our advocacy objectives at either local or national level.

3. COORDINATED RESPONSE: This refers to the definition of the appropriate course of action to pursue at the case level. As we are fully aware that each Black and minoritised woman has different housing needs that might not be fully addressed by a single organisation, we encourage and advocate for comprehensive, coordinated and, if required, multi-agency responses.

4. IMPLEMENTATION: This refers to the operationalisation of the coordinated response appropriate for each case. It will typically consist of the provision of accommodation options for Black and minoritised women to move in. From a policy development standpoint, the implementation stage enables the identification of concrete aspects within national housing policies that need to be reframed or implemented differently to guarantee Black and minoritised women's access to safe and suitable accommodation. Ongoing dialogue between partner organisations, case work advisors and the wider VAWG and Homelessness sector means that we are able to utilise in agile ways recent information from our ongoing practice to support positive outcomes in particularly complex individual cases, but the partnership work and information sharing is also aimed at informing (in real time) advocacy and campaigning initiatives in collaboration with likeminded stakeholders.

5. EVALUATION: Evaluating and learning about our practice on an ongoing basis is an important part of our approach to policy and influencing. We encourage collective reflection around our progress towards influencing and voice objectives using scalar methodologies. Simply put, this means that, for any given issue/objective, we ask ourselves the question: how much we have progressed according to the following five levels:

These types of practical devices help us self-assess our own efficacy and allow us to have a conversation starter that is grounded in concrete terms (even if the issues analysed are complex and multilayered).



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6. EVIDENCE-BUILDING: This refers to the ongoing documentation, systematisation and sharing of our experiences supporting Black and minoritised users in appropriate spaces, in order to influence practice, advocate for the rights of survivors to safe accommodation, and to counteract systemic failures in the housing system.



IN A FORTHCOMING PUBLICATION OF OUR WAHA INITIATIVE, WE WILL SHARE A TOOLKIT THAT GIVES MORE DETAILS ON HOW WE DO THIS WORK AT LAW.

1.6

POLICY CONTEXT CONNECTED TO SUPPORT PROVISIONS FOR VULNERABLE WOMEN

In the UK, homelessness is covered under a range of legislation, in particular, the Housing Act 1996, the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The primary homelessness provisions are contained in Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, the Act includes:

- the duties to inquire into a homelessness application;
- principal criteria for determining which duties a local authority will owe to an applicant who is homeless or threatened with homelessness;
- when and how an applicant should be notified of a decision;
- main accommodation duties and how they can be discharged;
- how a decision can be challenged.

Since the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 became an Act of parliament, the new statutory definition of 'domestic abuse' replaces the term 'domestic violence'. The Act provides clarity over governance and accountability around the government's duties towards survivors of Domestic abuse. Unfortunately, the Act lacks a gendered approach, and owing to that it fails to recognise the additional systemic barriers faced by women, including specifically a failure to recognise the wider access men have to owning property and the greater vulnerability of women, and migrant women to access safe housing.

The main overarching changes include:

A wider definition of domestic abuse: The new statutory definition of domestic abuse covers much more than physical violence. Abusive behaviour includes:

- physical or sexual abuse
- violent or threatening behaviour
- psychological or emotional abuse
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- economic or financial abuse

A provision to be considered in priority need automatically for survivors of domestic abuse: This means that people fleeing domestic abuse now have automatic priority need when they apply to a local authority for homelessness assistance. This new category is contained in section 189(1)(e) Housing Act 1996.

Vulnerability assessment no longer required: This should make it easier for survivors who are homeless as the result of domestic abuse, including single people with no children, to get local authority help and support with safe accommodation at point of extreme crisis in their life. Previously, survivors needed to show the impact homelessness would have on them, and they were often required to get medical or other intrusive evidence of their abuse.

Survivor and perpetrator need a personal connection for the abuse to be categorized as domestic: To meet this criterion, both the victim and the perpetrator must be 16 years or older and have a personal connection through:

- Marriage or civil partnership, whether it past, present, or intended.
- Being or having been in an intimate relationship.
- Having joint parental responsibility for a child under 18, even in the past.

-Being related according to section 63(1) of the Family Law Act 1996, which includes parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. This also encompasses step and half relations.

-Various types of relationships fall under this definition, such as ex-partners and other family members. Paid and unpaid carers are excluded unless they also share a personal connection, such as being family members. The Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities has been revised to incorporate the impact of the new statutory definition of domestic abuse and the newly established priority need category for survivors who are homeless due to domestic abuse into the homelessness application process. These modifications were published on July 5, 2021.⁹

-Importantly, under the Domestic Abuse Act, the vast majority of children of victims residing in safe accommodation are also victims in their own right.

More specifically, the Act places duties on each relevant tier one local authority in England (county and unitary councils (other than London Boroughs), the Greater London Authority and the Isles of Scilly Council), to¹⁰ :

1. Appoint a multi-agency Domestic Abuse Local Partnership Board which it will consult as it performs certain specified functions.
2. Assess the need for accommodation-based domestic abuse support in their area for all victims or their children, including those who come from outside the area.
3. Develop and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their locality, having regard to the needs assessment.
4. Give effect to the strategy (through commissioning/ de-commissioning decisions).
5. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy.
6. Report back annually to central government.
7. Require tier two councils (district or borough councils, and London Boroughs) to co-operate with the lead local authority, so far as is reasonably practicable.
8. Require the Secretary of State to produce statutory guidance, having consulted the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, local authorities and such as other persons as considered appropriate.
9. Require local authorities to have regard to the statutory guidance in exercising their functions.

¹⁰<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-fact-sheets/local-authority-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse-and-their-children-within-safe-accommodation-factsheet>

¹¹ Housing Act 1996, s 189B, inserted by Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, s. 5.

Domestic Violence (DV) survivors can approach the local authorities as homeless if they are fleeing an unsafe home. Two main mechanisms should be considered:

1. The prevention duty: this mechanism places a duty on housing authorities to work with people who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days to help prevent them from becoming homeless. If the local housing authority is satisfied that a person is a) threatened with homelessness, b) eligible for assistance, they are obliged to take reasonable steps to help the applicant to either remain in their existing accommodation or secure alternative accommodation. The first priority is to keep people in their homes, or if this is not possible, then to move the applicant to a suitable property in a planned way.

2. The relief duty:¹¹ This requires housing authorities to help people who are homeless to secure accommodation. The duty arises where the LHA is satisfied that the applicant is:

- homeless, and
- eligible for assistance

Unless the Local Housing Authority refers the application to another authority in England, they must take reasonable steps to help the applicant to secure that suitable accommodation becomes available for the applicant's occupation for at least:

- six months, or
- such longer period not exceeding 12 months as may be prescribed.

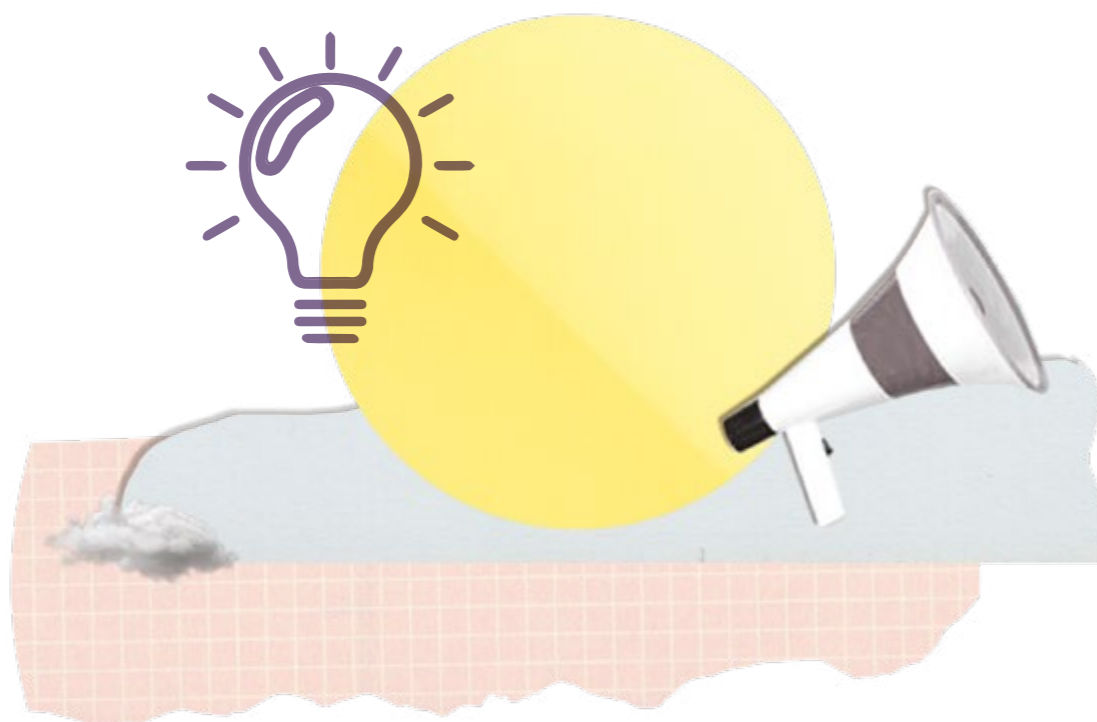
The duties under the Domestic Abuse Act are separate to local authority housing duties under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002 and even though the part 4 brings more visibility at the statutory level to the responsibilities towards survivors of abuse, does not place a requirement on authorities to provide domestic abuse victims with accommodation. **HOWEVER**, local authorities must still comply with their duties under homelessness law in line with Chapter 8 of the Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities.¹²

It is worth noting that new Act has significant gaps, the most important being that not all women fall within the scope of protection of the legislation. Despite the tireless campaigning,¹³ the government failed to deliver equal protection and

¹²<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/homelessness-code-of-guidance-for-local-authorities>

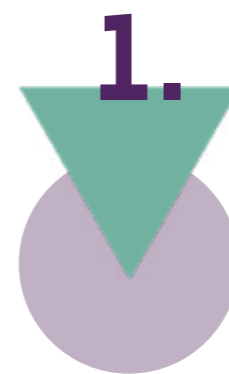
¹³ These campaigning efforts were led by the following organisations: [Southall Black Sisters](#), [Latin American Women's Rights Service](#) (through the [Step-Up Migrant Women campaign](#), of which LAWA is a member) and the [End Violence Against Women Coalition](#). These efforts were supported by a broad coalition of VAWG sector organisations through various submissions made during the passage of the bill through parliament. The most important of them was the [Joint Recommendations on the Domestic Abuse Bill](#), published in July 2020

support for migrant women through the new law. Further important omissions in the Act include that, despite making explicit a statutory duty on local authorities to fund support in 'accommodation based' services, the law does not use the word "refuge" at all. The Statutory Guidance however does insert this terminology more prominently (for more on this, see the Glossary – Safe Accommodation section-)



PART 4 OF THE NEW DOMESTIC ABUSE ACT DOES NOT REQUIRE LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO PROVIDE DOMESTIC ABUSE VICTIMS WITH ACCOMMODATION, IT REQUIRES THEM TO ASSESS THE NEED FOR ACCOMMODATION-BASED SUPPORT AND DELIVER A STRATEGY TO MEET THIS NEED. IT THEREFORE DOES NOT REPLACE EXISTING HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS DUTIES.

CHAPTER II FINDINGS FROM THE WAHA CASES OVERVIEW



One of the main barriers Black and minoritised survivors face to leave their abusive homes is not knowing where to seek help from, given unfamiliarity with the UK system, lack of information about their rights and services and language barriers preventing them from accessing these. Our evidence shows that local authorities are failing to provide vital accessible information about by and for support services and refuges, which means that Black and minoritised survivors are being left unsupported and at great risk for extensive periods of time before they become aware of their options.

For example, several residents of by and for refuges reported having to stay put with the perpetrators, sleep rough, couch-surfing or moving to other unsuitable forms of emergency accommodation (such as mixed gender hostels or generic women's refuges) before they became aware of the existence of by and for refuges. Evidence shows that by and for refuges are not only the most appropriate form of refuge accommodation to address Black and minoritised survivors' needs but that survivors themselves report feeling safer and more supported in this type of accommodation.

Altogether throughout the WAHA project in the period we reflect upon in this report, we supported a total of **193 COMPLEX CASES, OF WHICH 152 ARE CLOSED AND 39 REMAIN OPEN.** 23% of these cases were not only complex but extremely labour intensive, which we assess by comparing across the data set the number of work records associated with the cases and the length of the support. While on average cases are active for 3 months, we have seen that outcomes are rarely achieved that quickly. In fact, the average time to see outcomes is 5 months.

THE INITIAL REASON FOR REFERRALS TO THE WAHA PROJECT continues to be primarily homelessness (46% of cases) or threatened homelessness (16%) due to gen-

der-based violence (63% in total), and to a lesser degree service users facing issues with repairs and tenancy maintenance support (7%). A sizeable proportion of initial referrals are connected to issues arising from living in unsuitable temporary accommodation facilities (TAs) (31%). Issues would range from long stays in unsuitable TAs either after spending time in a refuge or not, or because the woman has recently been in a refuge and is time for her to move on. Lastly, we also get some referrals in connection to landlord harassment and eviction procedures cases connected with abusive situations, although not necessarily related to gender based violence.

For the most part, issues experienced in those cases include a wide variety of 'gatekeeping'²⁸ practices, including:

- Local Housing teams preventing survivor from making a valid homeless application (unlawful gate-keeping practice).
- Local housing team failing to meet homelessness duty owed to survivor already assessed as homeless and eligible for support.
- Local housing team wrongly assessing homeless survivor as not meeting homeless criteria. This included in some instances complete lack of awareness of the connotations of gender-based violence and how to support survivors in a dignified way.
- Social services wrongly assessing their duty of care with homeless survivors with children or vulnerable single women eligible for support. Worryingly, in some cases we have seen Social Services staff providing incorrect guidance in immigration matters to service users, which is extremely concerning and could carry very negative consequences.
- Survivor experience of violence disbelieved by Local Housing Team or Social Services and asked for further proof of abuse.
- Survivor experienced racism and discrimination whilst dealing with Local Authority.
- Cases of severe negligence from the LAs in ensuring the survivor is in a safe property that meets health and hygiene standard conditions.
- Patchy or in-existent communication between Housing Officers and survivors.

CHAPTER II

This is retraumatising and a very poor practice. Often, unless LAWA steps in, the LAs won't provide updates to service users placed in hostels or other forms of TAs for lengthy amounts of time.

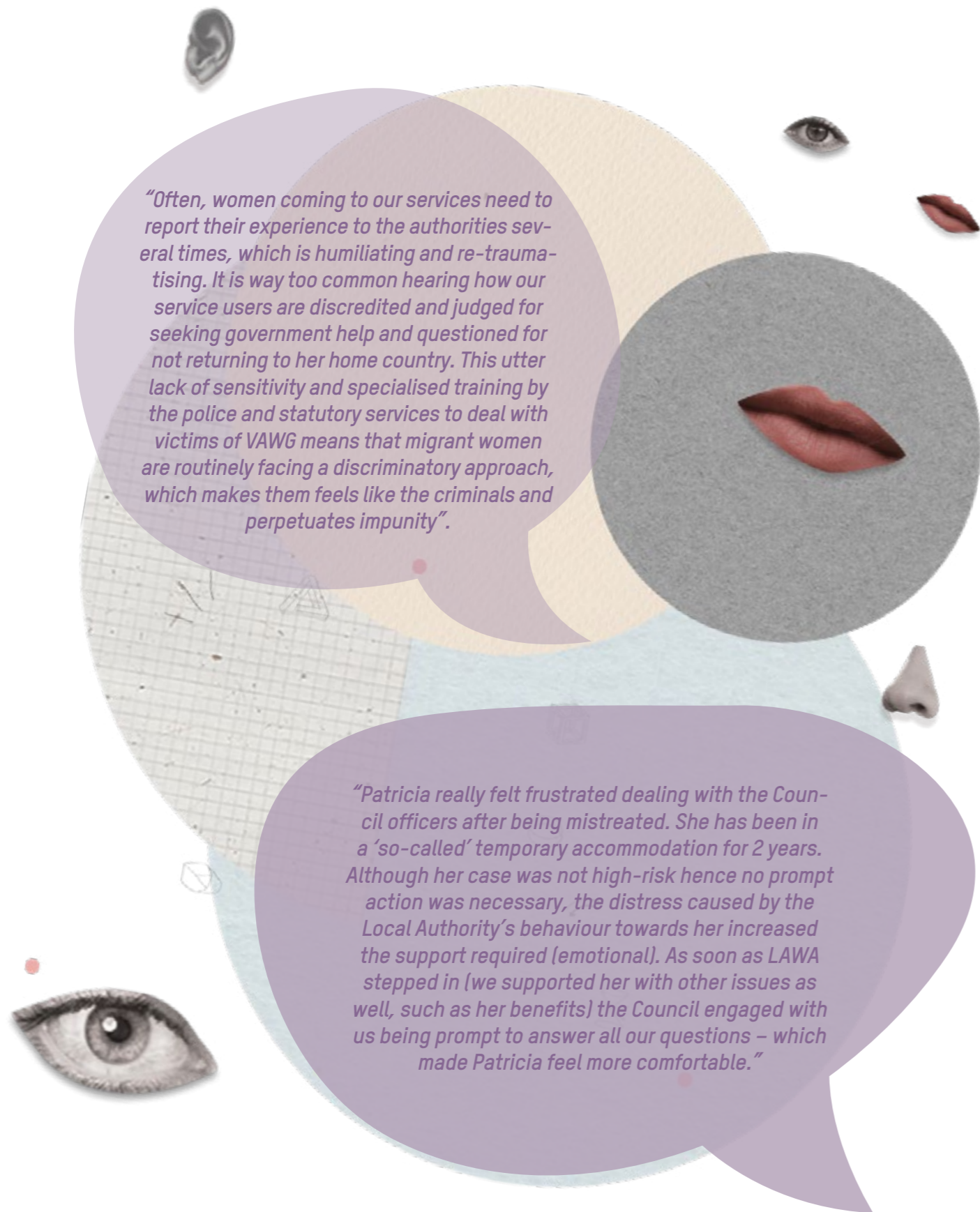
- Malpractice from the Police due to lack of information in community languages, due to a culture of disbelieving survivors and due to the practice of data sharing

If the police had available and provided accessible information to Black and minoritised survivors who are homeless or threatened with homelessness regarding diverse referral pathways, including making referrals to Black and minoritised services and refuges directly, a lot of these problems could be avoided. Equally, Police should implement a trauma-informed approach to the provision of their service to survivors of VAWG, which should be embedded within a comprehensive cultural competency training, including on how to resource appropriate professional interpreting services.

Support workers testimonies:

"In one case the council had placed the survivor in a hostel for well over a year and no updates were given to her or her options explained until we stepped in".

"In Maria's case, the Council sign-posted the duty to prevent/relief homelessness to a charity which seemed unprecedented and to me a clear sign that the Council wanted to avoid responsibility".



“Often, women coming to our services need to report their experience to the authorities several times, which is humiliating and re-traumatizing. It is way too common hearing how our service users are discredited and judged for seeking government help and questioned for not returning to her home country. This utter lack of sensitivity and specialised training by the police and statutory services to deal with victims of VAWG means that migrant women are routinely facing a discriminatory approach, which makes them feel like the criminals and perpetuates impunity”.

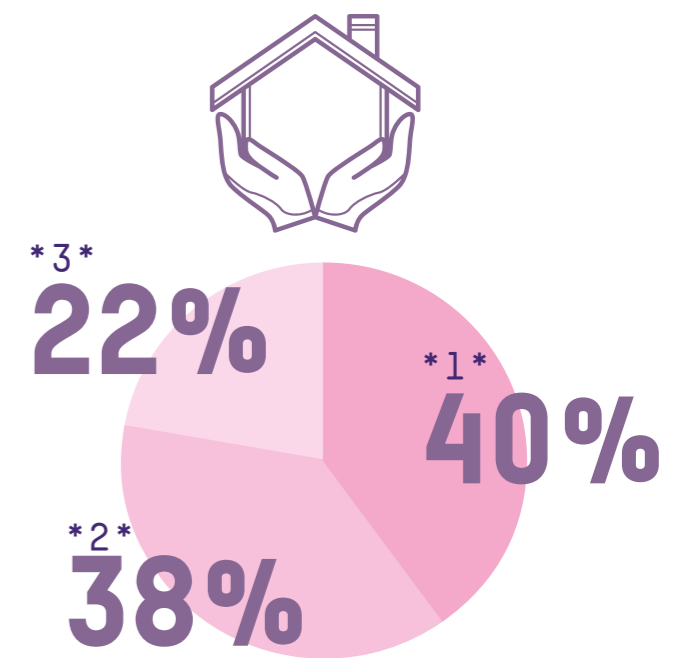
“Patricia really felt frustrated dealing with the Council officers after being mistreated. She has been in a ‘so-called’ temporary accommodation for 2 years. Although her case was not high-risk hence no prompt action was necessary, the distress caused by the Local Authority’s behaviour towards her increased the support required (emotional). As soon as LAWA stepped in (we supported her with other issues as well, such as her benefits) the Council engaged with us being prompt to answer all our questions – which made Patricia feel more comfortable.”

2.2

SUPPORT JOURNEY

In terms of the moments at which women are supported by the WAHA initiative, we have identified three broad phases:

- 1) **JUST AFTER BECOMING HOMELESS DUE TO VIOLENCE** to either a) **SAFELY RE-HOUSE** women and their children to emergency accommodation -including refuges but also other forms of housing- (this happened in 30% of cases) or b) **TO MAINTAIN THEIR TENANCY** and be able to remain in their house when it was safely to do so (this happened in **10%** of cases).
- 2) **AT MOVE ON STAGE**, which means support with re-housing following a period in a woman’s refuge (support at this stage was provided in **38% OF CASES**)– which primarily revolve around addressing local housing authorities’ malpractices.
- 3) **AT POST-MOVE ON STAGE**, which means support provided after women and children have been re-housed from a woman’s refuge or other forms of accommodation (support at this stage was provided in **22%** of cases).



1 Just after becoming homeless due to violence

2 Move on stage

3 Post-move on stage

2.3

KEY TRENDS

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF WAHA CASE FILES

Through our qualitative analysis of some of the (most complex) WAHA case files (n=78), we have observed a concerning trend that sees 80% of our cases showing roadblocks to preventing homelessness owing to the delays, mal practices and lack of sensitivity and inefficiencies of LHAs. Within this category of issues, 29% of cases related specifically to housing officers' malpractice, including unresponsiveness, neglect, incorrect assessments and lack of knowledge on Domestic Violence and of trauma informed approaches, while the rest is connected to more systemic policy implementation roadblocks (43%) (such as lack of available housing stock and lack of resources allocated to support migrant survivors with Non-Recourse to Public funds).

A particular concern over the last 18 months has been the increased barriers facing EEA nationals (settled or pre-settled status) when applying for homelessness assistance as victims of domestic abuse. What happens is that women fleeing abuse (as is understandable given the nature of how abuse and coercive control operates), cannot always maintain a job and therefore their ability to access public funds gets seriously compromised. This is a reality particularly affecting the Latin American population given the colonial links of our community with Spain and Portugal, which means that a sizeable number of women fleeing abuse would be Spanish or Portuguese passport holders. Due to the complexity of the immigration rules post-Brexit, there have been a number of service users who entered the UK after the 31.12.20, believing that as EU nationals they will be able to reside in the UK and are then faced with the harsh reality of being unable to stay, despite victims of domestic abuse.

According to our own research, which has also been substantiated through advice provided by specialist legal advice organisations such as [Rights of Women](#), the [EU Rights Hub](#) and others,¹⁴ it is concerning that LAWA has been put in a position in which is very difficult to guarantee women and children at risk of domestic violence with settled or pre-settled status that their benefits applications (Universal Credit, housing) will be approved swiftly. As far as the 'right to reside' test for those public funds is concerned, settled status holders should always pass it. We appreciate

¹⁴ Such as [the3 million](#) and [The No Recourse to Public Funds \(NRPF\) Network](#).

that, unfortunately, the position is much more complicated for pre-settled status (PSS) holders, primarily due to the legal requirement around current or past economic activity of either the survivor herself or her EU family member (through which she would have recourse).

Indeed, problems involving migration status of survivors are commonplace within our dataset, which is understandable given our specialism. We see the use of immigration status as a tool to exert coercive control, as well as very little knowledge about immigration related issues on the side of the local authorities, which sometimes leads them to provide mistaken information.

Women such as the ones we support with multiple, intersecting issues, such a black and minoritised survivors of violence will always need a holistic, multilayered response. This is why our model of work is specifically tailored to address this multiplicity of needs. Not only the history of violence and its consequences is complex (in terms of physical and mental health, lack of economic stability, etc), in addition to this, women from migrant backgrounds also have additional barriers to overcome due to their migration status and the connections with the ability or otherwise to access public funds. Notwithstanding the good work that many generalist organisations do, their lack of specialism and cultural competence prevents them from effectively addressing these challenges. Below some examples that bring to life some of these issues:



TESTIMONIAL



“Whatever organisation I approached they said I was not entitled to receive support or to make a homeless application due to my immigration status, and I was basically left on the street despite being two months pregnant. I learnt about LAWA, and I called the organisation for support. They listened to my story, they advocated on my behalf and because of that I was provided with emergency accommodation”.

CAROLINA, LAWA SERVICE USER



TESTIMONIAL



“I could have regularised my immigration status as the spouse of a British National, but he never told me. I didn’t speak the language enough to ask, I was not curious to ask but why I should be, right? That was the first sign, the starting point of the several abuse incidents.”

ANA, LAWA SERVICE USER



TESTIMONIAL



“Ana was subsequently abused by various perpetrators and lost her child due to intervention from social services after allegations from her abuser were believed (he had a powerful solicitor, whereas she had to represent herself, without speaking the language).”

If we saw the necessary changes in current immigration rules so that women with NRPF are able to access state support, these injustices would not take place”.

LAWA SUPPORT WORKER



CHAPTER II

2.4

FEEDBACK AND SERVICE USERS EVALUATIONS

The impact of our model of work is best expressed through the direct feedback provided by service users. Below some key figures:

83%

SAID THAT THE ADVICE GIVEN INCREASED THEIR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS, OPTIONS AND SERVICES

91%

SAID THAT THE FEEL MORE CONFIDENT ABOUT THEIR KNOWLEDGE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND LEGAL OPTIONS

96%

SAID THAT IT MADE A GREAT DIFFERENCE THAT THE SERVICE WAS AVAILABLE IN A LATIN AMERICAN / BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC LED WOMEN’S ORGANISATION

100%

SAID THAT THEY WERE SATISFIED OR HIGHLY SATISFIED AFTER THE WAHA INITIATIVE INTERVENTION

QUOTES FROM OUR FEEDBACK FORMS:

“I was feeling really down when I approached LAWA. I feel I am now in a much better place. Here, I have received the help I never thought I would really get. I hope LAWA will never end. People should recognise organisations like this. Many women do not know of the amazing organisation that LAWA is”.

“You helped me with everything. Helped with writing, advising, giving me psychological support, I felt secure. What can I say? I am going to a refuge because of you guys, I would not have where to go without you. I feel secure with you guys”

“I did not know all the things that were explained to me today. I seeked support in another organisation and I did not receive it. I am happy I contacted LAWA.” “I initially came to LAWA seeking support about my divorce. LAWA

helped me understand the violence I was going through. I did not know I was suffering and that I could have support for this.”

“The care provided by both LAWA support workers, has been excellent. They have always been attentive to me and have been very concerned that I have the best possible care, they have helped me in everything I have needed. I am very happy and grateful to them”.

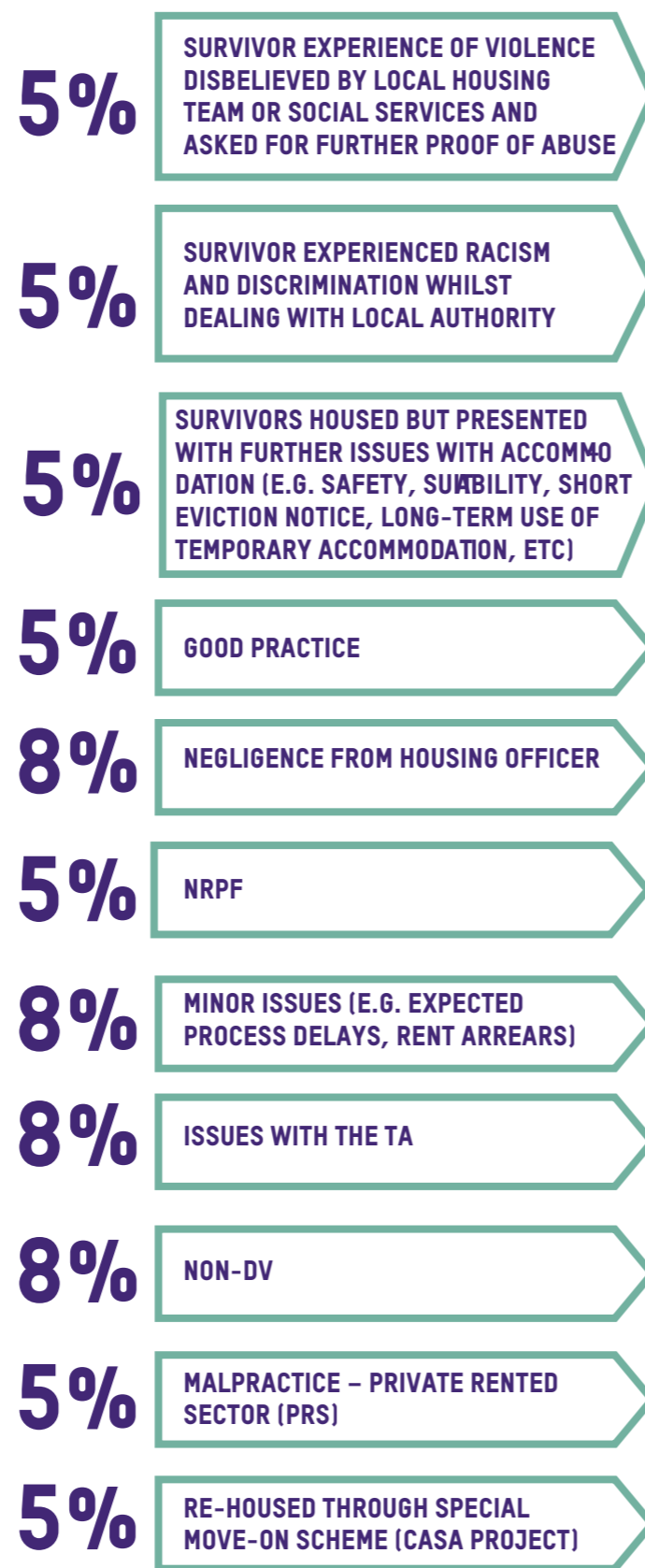
“Yes, I received a lot of support. Before, I was apprehensive in the future. Now I have gained confidence and that things are going to change but this will happen gradually. Having BAME women in support helped me a lot emotionally. I could see seeing myself standing back and making my decisions. If you have a good spirit it flows with someone. Everyone is compassionate and listen to you.”

CHAPTER II

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF WAHA CASE RECORDS BETWEEN JUNE 2020 AND JUNE 2023

Upon taking the service evaluation questionnaire (which is administered between 3-6 months after the case is closed), **94%** of our service users supported by the WAHA initiative during the reporting period stated that they were **NOT HOMELESS**. This is of course positive, but not without its challenges, because **43%** of them are **PRIVATELY RENTING**, which we know is a particularly hard to sustain living arrangement for vulnerable populations, particularly in the context of London and its pricing levels. In contrast, only **23%** were living in **SOCIAL HOUSING (HOUSING ASSOCIATION OR COUNCIL HOMES)**, **24%** remained in **TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION** (including hostels) **6%** are living in **REFUGES** and **3%** are staying with friends.

IN TERMS OF THE KEY ISSUES, THEY PRESENTED IN THEIR CASES, BELOW THE MOST SALIENT ONES:



CHAPTER II

2.5

CASE STUDIES (TAKEN FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS)

In order to illustrate in some depth the most salient issues we observed as significant repeating patterns within the casefiles analysed for this report, we purposefully selected specific survivor stories where those issues presented. Once the survivors were identified, we sought to conduct with a small sample of them in depth interviews to gather more detail about their struggles and perspectives. This section recounts that exercise, and as such we present a summarised version of the in-depth case studies steaming from some of the long interviews conducted. To read the fuller story – please follow the link to our website as indicated.

COUNCILS' MALPRACTICE

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](#).

UNSUITABLE ACCOMMODATION

KARINA is a 31-year-old black Brazilian woman. After three years living in the UK, she became pregnant, but her partner harassed her daily to get an abortion. In one episode, she had contractions and ended up in the hospital, where the midwife contacted the authorities regarding domestic violence. That day Karina did not return to her home. Upon leaving the maternity ward, Karina was offered temporary accommodation in a hotel. When she arrived, she did not feel relief. The room was filthy, it had no kitchen or windows and there were people with different needs in the building. With a newborn and still recovering from childbirth, she cleared the space. Inadequate temporary accommodation is a reality in the UK. Many women are placed in mixed spaces without access to basic facilities like a kitchen where they can prepare meals, laundry, Wi-fi, and with other problems like rat infestations and mould. To read the full story, [click here](#).

LACK OF COMMUNICATION FROM HOUSING OFFICERS

GLORIA is a 35-year-old Colombian woman who has been living the UK since 2020. She recently fled her home to escape an abusive relationship. She was placed in a temporary accommodation, but since she entered the property, she has not heard from her housing officer. The lack of communication from the authorities is something that causes anxiety and insecurity in women. LAWA's clients reveal that they cannot ask for support with housing issues or have no idea how long they will live in the accommodation, for example. As one woman said: "We were left in the dark and motherhood does not go with instability. Just the thought that without warning I will have to take my baby and all my belongings and go somewhere else scares me." Unfortunately, women in the process of recovery have to chase the authorities and resort to specialised services to intercede for them in this complex system. To read the full story, [click here](#).

GOOD PRACTICES

Although very rare, we do on occasions witness good practices from the part of local authorities. These experiences remain to be the exception rather than the norm, so we seek to have a better understanding of what exactly made a difference in these cases, in the hope that these learnings can be taken on board by practitioners in different localities:

FLAVIA is a Brazilian, heterosexual, and mother of one. She was married for 14 years, a period of her life that she experienced financial, sexual, and physical abuse. One day she met a woman who referred her to LAWA and Flavia decided to report to the police. They helped in the collection of her belongings, and she did not return to her house. Flavia currently lives in a refurbished self-contained flat, in a neighbourhood close to public services, transport and her son's school. She says that she is very grateful for being placed in this flat. Flavia's case is an example of good practice, as she feels that she was listened to by the local authorities who understood the problem and acted fast to support her. Throughout the process Flavia said that the social workers provided assistance, whether gathering donations or detecting her family needs to provide a decent accommodation.

To read the full story, [click here](#).

WHAT WORKED WELL?

THIS IS HOW FLAVIA TOLD HER STORY TO US:

"When I told my story I couldn't believe it, it felt like I was lying because it had been 14 years. Seriously, I really lived this? The social worker asked me everything from the beginning, I had to tell them things that I had almost forgotten, but I saw that they were very attentive, that they believed my story, because that day I didn't go back to my house. That day they sent me to a place, because he (the perpetrator) manipulated my psychology a lot."

"That same day she found a place for me. We were placed in a bedroom, that day was exhausting, we did not shower and there wasn't even a duvet for us, but it's a process. I was trapped in that very complicated situation, but some people appeared in my life to help me. There were people giving me vouchers, helping with things."

"My social worker helped me a lot, I said that I wanted to cook because I'm Brazilian and then arrived in my flat a man bringing pans, things for the kitchen and a duvet. LAWA's WAHA advisor also helped me to set up my bills. Just the fact of leaving that situation that I never thought I would leave, after 14 years..."

"The council did not offer translation regarding housing, but there was a woman there who helped me because she spoke Portuguese. When they needed to come to my house, they went with a translator. They respected me, I believe that because I'm Brazilian and don't speak English, they helped me more with things."

IN SUMMARY, GOOD PRACTICES OBSERVED IN THIS CASE INCLUDED:

- The police escorted the survivor to the house to collect her belongings.
- They took seriously the threats that the perpetrator made, and it was fundamental to have protection to go to the house, especially with a kid.
- She had an interview with the social worker, and it was done quickly and effectively.
- The survivor felt listened and supported when reporting domestic violence.
- The social worker provided translators when they visited her in the TA, which is something important because Flavia was not confident with her English skills, and this was something that prevented her to seek for help before.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT IN THIS CASE

One thing that Flavia highlighted is the possibility of participating in the decisions. This certainly could be improved:

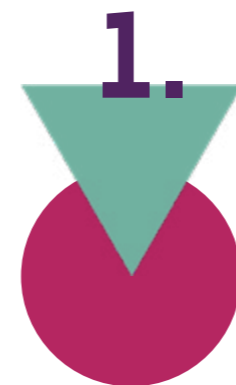
“I thought I was outside the process, it would be good if the people knew what they will receive, because we know what’s best for us. Although every help is needed, we should have the power to give opinions. It wouldn’t be that painful. This process is already very painful, if the mother could participate in the process and know what is best, know what else we can be supported, our rights.”

We believe in this case what made difference was correctly assessing the risk of the situation and acting fast. The perpetrator was a drug addict, very violent and manipulative. Flavia had 3-year-old son, and they were left without food or access to a phone to ask for help. Although she had a pre-settled status dependent from the perpetrator, their wellbeing was considered a priority, not her visa status.

As she says in the interview, it took her a long time to have courage to ask for help, which is not rare in cases of Domestic Violence. She was gradually being isolated from the world, so it was essential that when she asked for help, she was listened. Otherwise, there could be a risk of continuing in that relationship. She expresses that her story seemed unreal, she thought that people (social workers/other authorities) would judge her, for staying more than a decade in that relationship, or think that she was lying, but this did not happen. She said that she told her parents before, but they were mad at her, because they are from a religious family. In this case, a non-judgemental approach was important to encourage her to take the steps to report domestic violence and leave the perpetrator. After leaving the house, Flavia was placed in a hotel by the council. The conditions were far from being ideal, but after 6 months she was offered another TA. The TA that she lives is newly refurbished and has 2 bedrooms. The process itself was fast, as there are women who stay in unsuitable TAs for years. The first TA was used indeed as an emergency accommodation, and not as something permanent. She had her benefits approved, and the new TA is in a neighbourhood that provides everything she needs.

Flavia is very happy to be in that flat, there is plenty space for her and the son, and it’s close from his school. The only discomfort that she reports is not knowing when she will have to leave, she wishes she could stay in that flat permanently, or at least in the same neighbourhood.

CHAPTER III PREVENTING HOME- LESSNESS: POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS



NATIONAL LEVEL AUTHORITIES

THE DEPARTMENT FOR LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES (DLUHC) SHOULD:

1. Strengthen the homelessness prevention provisions within existing legislation by putting in place safeguarding and other legislative mechanisms that hold effectively to account Local Authorities when they deal with cases involving black and minoritised survivors of abuse.

WHY & HOW

A. The homelessness code of guidance for Local Authorities should make clear reference of **THE ELIGIBILITY OF EEA NATIONALS (SETTLED OR PRE-SETTLED STATUS) FOR HOMELESSNESS ASSISTANCE WHEN THEY ARE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE**. In many instances, women fleeing abuse that are temporarily unable to work because of the violence are wrongly being classified as ‘not workers’ and as such being denied their right to homelessness assistance. Survivors from black and minoritised backgrounds, are particularly overrepresented in these cases as we have extensively observed in our practice.

B. As we referenced in our 2019 report, ² the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 should embed diverse pathways approaches inclusive of the by and for Black and minoritised sector. This can be achieved through a stronger duty and changes in practice (such as **MANDATORY PROTOCOLS BETWEEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND BY AND**

FOR VAWG AGENCIES WHETHER THEY ARE COMMISSIONED LOCALLY OR NOT). This would ensure increased direct referrals to by and for services and refuges and would bring standard practice and alignment with the Equality Act 2010, and the Istanbul Convention 4(3) 40.

C. Tier 1 Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Boards (LPB) should be directly overseen by DHLUC National Steering Group, which should focus their work in developing a **NATIONAL OVERSIGHT MECHANISM (NOM)** that ‘delivers a secure system of funding for support costs, overseeing a mainly local system of funding and commissioning, but delivering national assurance that no woman is turned away’.^{xii}

This **NOM** should include:

- i. Representation and participation of the by and for Black and minoritised expert sector in its formal structure.
- ii. An extended remit to provide robust accountability over Local Authorities practices.

Similarly, Tier 2 Local Partnership Boards (LPBs) should have a clear and binding line of accountability with their corresponding Tier 1 authority and with DLUHC, who’s role should be ensuring consistent application of the procedures outlined in the Homelessness code and its crucial updates in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Alongside the Women’s Budget Group, we strongly support the recommendation from Shelter’s commission on the future of social housing for the government to deliver 3.1 million more social homes within 20 years. This will ensure that the benefits of the housing safety net are more widely distributed, while saving the government billions of pounds in housing benefit paid to private landlords. For more information about this

visit: https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/a_vision_for_social_housing

2. Allocate adequate levels of ring-fenced funding to ensure that all domestic abuse services (not just those that are accommodation-based), and especially those from the by and for sector (who have been historically under resourced), can operate in effective ways. This is not only the most effective way to support these communities, but also the pathway to generate more savings to the public purse in the long term.

WHY & HOW

A. Investment in by and for, Black and minoritised led specialist organisations has been shown to deliver significant financial savings as well as a range of social benefits and outcomes for service users.^{xiii} For example, our partners in the [OYA Consortium](#), [Ashiana Network](#) undertook a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis of their work in 2011 which showed that for every £1 invested in Ashiana Network, £9 of social value was generated to their service users over five years.^{xiii}

B. Typically, social housing is more secure than private rented accommodation and has ‘social rent’, which is on average 50% of the market rate linked to local wages. This means that survivors who manage to move on to this type of housing have much security and are better able to rebuild their lives in non-retraumatising ways.^{xiv} Being able to do this not only secures better physical and mental health outcomes for survivors, **BUT IT ALSO GENERATES SAVINGS IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM.** This is why **HOMES ENGLAND** should be provided with long-term investment budgets to create new and existing social rented homes. This is the only way to bring down the numbers in temporary accommodation and address housing inequalities in London.

^{xv}

3. Work alongside the Home Office, the Regulator of Social Housing, and the Housing Ombudsman to ensure that enforceable standards are put in place and are consistent with decent homes standards for temporary accommodation (TA) and that these will apply to all properties being used for TA regardless of who owns them, and regardless of immigration status of the residents.

WHY & HOW

A. We have ample evidence from our case work that indicates the conditions of temporary accommodation are often poor: they are often overcrowded, there is a lack of amenities to cook, do laundry, access the internet or to allow children to play safely, which are affecting children’s health and development.

B. Appropriate regulations at the national level must be put in place for the private rented sector to ensure that all providers carry out necessary actions in terms of health and safety in a timely manner, with particular attention to vulnerable tenants such as survivors of domestic abuse, who are more at risk of a safety failure because of non-compliance. **THIS IS SOMETHING WE ILLUSTRATED IN CASE STUDY 2 -PAGE 15**

We strongly welcome and support the initiative led by Chartered Institute of Housing, RAMFEL, JCWI and 133 other organisations, who have signed a joint letter to Michael Gove and Suella Braverman arguing in favor of retaining licensing standards for asylum seeker accommodation. No one should be forced to live in the 'worst of the worst' housing.

[See the letter here, and let your MP know you care about this issue.]

THE DEPARTMENT OF WORK AND PENSIONS (DWP) SHOULD:

1. Exempt domestic abuse survivors from the benefits cap and lift the local housing allowance to at least 50 per cent of the median for the area, as well as to increase benefits in line with inflation.

[xvi](#)

WHY & HOW

A. Housing benefit is an essential tool in preventing homelessness. However, while private rents have been rising consistently, the local housing allowance (LHA) rates (which determines the amount that can be claimed) have remained frozen, leaving vulnerable population with a shortage on average of £151 per month. [xvii](#) This sit-

We join calls made by the **NATIONAL HOUSING AND DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY AND PRACTICE GROUP**, led by the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance for specialist refuges to be passported through proposed licensing schemes.

Passporting through the licensing scheme will protect the specialist domestic abuse sector from being adversely impacted by additional oversight, regulations, and financial burdens -to detriment of survivor's access to support.

uation is making it near to impossible for vulnerable women vulnerable to afford suitable accommodation at move on stage or if it is unsafe to stay at their homes but do not require to go to refuge.

2. Work alongside DLUHC and the VAWG sector to ensure that forthcoming regulations in the supported housing sector effectively secure consistent standards of quality and provision nationally, while also ensuring that smaller providers such as by and for are not inadvertently disadvantaged.

WHY & HOW

A. The lack of regulatory oversight of exempt accommodation has led to an emergence of 'rogue providers' in the supported housing sector, whereby organisations are yielding higher rents from enhanced Housing Benefit, whilst providing a minimal level of care or support. A much-needed reform and regulations in this sector is therefore long overdue and very welcomed.

B. That said, without specific measures that protect specialist refuges, this Act could have unintended consequences which place overly burdensome regulations on our already underfunded national network of life-saving refuges, in particular 'by and for' black and minoritised refuge providers, which are already facing structural disadvantages due to the legacy of protracted underfunding. This is why we agree that specialist refuges must be subject to oversight mechanisms, however ones distinct from other types of exempt accommodation.

THE HOME OFFICE SHOULD:

1. Adopt the necessary changes in current immigration rules so that women with no recourse to public funds are able to access State support when fleeing domestic abuse.

WHY & HOW

A. The Government should extend the Domestic Violence Rule and Destitute Domestic Violence Concession to provide greater protection to survivors with no recourse to public funds and enable them to access domestic abuse services, particularly refuge.

B. In the Domestic Abuse Commissioner report two very specific scenarios to improve outcomes for migrant survivors were detailed. [xviii](#) The most promising of those scenarios, if adopted, could generate overall social gains worth almost £2.3 billion over 10 years of supporting migrant survivors.

C. Similar social and economic benefits were outlined by the Mayor of London commissioned research on the cost-benefit analysis of removing the Non-Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policy. This study found that ‘the benefits of scrapping the NRPF policy far outweigh its costs, leading to net societal gains of up to £872 million’. [xxx](#)

THE POLICE SHOULD:

1. Take comprehensive and mandatory trainings on how to adequately respond to cases of Black and minoritised women subjected to violence.

A. Black and minoritised women have repeatedly reported being unprotected, disbelieved, discriminated against and further criminalised whilst dealing with the police. As an enforcement agency, the Police has not shown a supportive role and it must ensure they respond to domestic violence cases appropriately and in a non-discriminatory manner in ways that do not exert further harm.

B. Police officers who need to access safe spaces for survivors of abuse (such as refuges), should take care and ensure that in these **EXCEPTIONAL INSTANCES**, such duties are taken over by female police officers and are conducted with the appropriate sensitivity. Unfortunately, women living in our refuges, who experience several intersectional inequalities such as race, language barriers and insecure immigration status, have reported receiving a heavy-handed response from the police, unable to understand what the police are saying, and feeling that they are treated as criminals.

“In one instance we observed how the Police provided a Portuguese (from Portugal) male interpreter for one of our Brazilian service users. As we were supporting her, and understand the language, we could clearly notice how he was not conveying the information in an objective way, including making veiled, culture specific sexist and racist remarks about the survivor”.

LAWA support worker testimony.

C. Specific areas of training identified include:

- Compliance with Public Sector Equality Duty.
- How to appropriately respond to Black and minoritised women specific experiences and needs regarding gender-based violence. Specifically, we would strongly suggest introducing Valerie’s Law for mandatory cultural competency training for professions around the cultural nuances and barriers, colloquialisms,

languages and customs that make up the diverse black and minoritised communities in the country, as called for by [Sistah Space](#).

- Their duty to refer cases to local housing authority under Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

- Their powers to make appropriate use of Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) and Domestic Violence Prevention Order (DVPO) to remove perpetrators from a house at least until safer accommodation is made available for Black and minoritised survivors. Currently, the new civil Domestic Abuse Protection Notices (DAPNs) and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs) are hardly (if ever) used by the Police. Instead, they continue to maintain bail conditions as the mechanism to protect survivors.

- Identification and provision of **ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION** to Black and minoritised survivors who are homeless or threatened with homelessness regarding diverse referral pathways, making referrals to Black and minoritised services and refuges, where Black and minoritised women identify the need to do so. We have been very concerned to witness multiple instances where police are not only failing to put in place interpreters for survivors from our community, but also failing to ensure that such interpreters are themselves suitable trained to be **OBJECTIVE AND UNBIASED** in their interpretation job. Similarly, it is unacceptable that the police are not sensitive enough to understand that interpreters selected for these cases should be female and with appropriate cultural sensitivity to adequately support survivors from minoritised backgrounds.



Step Up
Migrant
Women
UK

We join calls made by Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) and the #StepUpMigrantWomen Campaign for the implementation of safe-reporting mechanisms and an end to data-sharing policies when victims with insecure immigration status report abuse. For more information visit <https://stepupmigrantwomen.org/>

2. Make appropriate use of Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) and Domestic Violence Prevention Order (DVPO) to remove perpetrators from a house at least until safer accommodation is made available for Black and minoritised survivors.

WHY & HOW

A. Our evidence shows that the police are failing to make appropriate use of DVPN/DVPO when attending to domestic violence cases. There were instances where after calling the police, upon arrival Black and minoritised survivors were told they could not do anything to remove perpetrators from the house because the perpetrator owned/rented it. This kind of scenario has become increasingly hostile for survivors during the current housing crisis. In other cases, Black and minoritised survivors were removed from their homes by the police and left unsupported having nowhere to go, with some having to sleep in the police station.

B. On the flip side, we have also observed some instances of good practice from the part of the police, for example when providing basic safety information to support survivor's relocation from their danger borough. Unfortunately, sometimes Metropolitan Police officers designated to stay in touch with survivors communicate with them in patchy and inconsistent manner, which can create further mistrust and distance between service users and the authorities.

C. According to Article 5(2) of the Istanbul Convention and in accordance with the case law of the ECtHR, the States must oblige with the principle of due diligence. This means that the Police must respond to violence in a diligent manner to combat and prevent further acts, which, importantly, also implies a requirement for sufficient resources to be allocated to the police for these purposes.

"The new DAPNs or DAPOs do not place the onus on the survivor to apply or pay for a DAPN, which is much more beneficial as a mechanism. If the police do not implement these measures, and instead place bail conditions on alleged perpetrators, this creates a situation where women must prepare to go to court every 28 days, whereas the other mechanisms could be in place for six months or more, hence providing more safety and reassurance to survivors"

LAWA support worker

3. Stop the pervasive practice of data sharing about survivors of Domestic Abuse with Immigration enforcement authorities. This practice forces survivors to stay with their abusers because they are too scared to contact police. Abusers often utilise arguments connected to immigration status (threatening women with deportation) to exert control and coercive behaviours against survivors.

A. As noted by **LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS SERVICE (LAWRS)**, following super complaint on the issue around data sharing for immigration enforcement, it is crucial to make it clear that this type of data sharing does NOT help safeguarding victims. Instead, they would receive an immigration enforcement letter or be detained because of their reporting abuse to the police. This undermines the fight against crime as it has a real deterrent effect on people with insecure immigration status seeking the support of the police.^{xx}



3.2

LOCAL LEVEL
AUTHORITIESTHE LONDON MAYOR AND THE GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY (GLA)
SHOULD: :

1. Work with London local authorities to develop and enforce new standards and protocols to ensure consistency of VAWG-ending service provision across London. Particularly, concerted efforts need to be made to ensure that housing officers understand women's legal entitlements to housing, especially relating to domestic abuse. The practice whereby housing authorities only act lawfully when they are threatened with legal action must come to an end.

WHY & HOW

A. Local VAWG Strategies should align with the four priorities of the national VAWG Strategy 2021-2024 and any subsequent strategies, prioritising prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators and a stronger system. They should also align with the National Statement of Expectations ^{xxi} and the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act 2010 to ensure survivors with protected characteristics as well as those with intersecting disadvantages have access to the support services they need.

B. As local commissioners in London, the GLA must ensure the response to VAWG by Tier 2 Local Authorities is collaborative, robust, and effective. This means i) Put the victim/survivor at the centre; ii) Clearly acknowledges the gendered nature of VAWG iii) Ensures safeguarding pathways maintain perpetrators at bay in order to keep survivors (and those at risk) safe; iv) Take a strategic, system wide approach to commissioning; v) Be locally-led and safeguard individuals throughout; vi) Raise local awareness of the issues and involve, engage and empower communities to seek, design and deliver solutions to prevent VAWG.

C. In line with the growing understanding of the added value of delivering 'by and for' services, the Mayor should extend the commitment in the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy that his 'commissioning processes and requirements do not disadvantage small, specialist and 'by and for' providers, and support capacity-building', to all housing services commissioned by the Mayor. ^{xxii}

2. Allocate resources to enable the development of second stage/ move-on accommodation schemes and pathways for survivors, through a variety of models, including small & medium size scale projects that would facilitate community based, by and for providers to enter the marketplace without being at a disadvantage in comparison with larger, generic VAWG and housing providers.

WHY & HOW

A. Current approaches to move-on accommodation are very disjointed and ineffective. More coordinated efforts would help women to have a less-retraumatising experience violence and would also contribute to solve some of the existing demands on local housing. The strong local links of community based, 'by and for' organisations can be capitalised in more creative and cost-effective ways to enable sustainable solutions to the housing needs of black and minoritised survivors.

B. In 2021/2022, councils spent at least £1.6 billion on temporary accommodation for homeless households. ^{xxiii} For this reason, measures such as clearer and more direct allocation schemes in local authorities (which are particularly tailored to address the needs of the most disadvantaged survivors) would be an important step in the right direction.

3. Work with London local authorities to deliver support to women in need of housing, especially those that are survivors of abuse, such as tenancy guarantees and providing effective help finding longer term housing, with an emphasis in social housing rather than in the private rented sector (PRS).

WHY & HOW

A. It is well known the high cost of renting privately and how this creates a barrier for the most vulnerable. There is no region in England where private rented housing is affordable on women's median earnings, whereas men can afford to rent a median home (median private sector rental cost) in all regions except London. ^{xxiv}

B. Given that reality, the PRS needs to be substantially more regulated to ensure that it is affordable and safe for women, should this be the only option available to them.

C. The Greater London Authority is better placed to take up leadership and responsibility for regulating the PRS in London to ensure that private landlords follow best practise and support rather than hinder survivors' pathways to healing and independent living. For example, now there is no requirement for local authorities to record their regulatory activity in relation to the private rented sector, or to report such information to DLUHC. A mandated record keeping mechanism could be a first

step to be taken to better understand number of complaints, the number of inspections, or the number of staff who carry out tenancy relations duties that tackle harassment and illegal evictions. ^{xxv}

D. Alongside this, developing clear and detailed communications to women on housing waiting lists who are being discharged into the PRS would be greatly beneficial for survivors and their advocates. As proposed by the Women’s Budget Group, having tenancies targeted to women where affordable rent are set to local women’s wages rather than general average wages could be greatly beneficial to start bridging the gap of affordability and gender disparity in the capital. ^{xxvi}

E. Ensure that Housing authorities locally consult with an expert panel of local people with lived experience of seeking homelessness assistance in their area when planning how to implement these duties. For the plan to be realistic, the guidance should not only require authorities to take account of local housing markets, by assessing prospects of finding an affordable private rental in the area, but also the prospects of finding suitable social housing in the locality. ^{xxvii}

We strongly advise that Tier 2 Local Authorities follow closely recommendations made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in relation to improvements that council services should make to better support domestic abuse survivors. (Available here)

THE 32 LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN LONDON SHOULD:

1. Have clear and consistent guidelines in terms of how to facilitate accommodation for survivors of abuse. Demanding local connections to survivors of abuse must stop and social services must make their assessments swiftly and correctly.

WHY & HOW

A. As established in the 21.17 section of the Homelessness Code of Guidance, Local authorities must recognise the clear need for victims of abuse and their children to be able to travel to different areas in order for them to be safe from the perpetrator, and housing authorities should extend the same level of support to those from other areas as they do to their own residents. Unfortunately, in spite of the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act in 2021 we continue to see Local Authorities demanding a local connection in cases where homelessness assistance is in fact owed to survivors of domestic abuse.

B. In the case of survivors with children who should be entitled to support under section 17 of the Children Act, what we commonly see is that they are incorrectly

assessed as Non-Recourse to Public Funds and are left homeless while they are doing the assessment. If this practice is not reversed, this could amount not just to a breach of the Children’s Act, but also to indirect discrimination. We are also seeing in the refuges that women are not being granted their housing benefit from the date the DDVC was approved. Which again, shows lack of knowledge by the officer reviewing the applications.

C. Local Authorities should increase training for housing benefit officers to make sure they are sufficiently skilled into assessing women’s eligibility. We have seen cases of women with DDVC have their Housing Benefit suspended as they request letters from solicitors ensuring that the woman will be eligible afterwards.

2. Create specific referral pathways with their not locally commissioned by and for services.

WHY & HOW

A. Because we are not locally commissioned, organisations like LAWA are not part of the official referral pathways in the Local Authorities. This means that few -if any- referrals are in fact made to us by the local social services team or police. Connected to that we have the very real situation that a large portion of women in vulnerable conditions from our community would not necessarily trust going to the police or the council in the first place if a situation of abuse happens, for fear of immigration control.

B. Given all this, local authorities in housing teams must be sensitive to these realities and adopt appropriate measures to ensure survivors from minoritised backgrounds are adequately supported and not disproportionately disadvantaged by incorrect or delayed assessments of their situation of vulnerability.

3. Ensure they meet their safe accommodation duty or their interim accommodation duty (as appropriate) by ensuring their stock of Temporary accommodation units meet minimum standards of suitability.

WHY & HOW

A. Enforcing that properties are inspected before people are moved into them.
 B. Ensuring the properties are adequately staffed so survivors have the possibility to raise any concerns effectively and in a timely fashion. Linked to this, it is very important that housing officers from Local Authorities have appropriate levels of contact with survivors to avoid re-traumatisation.

C. Automatically awarding all women accepted for rehousing as a result of VAWG the highest possible banding/points. ^{xxviii}

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS



Upon reflecting on the impact of interventions such as those promoted by the WAHA initiative, and the many challenges we face, unfortunately, we cannot see that structural conditions in this area have improved after 5 years of work. What we see is that Black and minoritised women continue to face severe housing inequalities. The specialist Black and minoritised sector currently provides 296 refuge bed spaces in the UK but demand (in 2020-21) has demonstrated that we need an additional 1,172 bed spaces.^{xxxix}

Unfortunately, temporary accommodation is often unsuitable and unsafe for women and children, further re-traumatising them. Challenges include a chronic shortage of affordable accommodation, precarity due to immigration status, precarious jobs, and inadequate responses from housing officers. The complex processes for homeless survivors exacerbate the difficulties, especially for those with limited English language skills. The organization strives for professional, holistic support with in-house services, but the systemic issues persist.

In spite of these precarious conditions, our model of work is designed to be highly professional, holistic and comprehensive, which is why we have developed, not only an in-house specialist housing advice and advocacy service, but also culturally sensitive services on immigration advice, LGBTQ+ specialism and community engagement for policy, influencing and evidence.

Given all the challenges we face in a world riddled by war and dehumanisation, it is now more important than ever to rethink how we do that work, which we could say falls under what is normally understood as 'human rights based' advocacy. We could focus only on naming the wrongdoers, or in presenting exclusively the overwhelmingly negative realities that we often face when supporting survivors as they navigate a system rigged against them, (almost) by design. And yes, we do that, to an extent. But as you will have noted, in this publication we committed to elevate the human impact stories behind the numbers, and in doing so, we invite you to navigate outside of this page and into our website to explore further the nuances behind each of those stories. Our intention moving forward is that these stories can be looked at in depth in their own right for the lessons we can learn from them in order to, yes, show mal practices, but more importantly, make visible what actually works and makes a difference. This is why, apart from housing [our survivors' stories in our regular space at the WAHA page](#); from now on we are making the commitment to host a selection of those stories as [BLOGS](#) we translate into our communities languages [Spanish and Portuguese], to ensure we can create a fluid and genuine connection between the policy development work that we do, and the lived experiences of the women we support.

Importantly, we are not only interested in the 'housing journeys' of survivors – i.e. how they manage to put a 'roof over their heads' (as important as that is). In addition to that, we are interested in building the conditions for ourselves and in community, to create, **HOMES FOR HEALING**, in other words, places that bring about safety, but also the emotional compass to create our 'Home within', that inner knowing that helps us break cycles of violence and create sustainable futures.

This is why our approach to learning together is not accidental or an afterthought, but indeed a central component of how we see this work progressing in the next couple of years.

A CALL TO ACTION

LAWA and our partners in the [OYA Consortium](#) in London, comprising specialist advocates on housing, immigration and LGBTQ+ meet regularly to discuss challenges and practical solutions in all of the advocacy areas highlighted in this report throughout the analysis and policy recommendations section. If you are interested in sharing a particular challenge or wish to collaborate with us in disseminating practical useful information, or if you are seeking to join forces in solidarity with causes connected to the ones we stand for, please contact us at info@lawadv.org.uk.

PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU MARK YOUR E-MAIL USING THE SUBJECT 'OYA LEARNING HUB' SO WE ENSURE THE REQUEST IS PICKED UP!

EDITORIAL NOTES

* Where names are provided within our case studies or quotes, they allude to our service users and are pseudonyms, used to protect their anonymity.

* The support worker testimonies have been taken from two main sources: (a) meeting notes during their regular case file reviews; (b) annotations made at our internal qualitative case files analysis learning tool.

* The term BME means 'Black and minority ethnic' individuals, and it is a terminology more commonly used to refer to minoritised people in the UK context (within policy and practice circles).

* The term 'Black and minoritised' refers to groups that due to their race, religious creed, nation of origin, sexuality and gender are minoritised and, as a result of social constructs, have less power of representation compared to other members or groups in society. This term is used as a better reflection of minoritised groups than the previously used BME acronym and as such the term used in this report for those very reasons.

* Domestic abuse is a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG) – we understand the term Violence Against Women and Girls to be more encompassing of the multiple forms of Gender Based Violence that women experience because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately^{xxx}. Domestic abuse is the definition adopted in the Domestic Abuse Act, and when used as such in this document is because we are making a direct reference to the legislation in part or in full. Domestic Violence is understood by LAWA as interchangeable with Gender Based Violence, and as such the definition is used in this document.

GLOSSARY

BSB:

Bed and breakfast, a lodging establishment which offers overnight accommodation and breakfast.

Reflecting on the [Domestic Abuse Act Statutory Guidelines](#), Women's Aid defines By and For services as services that reflect the needs of all victims in the area, and that there must be 'adequate and appropriate support within the area to support victims with particular needs such as disabled victims, those from a BAME background, those who identify as LGBT and male victims'. If needs assessments identify a low level of demand for this specialist support, they need to clearly detail within their strategies how to ensure appropriate support is available for victims who need it.

Whilst we concur with the above, more specifically we also concur with the definition provided by Imkaan, who define By and For Organisations highlighting the use of the term Black as political Blackness, which means that is a term that encompass all women whose stories originate from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America, including the indigenous peoples of Australasia, the Americas, and the islands of the Atlantic Indian and Pacific Oceans. These organisations may be called BME (Black minority ethnic) in policy and governing documents.

According to Imkaan, a By and For Specialist Organisation looks like the following:

- * Lived experience organisations that address material realities. These experiences are embedded in the origins, constitution, and ways of working. The lived experience is not an add-on.
- * 100% of staff, senior managers and Board of Trustees are Black and minoritised women.
- * 100% of women and girls using services are Black and minoritised.
- * 100% of membership is Black and minoritised.
- * The organisation identifies as Black feminist. By association, this organisation locates itself as an anti-racist, social justice and intersectional organisation.
- * The organisation defines intersectionality by recognising the roots causes of oppression as systems of economic exploitation and subjugation that target Black and minoritised women disproportionately to continue their structural oppression. There is no hierarchy of oppression.
- * It is a social justice organisation addressing racism and VAWG,
- * It is an organisation that has historical roots in anti-racism and has

historically developed its work around the intersection of racism and VAWG.

DESTITUTION DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CONCESSION (DDVC OR DDV):

An authorisation enabling a person who was previously granted leave to enter or remain as the spouse/civil partner/unmarried or same-sex partner of a British citizen or a settled person to access public funds for a three-month period while they submit a free-standing application for leave to remain, when that person claims:

- * that the relationship with their spouse/civil partner/unmarried or same-sex partner has broken down as a result of domestic violence; or
- * that they need access to funds to leave the relationship.

DIVERSE REFERRAL PATHWAYS:

The availability of a range of referral options to organisations catering to the individual characteristics of a person approaching a public authority for assistance. Diverse referral pathways would include, by way of example, the possibility of referral to by-and-for Black and minoritised organisations.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTION NOTICE (DVPN):

A protection notice issued by the police to a person when there are reasonable grounds to believe that that person has been violent, or has threatened violence towards, an associated person, and the issuance of the DVPN is necessary to protect that associated person from violence.

A DVPN may include provisions prohibiting the potential/actual aggressor from:

- * evicting the associated person;
- * entering the premises; and
- * coming within a specified distance of the premises.

Duty of care under the Children's Act:

a general legal obligation of every local authority to:

- * safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and
- * so far as consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families;
- * by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs.

In addition to this duty, and further to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, local authorities have a legal obligation to take into account the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in any decision relating to children.

EEA/EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA:

Acronym used to describe a person who is a citizen from an EEA state. These are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland,

Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway.

EEA FAMILY PERMIT:

A residence permit that a person from outside the EEA may apply for in order to join an EEA or Swiss family member who is in the UK or will be in the UK within 6 months of the date of application.

Eviction: the action of expelling someone from a property.

GATEKEEPING:

The practice of local authorities turning individuals away who are seeking to make a homelessness application and denying their legal right to support.

Habitual Residence Test: a test which a person from EU, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland or Liechtenstein must pass in order to be able to apply for benefits. The purpose of the test is to establish that:

- * A person has the right to reside in the UK, Ireland, Channel Islands or Isle of Man; and
- * That a person's main home is in either of the above-mentioned locations and she/he plans to stay (habitual residence).

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM:

Discrimination or unequal treatment on the basis of membership of a particular ethnic group (typically one that is a minority or marginalized), arising from systems, structures, or expectations that have become established within an institution or organisation.

NRPF/NO RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS:

A condition imposed on a person due to their immigration status, according to which a person will not be entitled to benefits which are not based on National Insurance contributions.

OCCUPATION ORDER:

A court order which regulates who can and cannot live in the family home and can restrict an abuser from entering the surrounding area.

PERMANENT HOUSING/ACCOMMODATION:

Accommodation available for a person to live in for an undetermined period of time.

Public Sector Equality Duty: The public sector equality duty (set out in s. 149 of the Equality Act) imposes on public sector staff the legal obligation to have due regard to the need to:

1. eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
2. advance equality of opportunity with people who share a relevant protected characteristic (e.g. race, sex, disability or sexual orientation) and persons who do not share it; and
3. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic, in the exercise of their functions.

In order to meet this legal obligation, public sector staff must:

- * remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to the characteristic.
- * tackle prejudice and promote understanding.
- * take steps to meet the needs of the person who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.

SAFE ACCOMMODATION:

Accommodation where a survivor is safe from any risks stemming from a previous or continuing experience of domestic abuse. In the context of the Domestic Abuse Act definitions, Safe Accommodation is not restricted to Refuges, and are qualified by the definitions of 'relevant accommodation' and 'support', which include the following key points (as described in the [Statutory Guidance](#)):

*** RELEVANT SAFE ACCOMMODATION:**

- * Refuge accommodation – offers “accommodation and intensive support which is tied to that accommodation. Victims, including their children, have to be refuge residents to access expert emotional and practical support.
- * Specialist safe accommodation– “dedicated specialist support to victims with relevant protected characteristics and/or complex needs (also known as ‘by and for’), such as specialist refuges for BAME, LGBT, and disabled victims and their children.”
- * Dispersed accommodation – self-contained accommodation that must be ‘safe, secure and dedicated to supporting victims of domestic abuse’. It can deliver: either the same level of specialist domestic abuse support as provided within a refuge but for victims who may not be suitable for communal accommodation; or less intensive support than in a refuge, but for those who are still at risk of abuse.
- * Sanctuary schemes - properties with local authority installed Sanctuary Schemes or “other similar schemes which provide enhanced physical security measures within a home”.
- * Move-on and / or second stage accommodation – “interchangeable terms for projects temporarily accommodating victims”, including those who no longer need intensive support in a refuge, but require further support before accessing independent and permanent accommodation.
- * Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation – defined as “a safe place with support” that provides safe, self-contained accommodation for victims to “spend a temporary period of time.” It may include access to wrap around support and specialist support for victims with complex needs.

*** SUPPORT:**

(This list of support is not an exhaustive list and other relevant support

services can be put in place (based on victims’ needs).

- * Overall management of services within relevant safe accommodation – including capacity building, support and supervision of staff, payroll, financial and day to day management of services and maintaining relationships with the local authority (such functions will often be undertaken by a service manager).
- * Support with the day-to-day running of the service – for example scheduling times for counselling sessions, group activities (such functions may often be undertaken by administrative or office staff).
- * Advocacy support – development of personal safety plans, liaison with other services (for example, GPs and social workers, welfare benefit providers).
- * Domestic abuse prevention advice – support to assist victims to recognise the signs of abusive relationships, to help them remain safe (including online), and to prevent re-victimisation.

*** SPECIALIST SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS:**

- * Designed specifically for victims with relevant protected characteristics (including ‘by and for’), such as faith services, translators and interpreters, immigration advice, interpreters for victims identifying as deaf and / or hard of hearing, and dedicated support for LGBTQ+ victims [not limited to].
- * Designed specifically for victims with additional and / or complex needs such as, mental health advice and support, drug and alcohol advice and support [not limited to], including sign posting accordingly.
- * Children’s support – including play therapy, child advocacy or a specialist children worker (for example, a young people’s violence advisor, IDVA or outreach worker specialised in working with children).
- * Housing-related support – providing housing-related advice and support, for example, securing a permanent home, rights to existing accommodation and advice on how to live safely and independently.
- * Advice service – including financial and legal support, including accessing benefits, support into work and establishing independent financial arrangements; and,
- * Counselling and therapy – (including group support) for both adults and children, including emotional support.

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY:

Structural inequality occurs when the fabric of organizations, institutions, governments or social networks contains an embedded bias which provides advantages for some members and marginalizes or produces disadvantages for other members.

Survivor: a person who has experienced one or more forms of gender-based violence.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION/HOUSING (TA):

Accommodation available for a person to live in for a set period of time. In the homelessness context, temporary housing refers to council housing granted to a person when a homelessness application has been made and the council:

- * decided a person qualifies for longer term housing but has not made a final housing offer;
- * placed a person in emergency housing but has not moved a person after deciding they qualifies for longer term housing.

Not all temporary accommodation is a hostel, homeless BSB or budget hotel. Whatever type the accommodation is - by law, it must be suitable.

Importantly, as stated in the Statutory Guidance for the Domestic Abuse Act (referenced above), privately-owned and managed temporary accommodation (meaning, accommodation which is not managed by a local authority, private registered provider -usually known as a housing association-, charity or voluntary organisation); which is not separate or self-contained and with shared toilet, bathroom, or kitchen facilities (such as Bed and Breakfast accommodation) is not considered relevant safe accommodation, and is specifically excluded in the Regulations, so local authorities should not commission domestic abuse support for victims within these types of accommodation under these duties.

TENANCY AGREEMENT:

An oral or written contract between (a) tenant(s) and a landlord setting out their rights and responsibilities towards one another, including:

- * the name of the tenant(s);
- * the address of the property (or room) rented;
- * the name and address of the landlord and letting agent if there is one;
- * the rent payable, when it is due, and how it is paid;
- * how long the agreement is for;
- * rules for ending the tenancy.

Vulnerability:

A state, caused by one or multiple factors relating to a person's past experience, which may result in that person:

- * being unable to protect themselves from harm; and/or
- * needing additional safeguards than an ordinary person would need to ensure they do not suffer harm.

Vulnerability has a distinct meaning in the housing context, where an applicant may be considered to be vulnerable for the purposes of establishing priority need if she/he is significantly more vulnerable than an ordinary person in need of accommodation and is likely to suffer greater harm in the same situation.

ENDNOTES

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^{xii} Home Office VAWG Commissioning Toolkit. December 2016.

^{xiii} Women Resource Centre: [Hidden Value: Demonstrating the extraordinary impact of women's voluntary & community organisations](#). October 2011.

^{xiv} DAHA Alliance: [Social Housing Sector Toolkit](#), p. 3.

^{xv} Trust For London: [Joint open letter on Temporary Accommodation \(TA\) to Michael Gove](#)

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^{xvii} Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates applicable from April 2021 to March 2022 [Published on 29 January 2021, Last updated 11 August 2023] are available [online](#). On the 22nd of November 2023, as the Chancellor delivered its Autumn Statement, it was announced the unfreeze of LHA rates and an increase on Universal Credit. Details about these measures are still unclear. This has been reported widely on the [Independent](#), [Inside Housing](#) and others.

^{xviii} [Safety before status: The Solutions. Domestic Abuse Commissioner of England and Wales. July 2022.](#)

^{xix} [Social Cost Benefit Analysis of the no recourse to public funds \(NRPF\) policy in London, London School of Economics and Political Science \(commissioned by the Greater London Authority\), March 2022.](#)

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^{xxi} [Regulator of Social Housing: Consultation on the Consumer Standards. Annex 4- Draft equality impact assessment \(updated 16th August 2023\).](#)

^{xxii} [London Assembly, Housing Committee: Women and housing: a gap in the market \(February 2023\), p. 28.](#)

^{xxiii} [UK Parliament: Households in temporary accommodation \(England\)- Research Briefing. Published Monday, 30 January, 2023.](#)

^{xxiv} [DAHA \(2021\) Facts and Statistics. Available online.](#)

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