

Evidence submission

Unequal impact? Coronavirus and BAME people

Response by the Coalition of Latin American organisations in the UK (CLAUK)

July 2020

About CLAUK

CLAUK is a coalition of 13 'led-by and for' Latin American registered charities working together to raise awareness and understanding of the issues facing Latin Americans in the UK and to provide a collective voice for, and represent the collective interests of the community. Our diverse membership provides specialist support in a wide range of areas, including advice and information (on immigration, welfare, housing, employment rights), casework support and shelter for women facing domestic abuse, psychotherapy and well-being support, employability and integration programmes, civic engagement and cultural activities. From grassroots networks to established organisations with up to 37 years supporting Latin Americans in the UK, our members support between 50 to 5,000 beneficiaries every year.

www.clauk.org.uk

The organisations that make up CLAUK are:

- Indoamerican Refugee Migrant Organisation (IRMO), Lambeth, London.
- Latin American Disabled People's Project, Southwark, London.
- Latin American House, Camden, London.
- Latin American Support Network, Manchester.
- Latin American Women's Aid (LAWA), Hackney and Islington, London.
- Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS), Islington and Southwark, London.
- Latin Elephant, Southwark, London.
- London United Futbol Club, Croydon, London.
- Movimiento Ecuador en el Reino Unido, Newham, London.
- NAZ Latina, Hammersmith and Fulham, London.
- VOADES UK, Southwark, London.
- The Prisma, online media outlet
- CASA Latin American Theatre

Contact: Dolores Modern, Policy and Communications Coordinator at the Latin American Women's Rights Service, dolores@lawrs.org.uk

CLAUK welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Women and Equalities Committee call for evidence on the unequal impact that of the Coronavirus and the measures put in place to tackle it are having on BAME communities. We fully support the committees' interest in assessing and addressing the shortcomings of the current measures.

While COVID-19 has disrupted everyone's lives, its impact has been greater on BAME communities in a variety of ways. The Latin American community is no exception. On the one hand, unemployment and underemployment have risen sharply. On the other hand, those who were able to continue working, in many cases did so with little protection, and increased risk of illness, while carrying out jobs now classified as "essential". In addition to this, a high proportion of our service users facing these challenges have not been able to access government's support and the welfare system due to both pre-existing barriers and emerging challenges.

The evidence presented in this submission is based on the experiences of Latin American migrants living and working in the UK gathered through academic research as well via the frontline services offered by the organisations that make up CLAUUK. As reflected in this submission, discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic, age, disability, and gender intersect with resulting barriers to access decent pay and working conditions, social protection, childcare, ESOL classes and integration programmes, which in turn, increase migrant communities' vulnerability to discrimination.

Summary

As with many other communities, the pandemic has not only brought up new and evolving challenges for Latin Americans, but it has also exacerbated pre-existing inequalities affecting this community, such as over-representation in precarious and low-paid jobs, and lack of access to welfare support, services and social housing, among others. Latin American migrants are overrepresented in unregulated sectors of employment such as cleaning, in which many are experiencing exploitation and being forced to work - often without PPE and, at times, in spite of their need to self-isolate – or being dismissed.

This submission highlights that:

- ✚ Many Latin Americans working in the sectors of cleaning, hospitality and domestic work not have received contractual sick pay or **Statutory Sick Pay** when needing to self-isolate or shield during COVID-19.
- ✚ A high number of Latin American workers were forced to continue working under **unsafe conditions**, and have been routinely denied personal protective equipment, exposing themselves to the risk of becoming ill and facing loss of income.
- ✚ Workers in the cleaning sector are having to **work extra hours** to cover for colleagues who were ill or on furlough, without being paid for those hours, while many others have been **dismissed** or had their **hours cut**.

- ✚ Latin American women have been gravely affected by **childcare responsibilities**, as school closures have meant that many were unable to return to work. This is especially concerning in the cases of women who have no access to further support through the government schemes or through Universal Credit (e.g. those with **No Recourse to Public Funds**).
- ✚ Both the **Job Retention Scheme** and the **Self-employment Support Scheme** have had limited reach within the Latin American community.
- ✚ The NRPF condition has left those who have lost their income with no options and at risk of destitution.
- ✚ Many of our beneficiaries have been faced with increased risk of homelessness and are presenting a variety of problems linked to poor housing, including: attempts of eviction, falling into debt to pay rent, and facing increased risk of infection due to over-crowdedness.
- ✚ Migrant women victims of **domestic violence/abuse** who have NRPF find it virtually impossible to access refuge and financial support, as well as access to interpreters when contacting local authorities or statutory services. Our two VAWG specialist organisations, LAWRS and LAWA, are seeing many women stay/return to their perpetrators for lack of options.
- ✚ Access to reliable, **official information** and local guidance in the Latin American languages (Spanish and Portuguese) has been difficult, particularly for those lacking access to the Internet and to IT equipment. As a result, Latin Americans face constant uncertainty about government guidelines, health and safety, social distancing and new rules to reopen businesses.
- ✚ Many families **contracted coronavirus**, and many elderly members having to be hospitalised. Language barriers made it impossible for some to access information on COVID-19 symptoms, hygiene measures, how to request NHS support and testing, despite continuous efforts from CLAUK members to disseminate translated materials. Service users have reported feeling worried and **anxious about their health** and the health of their families and about their children's isolation and lack of school support.
- ✚ The closure of the EU Settlement Resolution Centre during the first two months of the pandemic made it impossible for organisations and individuals to advance with complex applications to the **EU Settlement Scheme**. Restrictions imposed in applying for **Family Permits** from abroad, as well as travel restrictions in other countries, have meant that family members have been unable to join their families in the UK. Travel restrictions have also affected people with pre-settled status who were unable to return to the UK and therefore risked running over the 6-months absence limit.

Inquiry questions

1. Factors that made the Latin American BAME community vulnerable to the effects of the virus

The Latin American community is one of London's fastest growing groups, with 113,500 in 2008 growing to 250,000 in 2016, of which 145,000 live in London. Fleeing economic crises, increasing numbers of Latin Americans are coming from Spain, Portugal and Italy, and two-thirds have arrived since 2000. The largest national groups of this 50-year old community are Brazilians, Colombians, Ecuadorians and Peruvians. In general terms, the Latin American community is young and in working age, with an average age of 36 years. Geographically, the population is mainly dispersed across London; however, the boroughs with the highest concentration are Southwark, Lambeth, Brent, and Newham.¹

It is a highly qualified group with high rates of employment (70%). However, many Latin Americans are employed in cleaning and catering sectors, which lack regulations and are characterised by very low pay and extremely poor working conditions.² A 2019 report presenting 326 cases of Latin American women employed in three feminised sectors (cleaning, hospitality and domestic work), found that: over half of the workers faced breaches to their contracts (62%), with unlawful deduction of wages being the most common type of abuse (46%) and 1 in 5 (20%) experiencing illegal underpayment of the National Minimum Wage. Over two in five (41%) of women in the sample had experienced discrimination, harassment or unreasonable treatment, and health and safety issues were present in 25% of the cases, which included injury linked to the nature of the work (33%), limited or no protective equipment (17%), and lack of training (12%). In addition, 16% of the women endured sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace and 11 cases of potential trafficking for labour exploitation were identified: 7 in cleaning/hospitality, 4 in domestic work³.

For those in onwards migration from Europe, typically naturalised Europeans and their family members, 'reduced outreach, interpretation and information services from local authorities for new arrivals often result in 'practical exclusion' from public services to which they are entitled, undermining their ability to integrate and secure appropriate standards of living'⁴.

¹ McIlwaine and Bunge. (2016). *Towards Visibility: the Latin American Community in London*. London: King's College London and Trust for London; McIlwaine et al. (2011). *No Longer Invisible: the Latin American Community in London*. London: LAWRS, Queen Mary University and Trust for London.

² *Ibid.*

³ De la Silva, Granada, and Modern. (2019). *The Unheard Workforce: Experiences of Latin American migrant women in cleaning, hospitality and domestic work*. London: LAWRS. Available at: <http://www.lawrs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/unheard-workforce-research.pdf>. See also: EHRC. (2014). *The Invisible Workforce: Employment Practices in the Cleaning Sector*. London: Equality and Human Rights Commission.

⁴ Mas Giralt and Granada (2015). *Latin Americans migrating from Europe to the UK: barriers to accessing public services and welfare*. Leeds: University of Leeds and LAWRS. Available at: <http://www.lawrs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Latin-Americans-migrating-from-Europe-to-the-UK.pdf>

In fact, only 6% of those coming in secondary migration from Europe claim an out-of-work benefit and half receive welfare benefits (although primarily child benefit). This situation leads many to live in precarious housing conditions: one-third share their home with other families⁵. A 2016 survey carried out by IRMO and focused on housing found that out of 199 Latin Americans accessing their services, 75% were in private accommodation, 17% were homeless and only 8% were living in social housing.⁶

Latin Americans' lack of access to health services is particularly worrisome: at least 1 in 6 Latin Americans are not registered with a GP, and 7 out of 10 have never been to a dentist in the UK. Although there is strong evidence that health care access rates are very low, there is very little information on Latin American's health care needs. An HIV rapid testing and awareness raising campaign for Latin Americans led by CLAUUK and Naz Latina from Naz Project London found 2 people testing 'reactive' (from 137 tests, 1.5% prevalence rate)⁷. A second campaign period led by Naz Latina found 21 Latin Americans testing 'reactive' in 800 tests and Public Health England reported a higher HIV prevalence rate among Latin Americans, when compared with White (0.84%) and with MSM (0.98%).⁸

There are also high incidence rates of violence against women and girls (VAWG) affecting Latin American women. A King's College London study reaching 195 Brazilian women in London found that almost half of the women (48%) had experienced some form of gender-based violence in the UK and that most of the violence happened at work and most perpetrators were colleagues or line managers (a quarter).⁹ The #StepUpMigrantWomen campaign, set up by LAWRS and led by a coalition of migrant women's organisations, have also evidenced extensively the impact of hostile environment policies on survivors reporting VAWG to the police¹⁰. In terms of access to refuge support for VAWG survivors, a recent report from WAHA¹¹, 'A Roof Not A Home'¹², evidences that homeless Black and minoritised survivors, including Latin Americans, have long been experiencing a crisis in relation to the

⁵ McIlwaine and Bunge, *op*

cit. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/789793/national_HIV_self_sampling_service_november_2017_to_october_2018.pdf

⁶ IRMO. (2016). *Latin Americans in London: Housing Situation*. Available at: <http://irmo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Research-report-IRMO-Research-Briefing-Housing.pdf>

⁷ CLAUUK. (2019). CLAUUK's response to the HIV Commission call for written evidence. Available at: <http://www.clauk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CLAUUK-response-to-HIV-Commission.pdf>

⁸ PHE. (2018). White (0.84%). Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/789793/national_HIV_self_sampling_service_november_2017_to_october_2018.pdf

⁹ McIlwaine and Evans. (2018). *We can't fight in the dark: Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) among Brazilians in London*. King's College London and LAWRS. Available at:

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/geography/assets/mcilwaine-and-evans-2018-we-cant-fight-in-the-dark-violence-against-women-and-girls-among-brazilians-in-london-short-version.pdf>

¹⁰ McIlwaine, Granada, Valenzuela-Oblitas. (2019). *The Right to be Believed: Migrant women facing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in the 'hostile immigration environment' in London*. King's College London and LAWRS. Available at: <https://stepupmigrantwomenuk.files.wordpress.com/2019/05/the-right-to-be-believed-full-version-updated.pdf>

¹¹ Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) is a project initiated in 2018 with leadership from Latin American Women's Aid and the London Black Women's Project, in partnership with the OYA consortium.

¹² Latin American Women's Aid (2019) *A Roof Not a Home: the housing experiences of black and minoritised women survivors of gender-based violence in London*. Available [online](#)

profound inadequacy of the UK government, local authorities and public services' response to their refuge and housing needs. A significant contributory factor has been a decade of austerity policies which have had a disproportionate negative impact on the specialist BME 'by and for' sector (Imkaan, 2015¹³; Women's Resource Centre with the Women's Budget Group, 2018¹⁴).

2. The impact of the pandemic on BAME communities, for example higher death rates, exposure to the virus.

As CLAUK has warned in its letter to the National Director for Health and Wellbeing of Public Health England¹⁵, Latin Americans are currently invisible in data collection systems in the UK, which leads to lack of official data about the number of Latin American migrants affected by COVID-19 and the death rate within the community. This statistical invisibility is largely due to the ONS and PHE's failure to include Latin Americans in ethnic monitoring, something CLAUK has advocated for since 2012¹⁶, the high proportion of Latin Americans with UK or EU citizenship (which grants them right to reside, work, etc.), the level of exclusion faced by undocumented Latin Americans, and the low levels of participation in the National Census of the community as whole. However, their economic vulnerability and working conditions, lack of access to welfare support, living conditions in overcrowded accommodation, low access to health services, the language barrier and lack of access to information about the virus and preventative measures, and lack of access to health services, increase the community's exposure and vulnerability to COVID-19.

3. The impact of the Government measures to contain the virus on BAME people, for example difficulty in self-isolating, being keyworkers, loss of income.

Latin Americans in the UK have been affected by the pandemic and the government's measures in a wide range of areas, including: income, working conditions, housing, gender-based violence and domestic abuse, access to healthcare, mental and physical health, and immigration, among others. As we continue gathering evidence to assess the scope of the impact, we have collectively identified the following:

INCOME AND WORKING CONDITIONS

¹³ Imkaan (2015) *State of the Sector: Contextualising the Current Experiences of BME Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Organisations*.

¹⁴ Women's Resource Centre and Women's Budget Group (2018) *Life-Changing and Life-Saving Funding for the Women's Sector*. London

¹⁵<http://www.clauk.org.uk/clauk-wrote-to-public-health-england-about-covid-19-and-the-latin-american-community/>

¹⁶ CLAUK has achieved the official recognition of Latin Americans and the inclusion of the category 'Latin American' in ethnic monitoring in Southwark, Lambeth, Islington and Hackney, and at the London level. See <http://www.clauk.org.uk/recognition/>

- a. **Sick pay:** Many workers who have been ill, needing to self-isolate due to displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or living with someone who has, or needing to shield due to having pre-existing conditions, have not received contractual sick pay or **Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)**.

A number of workers do not qualify for SSP because they earn less than £120 pounds per week, or because they are in bogus self-employment¹⁷. Others were simply told by their employer that if they are not working, they will receive no pay regardless of the reasons. This has led to workers losing their entire income, while others continued going to work despite feeling ill and/or with COVID-19 symptoms, risking their health for fear of losing their livelihood.

- b. **Exploitation and unsafe conditions of work:** A high number of Latin American workers were forced to continue working under unsafe conditions, and have been routinely denied personal protective equipment, exposing themselves to the risk of becoming ill and facing loss of income. LAWRS has supported Latin American domestic workers who have been asked to continue working throughout this period, in some cases even when displaying symptoms of infection or when workers had serious underlying health conditions. Many of them have been required to move in with the families employing them or otherwise threatened with dismissal.

We have seen many cases where service users working in the cleaning sector are being asked to **work extra hours** to cover for colleagues who were ill or on furlough, without being paid for those hours.

- c. **Loss of income and lack of support:** CLAUK members have seen an increased need for advice from service users who have been **dismissed or had their hours cut** over the past months. With many working in elementary sectors where staff turnover is high, few are protected from unfair dismissal.

- d. **Childcare responsibilities** have been an important limitation for Latin American workers, as school closures have meant that many were unable to return to work. As women tend to be primary caregivers in most families, school and nursery closures have impacted them disproportionately and prevented them from working. This is especially concerning in the cases of women who have no access to further support through the government schemes or through Universal Credit (e.g. those with NRPF).

- e. The **Job Retention Scheme** has had limited reach within the Latin American community, as it relies on the employer's good will. Our evidence so far suggests that a number of employers are laying-off workers rather than furloughing them. We have also received reports of employers furloughing workers, but only part of their working hours.

- f. The **Self-employment Support Scheme** has also not offered an appropriate model to support the Latin American community, as it applies to those who earn the majority of their income from their activity as self-employed, when many workers in elementary sectors such as cleaning have different conditions of work with different employers. As a

¹⁷ Bogus self-employment is a technique used by employers where workers are made to register as self-employed, while effectively being treated as employees. This keeps the employer from having to comply with employment rights such as holiday pay, sick leave, etc.

result, many of our beneficiaries are having to rely on food banks and soup kitchens, an issue particularly important for Latin American House and VOADES beneficiaries.

A survey conducted by IRMO with over 100 beneficiaries evidences that:

- ❖ 32% have been put on furlough
- ❖ 15% have been dismissed or made redundant
- ❖ 28% are not working: were told not to return to work, have childcare responsibilities or self/household member has symptoms
- ❖ 21% are receiving benefits
- ❖ 24% are struggling to access food
- ❖ 30% are not receiving any income

HOUSING

A general loss of income has meant that Latin Americans are struggling to cover their rent and bills. With the majority of them living in private accommodation, there is great anxiety over the possibility of eviction.

CLAUK members have supported service users by contacting their landlords to request rent pauses or reductions. Many families have been mistreated and evicted, or asked to leave their homes unless they are able to pay what is owed. A number of service users have left the property because they were unaware that all court actions on evictions have been delayed until the end of June 2020. IRMO's survey shows that 54% of the respondents are struggling to pay the rent, and 2 were effectively evicted. Many of our beneficiaries have been faced with increased risk of homelessness and are presenting a variety of problems including struggles when attempts of eviction have been made, having to fall into debt to pay rent, and facing increased risk of infection due to overcrowdedness. Latin American House has also found that those renting rooms in private or social housing homes are not being allowed to use the address for welfare applications.

As evidenced in the WAHA report mentioned above, refuge and housing provision for VAWG survivors has long been inadequate. The pandemic has further exacerbated the crisis and its effects. For example, LAWA's housing specialist advice has identified even slower and increasingly inadequate responses when it comes to re-housing survivors at the point of move-on from refuge accommodation during this pandemic. It is important to note that LAWA's refuges already work at full capacity, so highly concerned about the provision of move on/resettlement accommodation, so that refuge spaces can be freed up and opened to new service users.

LAWA has also seen multiple cases where our services users have experienced an outright rejection by local authorities for re-housing due to immigration status, even in those cases where the service users do indeed have some recourse to public funds, but this is misunderstood or inadequately assessed. The continued use of the Universal Credit has complicated substantially the process. For example, many are denied universal credit due to incorrect assessment and those that are accepted need further support in meeting the demands of the benefit teams and the Department of Work and Pensions, especially through

the online platform. This additional layer of work not only jeopardises the material and emotional stability of women needing support, but also stretches the resources of supporting organisations to the maximum.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Access to official information is important at any time, but never more so than in the midst of this pandemic which has led to high-paced and constant change in all areas of life. The lack of official information in Latin American languages (Spanish and Portuguese) has proven to be highly problematic for the community. Organisations have struggled to keep up, translate and disseminate information. However, misinformation has spread widely as a result of that gap. Whatsapp community-led groups are plagued with misleading information that organisations are having to address individually. LAWRS' caseworkers have received, for instance, a series of calls from women who believed that they did not need to pay rent for three months. IRMO has gathered evidence of families falling victim to scammers pretending to provide support in applying for the Job Retention Scheme in order to continue to receive part of their salaries.

Access to reliable, official information and local guidance has been even more difficult for those lacking access to the Internet and to IT equipment. As a result, Latin Americans face constant uncertainty about government guidelines, health and safety, social distancing and new rules to reopen businesses.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND DOMESTIC ABUSE

While home has been a place of safety for many during these months, for those experiencing gender violence and domestic abuse the situation is quite different. Self-isolation and social distancing measures have increased domestic violence cases and reports¹⁸. The impact of the outbreak on migrant and BME survivors of domestic violence has been disproportionately high. Evidence from LAWRS' casework shows that migrant and BME women face particular barriers when fleeing violence and accessing support¹⁹. This vulnerability is worsened by discriminatory responses and policies which prevent them from accessing safety, support and justice.

Evidence from our casework also suggests that in the context of this pandemic, statutory services and other public authorities are not following equalities duties when supporting migrant and BME survivors. To illustrate this, LAWRS has been dealing with rising cases of lack of provision of translation services, which shows that public authorities are failing to meet the obligation to remove or reduce disadvantages suffered by BME and migrant women because of their protected characteristics.

Migrant women victims of domestic violence/abuse who have NRPF find it virtually impossible to access refuge and financial support. Our two VAWG specialist organisations,

¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/24/charges-and-cautions-for-domestic-violence-rise-by-24-in-london>

¹⁹ https://www.sistersforchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/83-SistersForChange_UnequalRegardUnequalProtection_Nov2017-1.pdf

LAWRS and LAWA, are seeing many women stay/return to their perpetrators for lack of options.

HEALTH AND ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

As a community already affected by hardship, lockdown and isolation have been difficult for Latin Americans, with many reporting increased anxiety, loneliness and social exclusion.

Many families contracted coronavirus, with some elderly members having to be hospitalised. Language barriers made it impossible for some to access information on COVID-19 symptoms, hygiene measures, how to request NHS support and testing, despite continuous efforts from CLAUK members to disseminate translated materials.

Conflicting messages from employers and well-intentioned members of the community led many to receive inappropriate information during the “stay at home” phase of the lockdown.

Service users have reported feeling worried and anxious about their health and the health of their families and about their children's isolation and lack of school support. Recently arrived children and young people experienced higher levels of isolation, stress and worries about their social life and educational development.

IMMIGRATION

Free movement under EU law is set to end in December 2020. With many Latin Americans holding dual citizenship (typically Spanish, Italian or Portuguese), access to the application process for the EU Settlement Scheme has been key to ensure that they do not lose their legal status and become undocumented. Support from organisations has been vital for many affected by the language barrier or technological illiteracy. The closure of offices of CLAUK members commissioned by the Home Office to provide immigration support to access the scheme (IRMO, Latin American House and LAWRS) meant that this service was interrupted or limited, as people making use of this service tend to need in person support.

The closure of the EU Settlement Resolution Centre during the first two months of the pandemic made it impossible for organisations and individuals to advance with complex applications. Closure of UKCAS service points, where the identity of applicants is confirmed, required biometric information is enrolled and required supporting documentation is digitalised and checked has meant that family members of EU citizens were, and still remain, unable to complete their applications. Outstanding applications have also been greatly delayed, with applicants having to wait months for a response. This has directly affected their possibility of claiming benefits and social housing, as the application to the EUSS is required.

Restrictions imposed in applying for Family Permits from abroad, as well as travel restrictions in other countries, have meant that family members have been unable to join their families in the UK. Travel restrictions have also affected people with pre-settled status who were unable to return to the UK and therefore risked running over the 6-months absence limit.

4. Other factors that have amplified the impacts of the pandemic on BAME people may also arise and be explored such as a reported rise of hate crimes, no recourse to public funds, unconscious bias in educational settings, inaccessible Government guidance due to English not always being the first language.

The **No Recourse to Public Funds** condition, which many Latin Americans are subject to, has meant that if they lost their income for any of the reasons mentioned above, no further support was provided, leaving them at risk of destitution.

In the case of Latin American migrants who are **eligible for Universal Credit**, applications often prove too difficult to be completed without the support from a specialist organisation, which are struggling to meet the demand. Many **undocumented workers** are working under insecure work arrangements. This often means having to accept any conditions imposed by employers, while receiving threats of being reported to immigration enforcement. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, this has meant working without the necessary protections, facing pay cuts, or having to work while being ill. Not able to receive any support from the government, undocumented workers are fully unprotected from labour abuses and exploitation. They need to choose between continuing to work in these conditions and destitution.

A number of those Latin Americans with **dual nationality** (typically Latin American-Spanish/Italian) are also not able to apply for Universal Credit. This is because they are unable to pass the 'habitual residency test', a requirement for EU migrants to prove their 'right to reside' to claim welfare benefits such as Universal Credit.

Recommendations

CLAUK is actively advocating for BME and migrant workers to be placed higher up in the public agenda for stakeholders and decision-makers, so their urgent needs can be met. In particular, we advocate for the **official recognition of the Latin American community as a minority in the UK**. Migrant workers are among those that society is now praising for their role as "essential workers", and even being recognised for their work in the NHS, yet little is discussed about their working conditions and their lack of opportunities and options. They continue to work because they are left with no other recourse, even if they are ill, have pre-existing conditions, or childcare responsibilities. While their work is recognised, their plight is invisible.

Many migrants will be facing debts, left in unsuitable housing or homeless and unemployed. This in turn highly increases the risk of labour exploitation - something our community was already exposed to before the crisis. Targeted support is needed to ensure their protection in the coming months.

A range of measures can be taken to ensure that this support becomes a reality. CLAUK's recommendations are to:

- A. Officially recognise the Latin American community as an ethnic group in the UK and include the category 'Latin American' in ONS and Public Health ethnic monitoring.
- B. Abolish the restriction for **Statutory Sick Pay** for those earning less than £120 per week who are currently ineligible, and an increase of Statutory Sick Pay to cover the equivalent of one working week (35 hours) at minimum wage level;
- C. Increase **Universal Credit** allowance to cover cost of living, and an ending to the five-week wait;
- D. Immediately suspend the **No Recourse to Public Funds** condition, so that migrants can apply to social protection if they need to stop working or leave an abusive partner during the pandemic.
- E. Suspend **data-sharing** between all statutory services - including the police, healthcare services and labour inspectorates - and the Home Office, vulnerable workers and victims of crime can be protected and feel encouraged to come forward. Fear of immigration enforcement is affecting not only undocumented migrants, but also European citizens who are not aware of their rights and entitlements due to misinformation and fears related to Brexit. Suspending all data-sharing will allow the most vulnerable workers to report abusive employers, victims of crime and domestic abuse to report to the police, and all migrants to access healthcare during this pandemic.
- F. Suspend **NHS charges** to migrants and implement a campaign to inform migrants that they can access any health service free of charge is key during this pandemic, as migrants are resistant to accessing healthcare for fear of charges and information being shared with the Home Office. The COVID-19 pandemic, in the context of the hostile environment, is a risk not only to the health of migrant women workers but to public health as well.
- G. Implement an **emergency coordinated response and approach towards violence against women and girls (VAWG) issues** across the national and local Government and statutory services which is inclusive and mindful of the needs of migrant women, as well as an **inclusive, intersectional, and accessible campaign on Domestic Abuse** which reaches the most vulnerable and ensures signposting victims of domestic abuse to BME and migrant 'by and for' specialist services.
- H. Provide **adequate, ring-fenced, unrestricted, flexible funding for specialist BME and migrant 'by and for' organisations**, including refuges, so they can reach the most vulnerable and marginalised members of society.
- I. Ensure lessons are learned from this pandemic and the **unequal impact** it is having on migrants many of whom are BME, so that the **Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill** currently in Parliament is informed by issues raised during this time. The hostile environment has made life more difficult for migrants in many ways, but the crisis has shown that low-paid migrants are in fact carrying out essential jobs and the nation is much in need of them. Providing a safe route for "low-skilled" migrants is key to ensure they are still able to perform these jobs without the increased risk of exploitation, trafficking and modern slavery. By the same token, the illegal working offence should be repealed and all workers should be granted equal employment rights. Data-sharing for

immigration purposes should be stopped immediately, but further clarifications and restrictions should also be included in this Bill, so that workers are able to safely report exploitation and migrant women are able to report domestic abuse without fear of detention and deportation.

J. Use the forthcoming **Domestic Abuse Bill** to ensure migrant women are no longer left behind and have access to the same protections regardless of their immigration status. If migrant survivors had access to safety and support and could go to the police for help without fear of deportation, the situation would not be as dire as the one we are now facing.