

# Homes for Healing: Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA)

## Study overview

Homes for Healing captures five years of work by the Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA) partnership, led by Latin American Women's Aid (LAWA) and the OYA Consortium, to expose and address the realities of homelessness among Black and minoritised women survivors of gender-based violence in London.

Drawing on 193 complex cases between 2020 and 2023, the work evidences the deep and persistent link between violence against women and homelessness, showing how racial inequality, immigration policy, and housing insecurity intersect to deny women their fundamental right to safety.

The approach is both practical and political: combining frontline advocacy with systemic change. It shows that housing is the foundation for safety, stability, and healing. The findings call for an intersectional, trauma-informed, and rights-based framework to ensure that every woman can live in a home that heals rather than harms.

The current 'Evidence Bits' issue is based on the publication: **Quevedo, G. (2023) Homes for Healing: Women Against Homelessness and Abuse (WAHA). London: Latin American Women's Aid (LAWA).** Readers are encouraged to review the original study and read more about the WAHA project at the following link: [//lawadv.org.uk/research-and-policy/#waha](https://lawadv.org.uk/research-and-policy/#waha)

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## What is the significance of this research?



The report is intersectional, data-driven and grounded in ‘by and for’ evidence — research produced within Black and minoritised women’s organisations. It highlights an invisible crisis: women who are not counted in homelessness data because they are hidden in unsafe, overcrowded, or temporary accommodations.

By combining survivors’ testimonies, statistical analysis, and legislative critique, the paper builds a case for urgent reform. It argues that current housing and welfare frameworks — including the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) — fail to protect all survivors, particularly migrant women and those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

The WAHA initiative’s findings are not only descriptive but prescriptive: they illustrate how housing policy, if grounded in trauma-informed and culturally competent practice, can actively promote healing and equality.

## Systemic Barriers and Institutional Neglect

This report illustrates the many ways in which women across London continue to face systemic and structural barriers when seeking housing after violence, including:

- Unlawful gatekeeping: survivors being blocked from submitting homelessness applications or misclassified as ineligible.
- Negligence and re-traumatisation: long delays, unsafe housing placements, and disbelief of survivors’ accounts.
- Language and cultural barriers: many migrant women unable to access rights or communicate effectively with councils.
- Poor living conditions: temporary accommodation (TA) marked by mould, infestations, and structural disrepair.
- Intersectional discrimination: women reporting racism, xenophobia, and cultural insensitivity from housing staff.

These failings result in prolonged instability. WAHA’s data shows that **70% of survivors were placed in temporary accommodation after fleeing abuse** — often for over a year — while **only 8% secured public housing**.



# Core Findings and Evidence

## Housing as a Healing Right

Safe, stable housing is central to recovery from abuse. Survivors' testimonies show how unsafe or unsuitable housing—from collapsing ceilings to rodent infestations—can retraumatise women and children. Healing cannot occur in spaces of neglect. The vision of homes for healing insists that housing must nurture recovery, not replicate harm. It reframes housing as a healing right, integral to mental health, parenting, and long-term stability.

The report situates this within broader evidence: 15% of London's social properties fail to meet Decent Homes Standards, and poor housing costs the NHS £100.1 million annually. For survivors, the costs are emotional and cyclical — instability delays healing and pushes many back into dependence or unsafe arrangements.

## The Marginalisation of Migrant Women

For migrant women, immigration status often determines whether they can be safe. Those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) or pre-settled status are locked out of public housing and benefits. Abusers exploit this dependency, while councils frequently misunderstand or misapply immigration law.

Cases such as Carolina's, who was denied housing while pregnant, illustrate how institutional neglect can perpetuate violence. Without reform to the Domestic Violence Rule (DVR) and Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC), migrant survivors remain excluded from safety nets meant to protect all women.

## Policy Implementation Gaps

Although the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) created new duties for councils to assess and plan for accommodation-based support, WAHA finds that implementation is inconsistent, gender-neutral, and insufficiently intersectional. The law's omission of the term "refuge" and its failure to include all migrant women mean that statutory duties are often symbolic rather than substantive as they do not translate to guaranteed funding for specialist spaces that make safety possible. The report calls for embedding intersectionality into legislation and funding frameworks.

# Key Recommendations

## NATIONAL LEVEL AUTHORITIES (DLUHC)

- **Strengthen homelessness prevention and accountability.** Put in place safeguarding and enforcement mechanisms to hold local authorities accountable when handling cases involving Black and minoritised survivors of abuse. The Homelessness Code of Guidance should clarify the eligibility of EEA nationals with settled or pre-settled status fleeing domestic abuse.
- **Allocate sustainable, ring-fenced funding.** Establish a National Oversight Mechanism to secure long-term investment in by and for services, ensuring representation, accountability, and consistent quality of provision across England.
- **Ensure decent housing standards.** Work with the Regulator of Social Housing and Housing Ombudsman to apply Decent Homes Standards to all temporary accommodation, regardless of ownership or residents' immigration status.

## HOME OFFICE

- **Extend access to support for survivors with NRPF.** Adopt changes in immigration rules to ensure all survivors of domestic abuse can access state support. Extend the Domestic Violence Rule (DVR) and Destitute Domestic Violence Concession (DDVC) to women with insecure immigration status.
- **End data sharing with immigration enforcement.** Implement safe-reporting mechanisms so that victims can report abuse without fear of detention or deportation.

## DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS (DWP)

- **Exempt survivors from the benefit cap and raise Local Housing Allowance (LHA)** to reflect at least 50% of median market rents, ensuring affordability.

## POLICE

- Take mandatory cultural competency and trauma-informed training, in line with Valerie's Law.
- Use Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) and Orders (DVPOs) to remove perpetrators until safer accommodation is secured.
- Provide suitable interpreters—female, trained, and culturally sensitive—to avoid retraumatisation and bias.



### LOCAL LEVEL AUTHORITIES (GLA AND COUNCILS)

- End unlawful gatekeeping and ensure swift, lawful housing assessments without local-connection requirements.
- Develop clear referral pathways with by and for organisations, including those not locally commissioned.
- Guarantee suitable and safe temporary accommodation meeting minimum standards.
- Expand move-on and social housing provision and regulate the private rented sector to ensure affordability and safety.
- Include survivors' lived experience in the planning and delivery of housing and homelessness strategies.

## Conclusion

Despite enduring systemic barriers, WAHA's model remains professional, holistic, and rooted in human rights-based advocacy. Alongside specialist housing, immigration, and LGBTQ+ support, the initiative connects policy work with the lived realities of survivors. After five years, structural inequalities persist—Black and minoritised women still face severe housing insecurity, with far too few refuge spaces available.

WAHA's vision goes beyond providing a roof: it is about creating Homes for Healing—places that foster safety, dignity, and an inner sense of belonging. This "Home within" enables survivors to break cycles of violence and build sustainable futures. Learning together and amplifying survivor voices are central to this work, ensuring that advocacy not only exposes what fails but strengthens what heals.

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If you are interested in exploring new research collaborations or seek advisory services, contact our Director, Dr Romina Istratii, at [romina.istratii.work@gmail.com](mailto:romina.istratii.work@gmail.com)

If you'd like to join our network of partners, contact us at [idvrm.info@gmail.com](mailto:idvrm.info@gmail.com)