



# **Lemme Hablar: Community Engagement and the Latin American Community in Southwark**

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## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	8
BACKGROUND .....	8
METHODOLOGY: .....	9
THE LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN SOUTHWARK .....	10
CHALLENGES FACED BY LATIN AMERICANS .....	12
RETHINKING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER .....	13
BEYOND RECOGNITION .....	16
THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM .....	18
BRIDGES TO ENGAGEMENT.....	22
CONCLUSION.....	25
SUGGESTED APPROACHES AND METHODS TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT .....	26
<i>Intersectionality</i> .....	26
<i>Community Languages</i> .....	27
<i>Creative Community Engagement</i> .....	27
<i>Youth Engagement</i> .....	27
<i>Digital Engagement</i> .....	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	30
APPENDIX.....	33
PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES.....	33
INTRODUCTION .....	34
SOUTHWARK LATIN AMERICAN NETWORK (INITIALLY LATIN AMERICAN PROVIDER-LED GROUP) .....	35
STORYTELLING IN SPANISH, CANADA WATER LIBRARY .....	36
BRIXTON REEL FILM FESTIVAL.....	38
YOUNG LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN LEADING CHANGE .....	40
CARTONERAS CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT PROJECT WITH YOUNG LATIN AMERICANS.....	43
INTI RAYMI: YEAR OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES CELEBRATION .....	47
LONDON SPANISH BOOK AND ZINE FAIR .....	47
ONLINE ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE BY AND FOR LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN .....	49
LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN SOUTHWARK .....	51

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Cover Picture: Young Latin American Women and Girls Leading Change Programme, LAWRS, 2018, taken by Naomi Wells. See appendix for information about the project.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Context:

In 2012, Southwark became the first council in the UK to recognise Latin Americans as an ethnic group. In 2018, Southwark Council in partnership with the Institute of Modern Languages Research, University of London secured funding to support the Latin American community organisations in Southwark. The bid is part of the AHRC-funded Open World Research Initiative project '[Cross-Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community](#)', which involved a consortium of universities in England, and several research strands. The national project explored the central role that languages play in relation to key contemporary issues, such as social cohesion, migration, or health.

The Latin American strand of the project's aims were to:

- Articulate a common understanding of challenges, needs, goals and solutions, and support capacity building amongst the Latin American organisations and community groups in Southwark
- Support networking of the main Latin American community organisations in Southwark, and build partnerships to strengthen members' resilience and the support they offer to their communities
- Achieve a closer and more effective relationship between Latin American communities and Southwark Council
- Co-produce programmes, events, workshops and relevant materials to address the community's needs.

This research built on existing key academic research publications such as [Towards Visibility: The Latin American Community in London](#) (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016), [Latin Americans in Southwark: Service Access and Provision](#) (Berg, 2017) and *Chinese and Latin Americans in Southwark* (Pharoah et al, 2010). These reports find that key services such as education and health are poorly accessed by Latin American communities. This is partly due to language barriers, but also due to their employment and housing living conditions, and the accessibility of services. The precarious socio-economic and legal situation that many Latin Americans face in London creates a considerable dependence on community organisations and faith groups for support (Berg, 2016; McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016).

In that sense, this project explored ideas and experiences of language, identity, community, migration, and wellbeing centred around the community's assets and needs, in order to open up avenues for new forms and channels of dialogue and action.

## Methods:

The research was informed by a combination of literature review and analysis, ethnographic research, and community work conducted from 2018 to 2020. It included:

- **Action Research:** Co-development and delivery of community engagement projects, activities and events with several Latin American community organisations and groups in Southwark and Lambeth, including the co-creation and coordination of a Latin American network in partnership with [Community Southwark](#), the umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in Southwark, and supported by Southwark Council (see appendix).
- **Qualitative research:** Semi-structured interviews with staff, trustees, and community workers from five Latin American organisations based in Southwark and Lambeth, national and local charities and stakeholders such as Public Health Southwark, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), as well as national charities and other voluntary groups working in the borough. Research placement at Southwark Council offered key insights and information about the work carried out by the Council.
- **Data Collection:** Gathered through feedback forms, short surveys and questionnaires shared at different community activities and events, and an early consultation with Latin American organisations.
- **Outreach:** The project reached a total of **1200 participants** across **30 different community engagement activities** (see appendix).

## Key Findings:

- **Community Engagement:**
  - a. Latin America has a strong history of resistance and solidarity, collective activism, and innovative forms of civic participation. Latin American community organisations in Southwark are testimony to a collective and innovative approach to community development and community engagement. **There is a need and an opportunity to build on existing capacity within the community.**
  - b. A **clear engagement strategy** with the Latin American community by the local government is seen as a key factor for building a sustainable and meaningful relationship between decision-makers and the community.
  - c. Engagement is seen as a **long-term investment in the community**, both in the form of sustainable funding (including a physical space), training, and ongoing dialogue.
  - d. Services and engagement opportunities are not always ready to meet or adapt to the community's needs and fail to offer a more **comprehensive response** to engagement with migrant communities.
  - e. **Place-making:** Ethnic recognition should focus on the creation and development of community and communal spaces (physical and dialogic) where the Latin American community in Southwark can imprint its place-identity.

- **Data:**

- a. Despite ethnic recognition, **lack of official data** makes it harder to assess the community's levels of engagement and needs.
- b. **Without available public data** in key areas such as health, **Latin Americans remain marginalised from mainstream services and commissioning opportunities**. For instance, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment in Southwark (JSNAS) does not include statistics on Latin American communities in the borough. The availability and dissemination of data are vital to support commissioning decisions related to reducing inequalities.

## Conclusion:

Southwark Council's new approach to community engagement was developed during the period of my research, and included a series of workshops held in Cambridge House, which led to the creation of a [report published in September 2019](#). The Council's Approach to Community Engagement is mindful of the borough's different characteristics of its local communities and takes a clear stance on the Council's duty to uphold equality. The community approach also makes a clear reference to the Latin American community: "We will develop ongoing relationships with different organisations that are already connected to 'the seldom heard' so that we can call on them to foster participation, such as TRAs, faith organisations, [and] Latin American groups" (2019: 2). However, little is said about community languages, which is an essential factor when engaging with linguistically diverse migrant communities.

In response, Latin American organisations praised some of the actions taken by the Council, in particular, the precedent-setting recognition of Latin Americans as an ethnic group, the commissioning of research, and the available funding opportunities for the community. However, during my research, there was a clear discursive antagonism between the Latin American community organisations and the Council, which has been exacerbated by the urban regeneration process in the borough. Interviewees usually spoke in terms of "the Council" and "us", as two opposing political and discursive forces seeking different aims and with different values. This divide has further complicated the relationship between the community and the Council at a time of regeneration and funding cuts.

As suggested by the Latin American organisations, **a well-defined, long-term strategy** to work with the Latin American community would help to **co-develop** a regular and **consistent pattern of actions** rather than stand-alone activities or consultations. Once recognition has been achieved, the organisations expect that it would translate into better representation and interaction, as well as funding and commissioning opportunities. Coordination and collaboration across disciplines, departments and organisations is seminal for a successful outcome. Such a strategy would need to include a **physical space** where the community could feel rooted, and able to host and carry out its activities and services. **A long-term organisational strategy for community engagement with the Latin American community** is required to **continue building mutual trust and more meaningful forms of collaboration**.



As described in the appendix, a Latin American network in Southwark was developed early on during this research to work on the issues outlined in this report. The network was created with the aim of working on existing and new findings and develop stronger links between the Council and the Latin American organisations in the borough.

## Recommendations for Southwark Council:

- **Commissioning and Funding:** Increase the capacity of organisations to be ready to participate in commissioning processes. Make sure that appropriate support and training targets and reaches out to the Latin American-led organisations to enable the community to develop its own structure and ensure more sustainable growth. Reflect and consider motivation and reasoning to stop or grant funding initiatives to be included in the strategy. For instance, organisations describe issues related to commissioning opportunities which often favour larger and more generic organisations in allocation of resources, but which often rely on the specific local knowledge of the Latin American voluntary organisations.
- **Place-making:** Offer a place/land where the Latin American community can build and develop its own identity and image, self-manage the place, build and support the local economy, and foster social interactions and cultural activities. Consider a feasibility study to assess its viability, building on previous work done by [Latin Elephant](#) and [Carnaval del Pueblo](#).
- **Data Collection:** Southwark Council was one of the first boroughs to include the category of “Latin American” as an ethnic group. **Make sure the implementation of the recognition achieved in Southwark is attained in practice:** all monitoring to include the ethnic category, produce a report based on existing data gathered in the last 8 years to inform policy and service provision.
- **Co-design** with key Latin American organisations a **culturally-informed engagement strategy** to specifically target the Latin American community and tailor interventions for population, gender, labour circumstances, and language. Look at the community’s rich heritage, skills, and strengths as indicative of the community’s own capacity to grow, integrate, participate and contribute to social justice. This should be accompanied by representation in decision-making forums.
- **Cultural Competency: Provide cultural competency training amongst Council staff** in partnership with Latin American organisations in Southwark (e.g. via the Southwark Latin American Network developed during this research. See appendix). Induction courses for staff should include information about the Latin American community in the borough. Create a “language celebration week” to support, embrace and promote the borough’s linguistic diversity.
- **Promotion, translation, and dissemination of information** through multilingual, culturally inclusive branding and images that show Southwark’s multicultural heritage, and linguistic diversity. Written in plain English, as suggested in Southwark’s Community Engagement report, but translated into main community languages, including BSL. Provide videos and information on the Council’s website, and social media, including the Council’s YouTube channel. Partnerships with universities working in interpreting and translation have proved to be beneficial. Work with volunteers from Translation and Interpreting Studies from universities and colleges in

London to provide up-to-date information in Spanish and Portuguese and potentially in other community languages. Information dissemination is also key: share information amongst community organisations and representatives, community media (radio and newspapers), and provide training and multilingual toolkits and guides in key aspects related to housing, employment and education, health and wellbeing, and community engagement.<sup>1</sup>



Cartonera Art Book Cover made by a young Latin American at the Cartoneras Creative Community Engagement Project Latin American Youth Forum, Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation, 2019

<sup>1</sup> See the similar recommendation made by the Lawrence report on the impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities: *An Avoidable Crisis*: "The Government should remove linguistic, cultural and digital barriers to accessing public health information. The Government should work with all relevant bodies, including faith and community groups, to identify effective channels to disseminate information and provide support": <https://www.lawrencereview.co.uk/>



# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

In 2018, as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's [Open World Research Initiative \(OWRI\) Cross Language Dynamics: Reshaping Communities project](#), the Institute of Modern Languages Research (IMLR), School of Advanced Study, University of London, in partnership with [Southwark Council](#), secured funding to develop a project focusing on community engagement and Latin American communities in London. As a result of the successful joint bid, the research explored new tools, resources and opportunities for collaboration, participation, and engagement among Latin American community organisations in Southeast London, Southwark Council and the wider community in the borough.<sup>2</sup>

The research explored the effectiveness of community-specific forms of engagement which recognise the significance of linguistic and cultural interests in community formation and civic participation. In other words, the research is based on the understanding that culture and language dynamics shape identities and ideas of communities. Effective community engagement requires the participation, knowledge and expertise of organisations and voluntary groups working in equal, sustainable and meaningful collaboration with local authorities, researchers, practitioners, and other relevant stakeholders.

The project aims were to:

- Articulate a common understanding of challenges, needs, goals and solutions, and support capacity building amongst the Latin American organisations and community groups in Southwark
- Support networking of main Latin American community organisations in Southwark and build partnerships to strengthen members' resilience and the support they offer to their communities
- Achieve a closer and more effective relationship between Latin American communities and Southwark Council
- Co-produce programmes, events, workshops and relevant materials to address the community's needs.

The project explored community engagement approaches with the Latin American community in Southwark, its assets, and challenges, and offers recommendations and examples of best practice for working with the Latin American community in Southwark.

The report challenges homogeneous ideas of community and community engagement with the aim of highlighting the importance of power structures. The main conclusion is that there

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<sup>2</sup> There are many possible definitions to describe community engagement, but this report refers to the definition outlined in [Southwark's Community Engagement Approach](#) as "the process of involving people in the decisions that affect their lives", which "aims to create better relationships and greater trust and an equal exchange of viewpoints both peer to peer and between the council and other participants. [This can be achieved] through research, consultation, involvement, communication, networking, listening, learning, understanding devolved decision-making, supporting community action, building cohesion and developing long term relationships with different communities; all in ways that ensure that diverse places and people are enabled to fully take part." (2019: 02).

is a **clear need for a community engagement strategy** that attends to migrant communities, and in this case, the Latin American community, by (re)connecting community-building skills within the community to mitigate inequalities such as language barriers.

## METHODOLOGY:

The action-research primarily consisted of community work, ethnographic research and literature review and analysis. From April 2018 to June 2020, as lead researcher, I co-developed and delivered different community engagement projects, activities and events with several Latin American community organisations and groups in South London, including setting up and co-coordinating a Latin American Network Group in Southwark in partnership with Community Southwark (see appendix). Most of the activities were designed by exploring and implementing the main recommendations made by Mette Berg's report *Latin Americans In Southwark: Service Access and Provision*, commissioned by Southwark Council in 2014. Berg's report allowed this project to test new ideas and put into practice some of the suggestions made by the organisations, as detailed in the appendix.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with staff, trustees, and community workers from five Latin American organisations based in Southwark and Lambeth. During my time working alongside members of the Communities Division in Southwark Council and Community Southwark, I also interviewed other members of the Latin American community, national and local charities and stakeholders (such as Public Health Southwark, Clinical Commissioning Groups), as well as national charities and other voluntary groups working in the borough.<sup>3</sup> I also participated in several community events, meetings and workshops in the borough, which offered a valuable insight into the challenges faced by other migrant communities in South London.

This research builds on existing key academic research such as [Towards Visibility: The Latin American Community in London](#) (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016), [Latin Americans in Southwark: Service Access and Provision](#) (Berg, 2017) and *Chinese and Latin Americans in Southwark* (Pharoah et al, 2010). These reports find that key services such as education and health are poorly accessed by Latin American communities. This is partly because Latin Americans struggle to communicate in English sufficiently well to participate in civic life, but also due to their employment and housing conditions. The precarious socio-economic and legal situations that many Latin American face in London create a considerable dependence on community organisations and faith groups for support (Berg, 2017; McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016).

It should be noted that, in addition to the existing challenges, the research took place at a crucial time in history: at a national level, the UK's exit from the EU (aka Brexit), at a local level, a major regeneration project in Southwark; and the global COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in March 2020.

The intricacies of the political, economic, and social crisis that these diverse experiences implied, meant that the project required frequent review. When I started writing this report, the UK had left the EU. Brexit trade negotiations were temporarily put on hold by the COVID-

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<sup>3</sup> Although the organisations involved also work with the Brazilian, Portuguese-speaking communities as well as with other speakers from other language groups (such as Quechua), I mostly engaged with the Spanish-speaking communities in London, and the interviews as well as the activities were conducted in Spanish and English.

19 outbreak in March 2020. However, the talks were later resumed, and the transition period is likely to end on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2020.

The pandemic resulted in an unprecedented number of social and economic measures aimed at preventing the spread of the virus. The pandemic has had and will continue to have a substantial impact on our society, in particular on BAME communities.<sup>4</sup> While recovering from and readapting to what may be one of the greatest crises of modern history, community engagement has already changed when faced with such events.

Recently, Southwark Council launched [Southwark Stands Together Against Racism](#), a consultation in response to Black Lives Matter (BLM) to tackle racism and inequality in the borough. The Council also considered a series of actions, including the creation of a toolkit for reaching BAME communities in the borough and a review of grant funding (October Cabinet meeting). This report considers the impact of these events but acknowledges that more research will be needed to fully assess the effects of these events.<sup>5</sup>

## THE LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN SOUTHWARK

The Latin American community is diverse, formed by people from 20 countries, who are ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and geographically distinctive from each other.<sup>6</sup> “Latin American” is far from a homogenous term, and the community’s plurality should be considered when the ethnic category is used to group such diverse peoples together. While it is considered a rather recent migrant population, the Latin American migrant history in the UK has grown significantly in the last few decades. Three main migrant waves to the UK have been identified in the last half century: refugees who fled from political persecution and torture in the 1970s from the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay), Colombians who arrived in the 1970s and 1980s with work permits and escaped armed conflict in the 1980s and 1990s, and economic migrants who came to the UK via mainland Europe (mostly Spain), after the economic global crisis in 2008, and who now “form the bulk of Latin American migration to London and the UK more widely” (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016: 34).

The rather recent presence of Latin Americans in this country and the absence of direct connections with the Commonwealth (from where much of the UK migrant population originates) have been mentioned as contributing factors to the low support and understanding of the Latin American diaspora in the UK (Román-Velázquez, 1999). Lack of official data about the population’s size and characteristics has also contributed to the community’s invisibility. However, seminal academic reports such as *Towards Visibility* (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016), *Chinese and Latin Americans in Southwark* (Pharoah et al, 2010)

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<sup>4</sup> See Public Health England report: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-understanding-the-impact-on-bame-communities>

<sup>5</sup> See also *An Avoidable Crisis* report about the impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities: <https://www.lawrencereview.co.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> The term “Latin American” is used in this report as defined by the Latin American recognition campaign, and in line with previous research (e.g. McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016; Berg, 2017). It refers to the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking communities in Central, North and South America and the Caribbean, including Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela. But the term is problematic due to its colonial heritage and ethnic diversity, as briefly analysed in this report.

and *Latin Americans in Southwark: Service Access and Provision* (Berg, 2017), have helped to counterbalance the absence of official data about the community in the UK, and offer a comprehensive demographic overview of the community.

Reports based on the 2011 national census estimate that more than 145,000 Latin Americans lived in London in 2013 (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016). Although the overall **Latin American population may be higher due to undocumented or unauthorised migrants**, the existing figures alone make the **Latin American community larger in size than the Somali, Chinese and Romanian migrant groups in the UK** (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016; Berg 2017).

In Southwark, statistics based on the 2011 Census indicated that there were about 8,000 Latin America-born residents in the borough (Berg, 2017: 3). Again, although the number may seem rather small, **Latin American and African ethnicities “represent a relatively larger share of Southwark’s population compared to the national average”** (Berg, 2017: 5). Colombians and Brazilians represent the highest numbers within the Latin American population in Southwark (Krausova, 2015).

Those figures are highlighted by the fact that **Spanish is one of the most widely spoken migrant community languages in Southwark, and among the top five most requested community languages for interpreting and translation services in Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark** (CCG, 2019); over 120 languages are spoken in the borough.

With its great diversity, Southwark is a borough of great inequalities and high levels of poverty. Such inequalities include childhood obesity, the second highest rate of new STIs, the second highest prevalence of HIV in England, and high levels of knife crime. More significantly, in the last twenty years Southwark Council has implemented a major regeneration process, in particular around Elephant and Castle, which leave “Latin American and other migrant and ethnic groups, at risk of displacement and fragmentation” (Roman and Retris, 2020: 158).

At a national level, in the last ten years new migration laws have made migrant communities more vulnerable and less protected, and Latin Americans are no exception. The so-called “hostile environment” implemented by the UK Government since 2014 has prevented migrants from accessing mainstream benefits, housing, healthcare, education, work, bank accounts and drivers’ licences (Berg: 2019). The intricacy of the migration system developed in the last decade has also made it extremely hard for migrants to get access to public services, including reporting abuse to the police (Granada, McIlwaine, and Valenzuela-Oblitas, 2019). This has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has put many migrants in a more precarious financial position. Migrants whose immigration status lists “No recourse to public funds (NRPF)”, for instance, are unable to access Universal Credit.<sup>7</sup> As described by Latin American organisations, this has made migrants seek out alternative methods of survival more prone to exploitation and abuse. Such policies are placed within a national narrative that in the last decade has vilified migrant communities, creating new forms of alienation, disempowerment and disenfranchisement.

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<sup>7</sup> See the Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK (CLAUK) report: <http://www.clauk.org.uk/covid-19-and-the-latin-american-community-clauk-responds-to-the-women-and-equalities-committees-call-for-evidence/>  
See also the joint letter by CLAUK and Southwark Latin American Network Group: <http://www.clauk.org.uk/clauk-wrote-to-public-health-england-about-covid-19-and-the-latin-american-community/>

## CHALLENGES FACED BY LATIN AMERICANS

As a predominately young community, with high literacy and education levels, the Latin American community is active and willing to participate in civic life. However, the community feels underrepresented, under-recognised, and disregarded by the local government (Pharaoh, 2010: 3). Structural inequalities (such as undocumented status) make a large proportion of the community more vulnerable, and unable to be more fully and equally engaged. Indeed, despite being well-educated and having high levels of employment, Latin Americans are usually employed in low-paid and low-skilled jobs (such as cleaning and hospitality services) with weak labour protection and few opportunities for engagement (McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker, 2011: 4). Latin Americans in London go through a process of de-skilling which has a significant impact on their wellbeing (McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker, 2011).

A significant proportion of the community faces substantial barriers to accessing key services such as education and health, and are susceptible to discrimination, exploitation, and abuse (Berg, 2017; de la Silva, Granada and Modern, 2019; McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016). This is despite the fact that 68% of Latin Americans living in Southwark have a UK passport compared to 24% with a non-UK European passport (Krausova, 2015: 8). Currently, citizens of any country in the European Economic Area (EEA) are entitled to work study and use the NHS in the UK.<sup>8</sup> They can also claim benefits and get help with housing from the local council (until 30 June 2021). However, as reported by the Latin American organisations, little available information about how the system works means that many Latin Americans are not always fully aware about the type of services and/or benefits they are entitled to access and claim. This positions the **Latin American community within a broader legal framework which means that legal entitlement does not always lead to engagement** (e.g. service access and civic participation) (Berg, 2017; Gideon, 2011; McIlwaine et al, 2011). **Structural inequalities largely affect community engagement and civic participation.**

As Berg and Krausova note, the heterogeneity of the Latin American community in Southwark is evident in the **socio-economic differences among the different nationalities**. For instance, Bolivians make up the highest number of residents in large households in Southwark, followed by Ecuadoreans, whereas Chileans and Mexicans tend to live in smaller households (Krausova, 2015: 10). Most members of the Latin American population in Southwark do not have dependent children, but 65% of Ecuadoreans and 64% of Bolivians have three or more children (Krausova, 2015: 11). Despite some stark socio-economic differences depending on country of birth, **proficiency in English has been identified as one of the most significant barriers to engagement amongst most Latin Americans**, which also results in limited educational and employment opportunities, lower wages, poor housing, and health conditions (Berg, 2017; Granada, 2014; McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016). The next section looks into this in more detail.

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<sup>8</sup> Most EU citizens who arrive before the end of the transition period and intend to stay in the UK must take action and apply for either Settled Status or pre-Settled Status by 30 June 2021.



## RETHINKING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

Language barriers play a significant role in preventing Latin Americans from accessing key services such as health services, and more broadly, from engaging confidently and independently in civic life. Furthermore, services and engagement opportunities are not always ready to meet or adapt to the community's needs and fail to offer a comprehensive response to engagement with migrant communities. Lack of knowledge about services and entitlements by the Latin American population and poor understanding of the community by service providers deepen this lack of engagement and build further barriers, as a Latin American Sexual Health Service Manager points out:

When [Latin Americans] look for a General Practice Surgery (GP), language is the main issue, since GPs do not have people who speak Spanish. For instance, you can have a receptionist under lots of pressure who might not be particularly patient [and be able to communicate accordingly or effectively], and then, this puts the patient off.

Lack of official information about vital aspects of civic life makes it harder for Latin Americans to engage more effectively:

[...] From what I see from our services it is not a question of [their skills]. It is the system they are coming into. They are used to a kind of different system in South America or in Spain. They are not aware of the benefits they can get here, and even, I mean, there are barriers within the services as well. We have the NHS, which is free health service, which, you know, is great, but there are issues within that. For example, not all our service users know that they can get translators for their GP appointments, and even some GPs were asking them to bring their children to translate for them, which is obviously very problematic. [...] Language is obviously [...] the main barrier, but of course, there is a multitude of them.

In terms of mental health, a survey study conducted by the University of Leeds in 2015 collected the views of 37 Latin American women residing in Southwark and found that 72% of the women surveyed did not know how to access mental health services locally. In addition, the research illustrates that of all NHS services, mental health services were the least known by the surveyed group (Mas Giralt and Granada, 2015). Language and cultural barriers are also key factors preventing migrant women from reporting gender-based violence, and preventing women from accessing services such as refuges due to the lack of bilingual staff and resources (Granada et al, 2019).<sup>9</sup>

As highlighted, language barriers intersect with other structural inequalities and institutional barriers, such as accessibility of services for the community. As a Latin American Youth coordinator explains:

[I]t is not a question of ability or skills, it is actually more about the accessibility of the services, and due to the labour they are in, the salaries are low, which means they rent, and have to pay high rents, which often means that they live in overcrowded accommodation, often families in one bedroom. [...] in a three-bedroom flat you have

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<sup>9</sup> Although these issues might be more broadly experienced by other groups and residents in Southwark, it is helpful to look at the community's cultural heritage and history, as well as the community's assets, to reframe community engagement approaches and methods, as suggested later on in this report.

three families there, which obviously... is going to be very impactful on their general wellbeing [...] and put a big pressure on everybody.

As a result, Latin Americans, like other migrant communities, resort to different strategies to understand the system and access services. As existing research shows, accessing and using health services:

requires considerable work on the part of [migrants] since they have to mobilise a range of resources, including knowledge and information resources, social, language and support resources, and practical resources [...] in order to secure health care where access to formal health services is limited (Gideon, 2011: 200).

Whereas individuals may seek those alternatives and navigate the intricate administrative language of public services, Latin American community organisations and volunteering groups fill the void by offering key services and support where it is needed.<sup>10</sup>

If language acquisition alone is seen as a barrier, the problem will remain as the sole responsibility of the individual rather than a political decision. The current UK Government's narrative around migration tends to place the responsibility for English language learning on the community. The government's Green Paper published in March 2018 suggests that some immigrants fail to learn English and are therefore unable to integrate (HM Government, 2018: 35).

The high costs associated with translation and interpreting services and the limitations of such resources have also been indicated as unsustainable and, at times, inefficient.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the organisations contest this view and align their vision with a broader research body that recognises language barriers as part of multiple and interlinked barriers faced by migrants. Indeed, language learning is a long process that requires time and resources not always easily accessed by the community:

In the case of the Latin American communities, due to their working conditions, most of them work in the cleaning industry, and therefore, they do not have the same access to most of the language classes available. People working long and antisocial hours need lots of motivation to sit down and learn English. When they go to the classes at 10 or 11am, they are exhausted. We need to find a solution for that (Sexual Health Service Manager).

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<sup>10</sup> Some of these services have been funded by the Council through different grants such as Common Purpose. However, as explained by the interviewees, specialist Latin American organisations often absorb referrals from larger funded-organisations and are asked to provide information in community languages or support users/communities, with no extra funding available to them.

<sup>11</sup> Projects such as [Multilingual Manchester](https://www.manchester.gov.uk/multilingual-manchester) promote awareness of language diversity in the city-region, and have been fully supported by the Council. NHS Scotland provides translations in main migrant community languages and BSL: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/translations>. The Scottish Parliament also includes a section with translations, stating it is "committed to being accessible to all people who are resident in Scotland and encouraging their participation in its work". The Scottish Parliament is also a member of Happy to Translate, a national initiative developed to promote equal access to services by overcoming language barriers. The Scottish Parliament: <https://www.parliament.scot/help/1679.aspx>. The City of Edinburgh Council offers translations upon request, and Glasgow City Council includes a translate page using Google Translate: <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/article/25396/Translate-page>.

Part of the solution is to provide vital information in migrant community languages and create more suitable avenues to access language learning opportunities:

[The community] need[s] to have the information in Spanish. There are lots of Spanish speakers in [the borough], [so] Southwark Council needs to think about how they can provide information and services in Spanish [to cater] for the needs of the Latin American community. It is not because the Latin Americans do not want to learn English, it is a [necessary] transition until they learn the language (Director of a Latin American Mental Health charity).

Most Latin American organisations in Southwark provide their own translations, and such resources were vital during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, but resources are limited, and information is mostly accessed by their users/communities. In this sense, organisations mention the need for national and local campaigns in community languages to inform, engage and empower communities. Engagement in health care is an important point in case:

They must do more information campaigns [in the target community languages] to show how people can have access to public services. I think they should do more health campaigns and promotion, and also involve community leaders, people who are known to the communities, people who are trusted by the communities (Director of a Latin American Mental Health Charity).

Target campaigns in community languages are described by many staff members at local organisations as a way to foster a welcoming relationship, trust and sense of belonging:

Information is the key. Information is power to allow [the communities] to get access to the services by themselves. It is important to give the information in different languages. [The Council] should do more information campaigns [in community languages].

Several organisations, such as Latin Elephant, advocate for a multicultural and multilingual borough in key locations such as Elephant and Castle. They have argued that, in particular in these key urban spaces, multi-ethnic public environments such as the Elephant and Castle business area are places where migrant community languages have played a transformative role in the local economy and social cohesion (Román Velázquez: 2009). Substantial academic research, including this Open World Research Initiative project, has demonstrated the positive impacts of community, indigenous and foreign languages on the British economy and society in key areas such as social cohesion, social mobility and equality, health and wellbeing.<sup>12</sup>

In the recent book *Multilingualism and Politics: Revisiting Multilingual Citizenship*, Katerina Strani argues that migrant's own languages and "the multilingualism they bring to communities, are 'invisible and, implicitly, undervalued' (Nikula et al. 2012, p. 62) along with their actual language practices" (2020: 26). Strani maintains that people who "deliberate in a language different from the dominant one, would fall under the category of minority 'counterpublics' (Fraser 1993) or 'emergent collectives' fighting for recognition" to gain an equal place and space in the public sphere (26). As the next section analyses it, ethnic recognition should therefore come with the recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity, and a community engagement approach should include a language strategy for such a

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<sup>12</sup> See: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/publications/ahrc-the-power-of-languages/>

multilingual region with high levels of migration, as a key priority for social justice and civic participation.<sup>13</sup>

## BEYOND RECOGNITION

The recognition of Latin Americans as an ethnic minority in the UK has been long claimed by the Latin American community and organisations using several and often competing approaches and strategies. In 2010, the Latin American Recognition Campaign (LARC) was created “to provide an alternative to a campaign called Alianza Iberoamericana (Iberoamerican Alliance, AIU), which “was lobbying for an official category for all Spanish and Portuguese-speaking people” (Granada, 2014: 171). Whereas LARC campaigned for the official recognition of Latin Americans as an ethnic minority in the UK, AIU considered the political advantage of including a broader community representation not restricted to Latin Americans (Granada, 2014).

AIU contributed to the development of the Metropolitan Police Ibero-American Association (MPIAA) and Amigo Month, a cultural celebration of the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking communities in the UK, both of which continue today. At the same time, LARC continued developing their work through the [Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK \(CLAUK\)](#), which met for the first time in July 2011, and achieved the recognition of Latin Americans as an ethnic group in Southwark in 2012.<sup>14</sup> This was a significant accomplishment. CLAUK members have continued working together in key areas of advocacy for the recognition and rights of the Latin American community in England. More recently, Latin Citizens UK has also taken up a similar campaign with the Office of National Statistics (ONS), and groups such as LatinXcluded have achieved the recognition of “Latinx” in the Arts Council in England.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, the different campaigns for recognition have played a vital role in the community’s identity, strength and development.<sup>16</sup> Such campaigns show the ability and experience of the community when engaging in civic participation, even if differences and discrepancies arise from those actions. Questions about community formation, representation and legitimacy were frequently raised, contested and addressed at our Latin American Network in Southwark meetings (see appendix). This is particularly useful for understanding the community’s identity politics, power dynamics and intragroup differences.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Granada’s research on the Latin American community, language, integration and ethnic identity (2014).

<sup>14</sup> Members of CLAUK are: Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation, Latin American Disabled People’s Project, Latin American Women’s Rights Service, Latin Elephant, Latin American House, Latin American Women’s Aid, Movimiento Ecuador en el Reino Unido, Naz Latina, VOADES UK (former Teléfono de la Esperanza, TEUK), The Prisma Newspaper, and CASA Latin American Theatre.

<sup>15</sup> “Latinx” is used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino/Latina.

<sup>16</sup> The term “Latin” was created by the French Empire to designate all the countries south of the United States that shared a common language derived from Latin (French, Portuguese and Spanish). Such a designation evokes the region’s colonial history and legacy, and carries a heavy load of discrimination, violence, and obliteration. The term is, therefore, problematic, so acknowledging such heritage would be helpful to understand the complexity of the communities in question.

<sup>17</sup> See for instance, Márquez Reiter and Patiño’s sociolinguistic discussion about “banal interculturalism” amongst Spanish-speaking Latin Americans in Elephant and Castle. The authors look at how internal relations amongst Latin Americans are exercised and constructed, for instance, in terms of hierarchies based on migrant trajectories and national identity stereotypes within the community itself (2019).

Southwark Council has maintained a long-term interest in engaging with the Latin American community in the borough, by hosting, for instance, the Latin American Festival in Burgess Park, which was deemed Europe's largest outdoor Latin American festival.<sup>18</sup> In its preparation for conducting the Census 2011, the Council commissioned a report on the seldom heard communities in Southwark, often referred to as "hidden" communities, entitled *Uncovering Community: Chinese and Latin Americans in Southwark* (ESRO, 2010). The report was used in developing its community engagement and participation in the Census and afterwards. After a successful campaign led by CLAUUK, Southwark became the first London borough to officially recognise Latin Americans as an ethnic group, followed by Lambeth (2013), Islington (2014), Hackney (2014), and the GLA group (2016).

Despite this achievement, eight years after Southwark Council included "Latin American" as an ethnic group on its monitoring forms, statistics remain scattered. On the one hand, the lack of official data makes it harder to assess the community's levels of engagement. As a result, without available public data in key areas such as health, the Latin American community will remain marginalised from mainstream services and commissioning opportunities. The availability and dissemination of data is vital to underpin commissioning decisions related to reducing inequalities. For instance, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment in Southwark (JSNAS) does not include statistics on Latin American communities. Such data, although it might not necessarily be conclusive and universal, is vital in community planning and development. Indeed, Latin American organisations point to the need for public bodies to publish data to support the community's inclusion in service planning and delivery (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016; Berg, 2017).

What seems evident when reading previous reports and listening to the voices of Latin American community members is that, despite an increasing body of available literature on the Latin American community in the UK (see bibliography) which repeatedly indicates similar findings, national and local strategies designed to tackle those issues have yet to be implemented. Although Southwark Council has developed several strategies, policies and initiatives to tackle some of the issues mentioned above, a clearer, more targeted approach regarding the Latin American community specifically is mentioned by organisations as the central aspect in the discussion around community engagement and planning. Many of the organisations share frustration over the lack of recognition of their achievements and presence, and the feeling that despite a long history of political participation in the UK, the community is still under-resourced, misrepresented and underrepresented, and effectively disenfranchised.

It is clear, therefore, that developing a strategy which sets out and communicates how and why data should be collected between the different service providers in the borough is an important step. It would provide a necessary resource, especially in key areas such as sexual and mental health. Pulling together resources from academia, statutory bodies, service providers, and the third sector would help create a better understanding of where, when, and how public services and resources need to be created or improved for the community.

Data knowledge should also be considered in relation to other sources of information, which include organisations' own data and intelligence, alongside personal stories and testimonies (Sarkissian and Hurford, 2010: 7). This is because data regarding ethnicity presents challenges,

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<sup>18</sup> However, the Council stopped funding the festival in 2011.



e.g. language barriers; self-identification might differ from the given ethnic category, which in the case of the Latin American community becomes complex due to its multiethnicity; lack of understanding or trust of the purpose of data collection; lack of resources in primary care settings, or indeed lack of engagement generally. In this sense, a longstanding strategy and approach to promoting sustainable engagement with linguistically diverse communities would acknowledge and address these issues by working with the community and service providers, and commissioners.

However, recognition of the Latin American community should also go beyond “the static picture of the population” (Krausova, 2015). Group dialogue and reflection have been suggested by some organisations as complementary forms of data collection. Such dialogue should be seen as an ongoing critical process and has been a key aspect in the implementation of the Southwark Latin American Network, as part of this research (see appendix).

Recognition and representation are not necessarily interchangeable terms, and the organisations speak about the recognition of their voice, and their knowledge, not as advisors, but as **agents** of change. Such recognition should also acknowledge the implications and differences in cross-cultural contexts. Recognition thus implies a wider acknowledgement and deeper understanding of the community, in which “status and privilege are unequally available to different groups based on how they conform to hegemonic ideals of what is constructed as normative” (Akwugo, 1997: 5). This needs to translate into a clear local language policy that embraces multilingualism not only as a key factor for social justice but also as an asset, as something to be proud of and cherished.

## THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

**“If you are constantly moved, what beautiful house are you going to be able to build? The Latin American community in Southwark is homeless, and it does not have its own front door key”** (Trustee from a Latin American community organisation in Southwark)

Discussing community engagement at a time of significant redevelopment in Southwark is vital as well as extremely challenging. There is a clear mismatch between the vision of those who support regeneration as a way of improving the area, and that of those who believe that the regeneration process, specifically in Elephant and Castle, is a form of “social cleansing” which benefits developers and disadvantages local residents. BAME communities in the borough feel particularly affected and disenfranchised. Significantly, in the case of the Latin American community, both of the two most visible physical places and community spaces used by the Latin American community - the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre in Southwark and the Seven Sisters Market in Tottenham - have been under threat of demolition for years. At the time of writing, the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre has closed down and is soon to be demolished. Although most traders have been relocated, the regeneration has been a challenging process. Román-Velázquez has long studied and documented the Latin American community’s impact in the area, stating that Latin Americans “have not only participated in the economy of the area, but over a period of time have transformed it”, creating a place largely identified by the community as a vital social and cultural space (2014:

91). For many, the demolition of the shopping centre is symptomatic of a wider approach to migrant and BAME communities in the borough: a dismissal of their presence and contribution, and of their own efforts to create and recreate places of identity and belonging (Román-Velázquez and Retis, 2020).<sup>19</sup> Copious research on migration has argued that:

‘[p]lace-making’ by migrant populations has long been seen as an essential strategic response to the alienation, isolation and difference experienced by newcomers, helping to cement new identities, and sustain and empower marginalised communities (Phillips and Robinson, 2015: 8)

A grassroots Latin American organisation based in Southwark spoke about how despite its long and evident presence in Elephant and Castle, it has been given little recognition and repeatedly offered sub-standard venue accommodation. Every time it has been given a place, it has been evicted without an alternative. Organisation members expressed their frustration over the difficulty of developing any possible form of engagement without a place in which to establish roots and grow:

The expectation of Southwark Council is [that we are] professional, and that is when it collapses...because it is not sustainable. We would love to have all these systems in place... You try it, if every five minutes you have to pack your suitcase and move somewhere else. (Trustee from a Latin American organisation)

Community engagement, place-making, social cohesion, and integration are, in this sense, interconnected. The creation of a clear engagement strategy with the Latin American community by the local government is seen as a key factor for building a sustainable relationship between decision-makers and the community. The lack of an engagement approach with the Latin American community is perceived by the interviewees as evidence that Southwark Council does not consider the community to be of much relevance. A Trustee, sarcastically, pointed out:

I thought there must be a policy in Southwark Council about not letting the Latin American community get too strong. So, if you destabilise people, they will not be able to have roots.

There is the view that, apart from a couple of initiatives spread across the last 8 years, the Latin American communities have not been properly consulted or reached out to by the Council:

I am really struggling to think of when [Southwark Council] initiated a collaboration with us. So apart from Southwark Conversation when one of their workers came to one of our groups... [I cannot think of any other form of engagement]. [S]o I feel that it would be very good to have a stronger communication channel with [the Latin American organisations in the borough]. (Latin American Youth Coordinator)

While consultations are acknowledged as a form of engagement, they are not necessarily seen as effective. On the one hand, they are perceived as an “accountability exercise” created by the local government (Román-Velázquez, 2014: 97), or as a “tick-box exercise”, in the

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<sup>19</sup> McIlwaine and Bunge note that Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre played a particular important social role for the working classes: “Qualitative data shows that people from all socio-economic backgrounds used [the shopping areas such as Elephant and Castle and Seven Sisters] although the working classes tend to use them more regularly” (2016: 109).

words of some members of the community. On the other hand, if consultations are written in English on the Council's website (with a few exceptions, such as Southwark Conversation), as a process, they are considered not to be fit-for-purpose when language competence excludes community members from these modes of participation.

Latin American organisations speak about the need for Southwark Council to consider how different voices might gain equal access to decision-making. Organisations are willing to work in a closer relationship with Southwark Council, but highlight the lack of collaboration from the Council. As one of the interviewees expresses:

So for example, in regards to the consultations, I am sure [the consultations are] on [Southwark Council's] website, but I think they should contact us [the Latin American organisations in Southwark]; they should send us an email, even if it is a forward message: "There is this consultation. There is such consultation". I mean, as something as simple as that. Once you have done that, we can spread the word as well, which is again, you know, part of our work and it is part of the Council's work; that is simple partnership working.

Articulating complex thoughts in highly politicised monolingual environments can be a challenge for many Latin American members. While language proficiency might not be a tangible barrier, "power differentials are clear between competent and non-competent speakers" (Strani, 2020: 2). This implies a wider acknowledgement of unequal access to spaces of power, where public consultations, such as Council Committees, are also seen as asymmetrical forms of participation:

For me to go to a meeting at a Culture Advisory Meeting on Tooley Street takes money and time. Costs of participation from organisations are not taken into account. All these guys on big fat salaries do not acknowledge existing inequalities in terms of participation. (Trustee from a Latin American organisation)

Such unequal access to decision-making creates unequal power relationships which defeat the purpose of community engagement and further division:

[It is] not enough to hold a meeting somewhere in a building they have never been to. If you want to engage with the community, you need to go where the [community is], otherwise you are going to make a great event, and nobody is going to come. (Trustee from a Latin American organisation)

In their recent book, Román-Velázquez and Retis speak about a sharp contrast between community-led initiatives which address local communities' needs and "private-public sector-led consultations that seek to address the aspirations of a professional and highly skilled population" (2020: 159). Such a contrast results in distrust and scepticism, as well as resentment of a relationship generally perceived as unequal, paternalistic, patronising and racist.

More robust channels of communication are mentioned which could be part of a comprehensive strategy for reaching out to the Latin American communities with a more holistic and long-term approach to engagement:

Instead of giving us “bits and bobs” of grants. Look at the bigger picture. Since what happens in Southwark fits into the national government. (Trustee from a Latin American organisation)

This view is echoed by the CEO of a mental health charity, who stresses the need to focus on the community’s key priority areas, such as housing, employment, mental health and wellbeing, as well as the need to utilise a more integrated and articulated approach to community engagement with the Latin American community:

How can we improve people’s lives in London? Are we going to leave local schools to deal with all these issues? Or are we going to work in partnership to address the different communities’ needs? We need to articulate a programme in the longer term. Not like a “ping-pong” plan. The local government should create a responsible [and sustainable] plan to work with the Latin American community and improve their wellbeing from a more comprehensive approach.

The need for a rooted, physical space for the community in the borough is seen as integral to such a strategy:

You cannot expect anything to be achieved without an identity of space. [...] Everything we have set up collapses because the roots are removed from us. This creates conflicts within the community. Establish a healthy, happy, beautiful, fulfilling lifestyle for the Latin American community in Southwark. [We need] a place where the community can be a host and not a visitor. (Trustee from a Latin American organisation)

This view is echoed by other members:

[One of our needs] is to find physical spaces where people can find out about opportunities. [A place where people] can go and have a coffee and read some literature or meet someone to have a chat... get some dance lessons, etc. [I would like] to see a place, like the Wellbeing Hub but for migrant communities, where information is available in community languages, in a way that is accessible to the community, created by the community and for the community. (Director of a migrant mental health charity)

Engagement is seen as an ongoing process for building and maintaining a closer and reciprocal relationship, where participants are able to build a wider, more equal and inclusive form of participation:

You need to get to know people, at the end of the day, engagement is about people-to-people contact, so they need to know your face, they need to know your name, and you need to show that you are going to listen to them, and then you are going to do what you can to create something from that. (Youth Coordinator)

Organisations express their willingness to collaborate with the Council, where their work and leadership is not only respected but also supported, and suggest a more personal and direct, welcoming and sustainable type of relationship, which can counterbalance such inequalities:

One of the best ways to engage with the Latin American community is to go and speak to the organisations who are directly working with them; [...] contact services that also going to have a high population of Latin American attendance or participants, such as

the schools and GP services, so you can find out about the percentage, then you can translate your materials for them, and take it from there. (Youth Coordinator)

In sum, justice as recognition needs to be focused on the creation, development and sustainability of community and communal spaces (physical and dialogic) where migrant communities can counterbalance power relations (Akwugo, 1997). The creation of the Latin American network in Southwark in 2018 has been an important step forward for discussing some of these issues, and for creating such dialogic spaces between the Latin American organisations in Southwark and Southwark Council.

## BRIDGES TO ENGAGEMENT

Southwark's new approach to community engagement report published in 2019, highlights the asset-based approach to community development (aka ABCD) as the foundation for the Council's engagement work with communities. This section offers an overview of the community's rich heritage, skills, and strengths as indicative of the community's own capacity to grow, integrate, participate and contribute to social justice.

The Latin American community is a resilient and thriving community that has significant impact in the borough. From the local businesses that fill the streets and the shopping centre in and around Elephant and Castle, to the creative industries that nurture the economy, the Latin American community is an active community willing to engage, integrate and contribute to the host country. Indeed, the community has developed cultural events in and around Southwark, such as [Carnaval del Pueblo's](#) Latin American festival (McIwaine, 2012: 5), which in 2007 gathered around 130,000 people in Burgess Park.

Usually misrepresented by the media as a region of drug-related violence, human rights abuses and poverty, **Latin America has a strong history of resistance and solidarity, collective activism and innovative forms of civic participation.** Particularly in the 1990s, social movements led by women, indigenous communities, and the landless created new forms of civic participation across the continent. These ranged widely, and included the Indigenous autonomous community assemblies in Mexico, which created their own forms of governance, political and legal organisations in the 1990s (Mignolo, 2006: 124); the model of participatory budget which emerged in Brazil and is now used in countries such as [Scotland](#); and the Cartoneras grassroots initiative, which catalysed civic participation and activism within vulnerable and marginalised communities.<sup>20</sup> Other significant examples of innovative grassroots forms of community organising, and familiar to many Latin Americans, are the creation of community swap markets in Argentina and Uruguay after the 2001 economic crisis, community mapping to regain ancestral lands by indigenous populations, or communal cooking organised by women in countries such as Peru. Grassroots women's groups and collectives in Latin America are excellent examples of activism and civic participation and have played a vital role in decision-making and political change in many countries in the region. Most recently, street protests in Chile led to a referendum, where 78% of Chileans voted in

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<sup>20</sup> As part of our creative engagement work with the Latin American community in Southwark, we co-developed a Cartoneras project in collaboration with the Latin American Youth Forum from the Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation and the University of Surrey, the British Library and the Migration Museum. For more information see Appendix X.



favour of re-writing the constitution imposed on them during Augusto Pinochet's brutal dictatorship, and decided that the new constitution should be drafted by ordinary citizens.

Indigenous philosophical concepts such as “sumak kawsay” in Quechua, or “suma qamaña” in Aymara, which roughly translate as “buen vivir” or “vivir bien” in Spanish, and as “good living” or “living well” in English, are very popular concepts present in the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador (Gudynas, 2011). These traditional indigenous concepts consider wellbeing as part of a harmonious non-hierarchical coexistence with nature and the community. Such notions represent “powerful cultural innovations and capabilities rooted in the indigenous knowledge and traditions” of the relevant regions (Gudynas, 2011: 444). Brazilian educator [Paulo Freire](#)'s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) has been widely studied in community development theories and practices. One of Freire's central ideas is how dominant narratives are internalised by people in a way that dehumanises the most vulnerable and marginalised members of the society. As Margaret Ledwith explains, “[u]nderstanding the way power works systematically to silence people is at the core of Freire's thinking” (2016: 24). Freire's critical pedagogy approach is not only about identifying inequalities but questioning and challenging the root causes of social injustice (2016: 25).<sup>21</sup> Community development in Freire's thinking is, therefore, understood as a democratic process of critical consciousness, as a form of empowerment and collective action.

All these concepts and initiatives are important in order to understand how diverse ideas and discourses around community engagement and community development are at play when engaging with Latin American communities in the UK. When we discuss culturally-informed approaches to community engagement, we should consider the rich heritages, knowledges and experience that can significantly contribute to engagement methods and practices; the examples above are only a short list of such contexts.

Drawing on this heritage, **Latin American community organisations in Southwark are testimony to a collective and innovative approach to community development and community engagement.** With almost five decades of advocating for the rights of the Latin American communities in London, organisations such as Latin American Women's Rights Service ([LAWRS](#)), have led ground-breaking campaigns, such as [Step Up Migrant Women](#), and have reached out to other communities and stakeholders at local, national and transnational levels. Many of the Latin American organisations and groups have long been engaged in civic participation as a means of seeking social justice. Community organisation members speak about the Latin American community's potential for engagement:

[...] The Latin American community [is a] very proactive community [...]. They [are] very willing to give their ideas, share what is going on for them, and to contribute to creating change. But you have to be real with that, you have to come to listening to their ideas, and then collaborate. You know, [...] it is about collaboration. (Youth Coordinator)

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<sup>21</sup> Ledwith's book offers clear examples of Paulo Freire's theory put into practice for community workers in the UK.

They also highlight the community's strengths:

The community has the knowledge and the resources. Lots of people who bring different skills. There are brilliant academics in the community. (Trustee)

In their recent book, Román-Velázquez and Retis similarly argue that the Latin American community in London is empowered through culture and the arts, and they do so by creating cultural and safe spaces “to build communities of resistance, belongingness and a sense of social justice” (2020: 2). Román-Velázquez and Retis refer to a series of initiatives, activities and events, such as the [Festival of Latin American Women \(FLAWA\)](#), LAWRS’ Sin Fronteras Youth Group, and the importance of Latin American community media, which demonstrate effective forms of creative engagement and community development, as explored in some of our projects (see appendix). Latin American social and professional networks abound across the internet, and the community is highly successful in reaching out beyond its own groups.

The examples above offer an overview of a community that values collective action. Data gathered during my research points to the interest of the community “to come together” and have more communal spaces and community events. Members of the community speak about the importance of family, local, national, and transnational social networks as fundamental anchors for integration, social cohesion, and a sense of belonging. Feedback surveys conducted at the many community events we co-organised with Latin American organisations in Southwark from 2018 to 2019 tell us that public libraries, museums and art galleries, parks and green spaces are the most frequent places attended by the community in Southwark (see appendix).<sup>22</sup>

Spaces of worship, in particular Catholic churches, are valued by a large sector of the Latin American community, and the Council has supported initiatives run by local churches, such as food banks.<sup>23</sup> Community engagement activities and events organised by and for the community are well attended and provide important opportunities for meaningful participation. For instance, large cultural events such as the Latin American Festival have served as unique opportunities for recruiting people for the Metropolitan Police. Latin American solidarity groups in the UK also offer instances of transnational community engagement and are important channels for civic participation and community building. Mutual Aid groups emerged during the COVID-19 lockdown and offered essential support for many people. The Latin American community was no exception in organising to provide support and vital supplies for destitute residents in the borough.

Despite all these actions, community engagement led by the Council is still described by members of the community as a bureaucratic process where migrant communities are seen as passive recipients of policy making rather than as active members of an ever-changing political scenario. Interviewees were very transparent in pointing out the challenges faced by the community and the discrepancies within it, but equally clear about the community's capabilities and strengths.

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<sup>22</sup> See also McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016, Chapter 9.

<sup>23</sup> Places of worship also have their own needs and present some additional challenges and issues, which should need to be considered within a Latin American context. For instance, Evans and McIlwaine noted that “Brazilian churches in London, especially evangelical denominations, often prevented women reporting Gender-Based Violence due to a policy of encouraging women to stay in their relationship and censoring divorce” (2017: 7).

## CONCLUSION

Southwark Council's new approach to community engagement was developed during the period of my research, and included a series of workshops held in Cambridge House, which led to the creation of a report published in September 2019. The [Council's Approach to Community Engagement](#) is mindful of the borough's different characteristics of its local communities and takes a clear stance on the Council's equality duty. The community approach also makes a clear reference to the Latin American community: "We will develop ongoing relationships with different organisations that are already connected to 'the seldom heard' so that we can call on them to foster participation, such as TRAs, faith organisations, [and] Latin American groups" (2019: 2). However, little is said about community languages, which is an essential factor when engaging with linguistically diverse migrant communities.

In response, Latin American organisations praised some of the actions taken by the Council, in particular, the precedent-setting recognition of Latin Americans as an ethnic group, the commissioning of research, and the available funding opportunities for the community. However, during my research, there was a clear discursive antagonism between the Latin American community organisations and the Council, which has been exacerbated by the urban regeneration process in the borough. Interviewees usually spoke in terms of "the Council" and "us", as two opposing political and discursive forces seeking different aims and with different values. This divide has further complicated the relationship between the community and the Council at a time of regeneration and funding cuts.

As suggested by the Latin American organisations, a well-defined, long-term strategy to work with the Latin American community would help to co-develop a regular and consistent pattern of actions rather than stand-alone activities or consultations. Once recognition has been achieved, the organisations expect that it would translate into better representation and interaction, as well as funding and commissioning opportunities. Coordination and collaboration across disciplines, departments and organisations is seminal for a successful outcome. Such a strategy would need to include a physical space where the community could feel rooted, and able to host and carry out its activities and services. A long-term organisational strategy for community engagement with the Latin American community is required to continue building mutual trust and more meaningful forms of collaboration.

As described in the appendix, the Southwark Latin American Network was developed early on during this research to work on the issues outlined in this report, with the aim to work on the existing findings and develop stronger links between the Council and the Latin American organisations in the borough.

## SUGGESTED APPROACHES AND METHODS TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This section suggests approaches to community engagement with the Latin American community and offers a set of further recommendations, building on the co-development and delivery of the projects described below.



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### INTERSECTIONALITY

The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. The concept emphasizes the multiple avenues through which social categories such as race, class and gender intersect in power imbalances. As we begin to recognise and understand the Latin American community in the UK from a broader perspective, it is important to consider how inequalities such as social class, migration status, ethnicity and gender, and many others, play a significant role in community engagement with migrant communities. Such recognition also prompts us to co-design a more integral approach to representation and participation which recognises the community's heterogeneity, and its linguistic and cultural diversity. Organisations and community members point out how an intersectional approach would identify existing structural inequalities within the community, and how such an approach could enhance service provision and engagement in Southwark more suited to the Latin American community.

## COMMUNITY LANGUAGES

Effective engagement with migrant communities involves the support and development of the community's skills and confidence. However, if language works as a barrier, and communities are unable to get access to basic information in their community language, it is likely that those members will become either dependent on help or further isolated. Access to key information in the main community languages (Spanish and Portuguese) should be a strategic priority in the Council's approach to migrant communities, and in the promotion of equality and accessibility. In considering legally protected characteristics, such as race/ethnicity, language cannot be disassociated from such characteristics when working with BAME and migrant communities.

Southwark Council is proud of its diversity, and this should translate more clearly and effectively to its approach to community engagement. Additionally, as part of an equality strategy it should develop a language policy across Council departments.

## CREATIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Creativity plays a vital role in transformative and effective community engagement processes and practices in cross-cultural contexts. Creativity should be understood as a source of free expression, adaptability and innovation, and an alternative to more bureaucratic forms of consultations. Members of relevant Latin American organisations are also in agreement regarding the creation of different types of community engagement practices and methods depending on the communities' specificities and needs. Social interaction is mentioned as a key method for enhancing community engagement. In particular, the act of sharing a meal is also cited as a popular form of engagement and as a welcoming approach by the Latin American communities. A combination of creative and more formal approaches should also be co-produced as a comprehensive plan for social integration and community participation.

## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

A second generation of UK-based Latin Americans is a fairly recent development, in contrast to more established migrant communities. McIlwaine and Bunge's research found that "second-generation Latin Americans [are] young, most likely to be born to Latin American mothers, have Colombian parents and identify as 'British Latino'", "maintain links with their Latin American heritage", and that "almost two-thirds have experienced discrimination, especially workplace abuses, educational racism and police harassment" (2016: 110). The "second generation" might also include young Latin Americans who relocated at a young age and were educated in the UK. McIlwaine and Bunge also note that second-generation Latin Americans are economically and socially vulnerable (2016: 110) but might be hidden from official statistics.

It is interesting to note that all the interviewees in this research mentioned the need to focus on the younger generation. On the one hand, there is hope that new generations will be able to continue advocating for the rights of the community and will lead the community to an improved stage. On the other hand, others see the new generation (or second-generation Latin American) as a critical factor regarding monitoring. There is a sense that new generations might not identify themselves as Latin Americans and might be subject to similar or new barriers.<sup>24</sup> Such engagement approach is vital in order to challenge preconceptions

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<sup>24</sup> We refer to "second generation" as Latin Americans born in the UK with at least one parent born in one of the 20 Latin American countries (McIlwaine et al, 2011).



and stereotypes and foster a sense of belonging based in both British and the community's diverse heritage and background. The younger generations are seen as a "good role model to develop", because they "have all the knowledge and experience of the injustices and hardship of their families". The creation and sustainability of safe spaces for the youngsters is also vital. As a Trustee explained: "The only place the youngsters can go after school is under the bridge in Waterloo. But the developers banned the [youngsters]. There is a way to work with those youngsters. They need a place where they can be safe and be themselves".

The Council should make sure that initiatives such as the Youth Fund reach out to the community.

### DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Broadly speaking, Latin Americans prefer face-to-face meetings, and social events and gatherings are welcomed forms of engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we interact, and although at the first stages of my research, digital engagement was not considered the preferred method for the community, in particular by older members, there has been a slight change in relation to how well some forms of digital interaction might work in, for instance, virtual meetings. However, several considerations remain.

In preparation for the development of an online English-language course for Latin American women, together with LAWRS and UX/UI designer, Carolina Gaspari, we carried out a short survey about the prospective students' access to IT and level of digital skills. Most respondents have smartphones and are phone dependent, with WhatsApp and Facebook being their preferred method of communication. Most of them do not have printers at home. All users reported to have email addresses and preferred this form of communication to phone calls or written letters sent by post (see also Berg, 2017).

The digital gap has become more prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many families did not have access to broadband or IT equipment. Any digital form of engagement is likely to provide further barriers if training and equipment are not offered. Organisations also expressed concerns about how data is used and shared, and stressed that people with irregular legal status might refrain from engaging for fear of being deported.

As part of our AHRC project, Naomi Wells analysed the digital presence of London's Latin American communities in the UK Web Archive (UKWA) and the global Internet Archive over the past two decades. She notes that "many of the earliest websites in the archive dating back to the early 2000s are those of organisations based in or around Southwark (e.g. LAWRS and IRMO), demonstrating the centrality of the borough for the Latin American community" and Southwark's pioneering role in community engagement with the Latin Americans.

Wells notes that the community's web presence has grown significantly over time, and many of the organisations have developed an increasingly professionalised web presence. But Wells also points out that, at the same time, "it is important to emphasise that despite the ever-increasing importance of digital environments, these should not be understood as a substitute for physical community spaces". Wells affirms that although her research was conducted before the unavoidable shifts necessitated by COVID-19, "it remains important to emphasise that digital strategies of communication or engagement are likely to be unsuccessful if they are perceived as an attempt to replace or substitute the community's physical spaces, particularly given ongoing threats to these spaces". Furthermore, Wells understands that "while informal social media spaces (e.g. Facebook and WhatsApp) may be

effective for Latin American organisations to engage with their communities, their use by local and public authorities may raise concerns surrounding privacy and security”. Instead, Wells recommends that

rather than using such channels themselves, it may be more effective for Southwark to develop a digital engagement strategy that involves supporting Latin American organisations (e.g. through training and resources) in their efforts to disseminate important and trusted information through such channels, and based on these organisations’ greater understanding of the needs and preferences of their users.



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## Appendix

### PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES



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April 2018 - October 2020



## Introduction

In 2018, the AHRC's [Open World Research Initiative](#) in collaboration with Southwark Council launched an exciting initiative which aimed to develop and consolidate support for the Latin American community in Southwark. The project was introduced on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July at the Celebration of the 6<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Recognition of Latin Americans as an ethnic group in Southwark, organised by the Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK and Southwark Council.

The Southwark Project was led by María Soledad Montañez and consisted of a series of interlinked programmes prioritising collaboration, partnership, and strategic change in collaboration with Latin American organisations and community groups in the London Borough of Southwark. The programmes aimed to explore ideas and experiences of language, identity, community, migration, health, and wellbeing with the Latin American community in the borough.

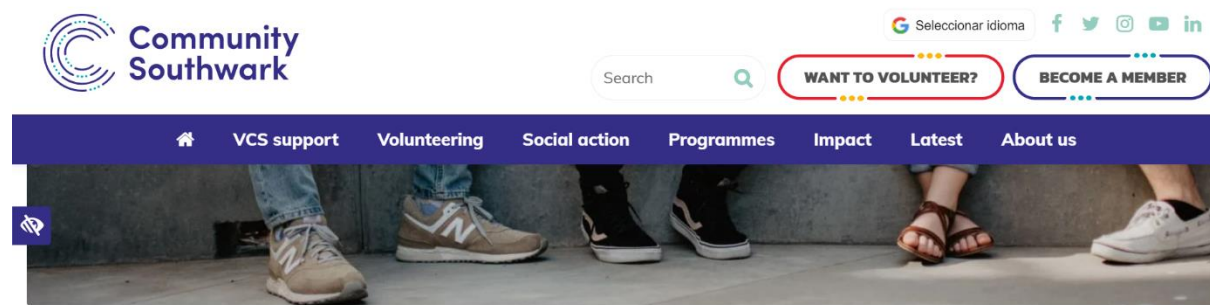
From storytelling to book making, creative workshops on leadership and mental health for young people to the implementation of a cross-sector, multilingual and multicultural network, the multidisciplinary project on community engagement and the Latin American community in Southwark explored different community-specific forms of engagement in cross-cultural contexts.

The project considered that creativity plays a vital role in transformative and effective community engagement processes and practices in cross-cultural contexts. Accordingly, we tried to find alternative and complementary solutions to existing and more traditional ways of engagement within a super-diverse context. Creative practice offers the opportunity to (re)connect with diverse communities through multiple media and languages, allowing alternative methods of communication and understanding.

Taking into account the priority key areas in service provision and access identified by Latin American organisations and based on existing research and recommendations (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016; in particular Berg, 2017), as well as Southwark Council's strategy, the project's engagement approach was focused on **health and wellbeing**. The project considers health and wellbeing from an integral and multidisciplinary perspective, which interlinks health with culture, migration and education.

This section highlights the different events, programmes and activities developed during the project in partnership with local Latin American organisations and Southwark Council, as well as other organisations and institutions, and offers a brief analysis of the key aspects related to community engagement and the topics that matter most to the Latin American community.

## Southwark Latin American Network (initially Latin American Provider-Led Group)



Latest > Events

### LATIN AMERICAN NETWORK MEETING

The idea to create a Latin American network in Southwark emerged organically from this action-research. The network was initially conceived to increase representation, support service provision, and facilitate a closer and more sustainable relationship between the Latin American community and Southwark Council. The initiative was built on one of the recommendations made by Mette Berg in her report: “Facilitate fora that bring service providers from different areas of provision together to reflect on challenges and issues, and to share good practice initiatives across service areas” (2016: 3), and on data gathered during this research.

Back in 2018, Southwark Council and I approached Community Southwark to start discussing the possibility of developing a Latin American network in the borough. In July 2018, Community Southwark began co-developing and co-facilitating the Latin American cross-sector network in Southwark. At its initial stage, the Latin American network brought together the local government (Southwark Council), third-sector (Latin American organisations, stakeholders and providers of services for the Latin American community in Southwark and neighbouring boroughs) and public organisations (University of London, Public Health Southwark, HIV Commission Lead and CCGs).

The network was based on Community Southwark’s existing network model known as “Provider Led Group/Network” (PLG). PLGs were designed to encourage peer support between communities and organisations of different sizes and stages of development and are facilitated by Community Southwark to ensure that the groups were plugged in, joined-up and could get their messages across to opinion formers and decision-makers.

The network aims to support Latin American representation in Southwark and articulate a common understanding of issues, needs, goals and solutions, increasing more effective collaborative working, reducing gaps and duplication in programmes, and improving services for the Latin American community at a local level. Southwark Council has participated actively in the network’s building-process, and considers the network an important tool and space for

relationship building and collaboration. The network is therefore an opportunity to develop a more consistent relationship and better understanding of community needs between the Latin American organisations and the Council and other decision-makers.

As a cross-sector network, it has presented some challenges in terms of identity politics, representation and leadership, in particular in relation to the Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK (CLAUK). Issues regarding community formation, accountability and legitimacy were frequently raised, contested and addressed at the network meetings, including competitive pressures, resource constraints, and differing priorities. Since its inception, the network has discussed these challenges, as have Southwark Council and Community Southwark and member organisations in their desire to seek the best way forward.<sup>25</sup>

At the time of writing, the network is in the process of agreeing its Terms of Reference (ToR), and electing a Network Chair, which will become a representative of Southwark Voice. Southwark Voice provides a platform to explore and discuss issues of relevance to the VCS and communities in Southwark.

It is expected that the network will continue its development and consolidate its role, led by Latin American community organisations in Southwark with the support of Community Southwark and Southwark Council.

**Current network member organisations are:** Carnaval del Pueblo; Latin Citizens UK; Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation; Latin American Women's Rights Services; Latin American Disabled People's Project; Latin Elephant; Metro Charity; Naz Latina; PACT-Espacio Mamá and Voces Amigas de la Esperanza, UK.

**Relevant stakeholders include:** Southwark Council; CCGs in Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark; Public Health England; Public Health Southwark; Metropolitan Police; Society for Latin American Studies and the School of Advanced Study (University of London).

The Latin American Network in Southwark has met **9 times** between 2018 and 2020.

## Storytelling in Spanish, Canada Water Library

- Objectives: to celebrate the borough's linguistic diversity and encourage multilingual education, and engagement. The support and promotion of community languages provide meaningful opportunities to be successfully and happily immersed in a complex world where cultural and linguistic diversity can be cherished and defended.

As a first outreach activity, the event was an opportunity to reach out the Spanish-speaking community in Southeast London and explore if a programme of similar activities in public

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<sup>25</sup> During the COVID-19 outbreak, the Latin Network in Southwark member organisations were signatories to a letter CLAUK wrote to Public Health England raising concerns about the statistical invisibility of the Latin American community and the need to include it in the Government's review on the impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities.



libraries - in conjunction with community and public organisations - might be useful in supporting the dissemination of information in community languages, for instance, about service provision in Southwark.

The session was free and open to the public. The storytelling was created and performed by British-Argentinean Daniela Hathaway, and included a presentation by a member of staff from the Communities Division, Southwark Council and myself.

Feedback from the event articulated the need for similar and more regular activities for families in public spaces. Our own data gathered during this research indicates that public libraries, museums, art galleries, parks and green spaces are the most frequent places attended by the Latin American community in Southwark.

More than **80** families registered for this event online, which was fully booked within 48 hours. We used different social media channels to advertise the event, mostly through Facebook groups, and in Spanish. On the day, Latin American organisations, such as IRMO, LAWRS, and VOADES-UK offered advice and information about their services.

- **Suggestion:** Partner with a Latin American community organisation, a local library (e.g. East Street Library, which holds a substantial collection of books in Spanish), and a language department from a HE institution in London to develop a programme of storytelling sessions in community languages, support young parents to take the lead and organise weekly meet-ups, and/or organise reading groups, conversation classes, advice surgeries, or information desks.



## Brixton Reel Film Festival

Brixton Reel Film Festival is a mental wellbeing project set up to engage with hard-to-reach, socially excluded and often lower-income BAME communities. The film festival has built strong bonds with individual community partners and local mental health service providers, and uses film and arts in a fun way to engage community members who may otherwise view mental health, or mental health services, with fear, shame or other social stigmas.

The festival's 2018 edition focused on the seldom heard stories of mental wellbeing by BAME communities in London. In partnership with Southwark Council and [Voces Amigas de la Esperanza](#) (VOADES, previously TEUK), the OWRI/IMLR funded a series of events for the Latin American community in London.

The film festival began with a premiere event designed to coincide with World Mental Health Day (10 October), and the main festival took place from the 8th to 15th November 2018.



The festival was preceded by an evening celebrating young Latin Americans and wellbeing, in association with Thrive LND Culture and the Latin American mental health and wellbeing charity VOADES. The event took place at La Bodeguita Restaurant in Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre. The event aimed to raise awareness about mental health in migrant communities, and screened powerful testimonials of young Latin Americans in London who spoke about their experiences of

invisibility, how migration affected them, the strategies they used to deal with mental health



issues, and the support they got from their social networks, and organisations such as VOADES.

The programme also included a film screening of Colombian film *Virginia Casta* at the emblematic Cinema Museum. The event was attended by **80** people. There was Latin American food and attendees enjoyed a salsa masterclass after the screening.



A wellbeing workshop for young Latin Americans, facilitated by Nancy Liscano, Director of VOADES, and funded by IMLR/OWRI, was held to follow up on the issues raised in the film. This interactive and multilingual workshop (Spanish, Portuguese and English) explored the ways in which young migrants construct their identities and build their self-esteem. Considering that cultural and linguistic differences play a role in the way we talk about our emotions and feelings, the multilingual workshop created a safe multilingual and multimodal space for sharing experiences about identity, mental health, migration and integration. The workshop was attended by **15 participants aged 10-21 years** from six countries of birth.

- **Suggestion:** If supporting the event in the future, ensure that the Latin American organisations involved also get access to

funding and support. This initiative could be better supported by creating a more effective and long-term partnership, where the community can have a stronger voice and increased financial assistance.



## Young Latin American Women Leading Change



[The leadership programme](#) was a unique collaborative project between OWRI-IMLR, University of London, and the Sin Fronteras Youth Group from the [Latin American Women's Rights Service](#), in partnership with Southwark Council and developed from October to December 2019. The multidisciplinary project included a series of creative workshops aimed at exploring community formation and the significance of language and its relation and relevance to community formation, leadership, and civic participation.

Over the course of a six-week programme, a variety of arts and sports workshops explored the way that young Latin American women and girls perceive their own cultural, linguistic and gender identity through creative, critical and engaging paths.

The programme offered the young participants the opportunity to reflect on their identities and developed community action, strengthening the participants' understanding of collaboration, contribution, and integration. Through the different creative workshops, participants explored language and identity by identifying the challenges and advantages of being a young Latin American woman in London. The activities allowed the participants to work collaboratively, reflecting on their own complex and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, their capacities, and skills, and to build stronger senses of leadership and connectivity among themselves.

The workshops enabled a process of symbolic – and practical - interaction that challenged preconceptions and misconceptions about young migrants. In that safe space, participants

were supported and encouraged to express their own views openly and respectfully in any language. Indeed, it was wonderful to observe how the participants became more and more aware of the value of speaking more than one language (Spanish, English, Portuguese, Quechua), and the importance of speaking and cultivating a family language. Mixing languages (verbal and non-verbal), translanguaging, code meshing, and code-switching were employed freely and naturally, as powerful signs of cultural identity, and as tools for change. The fact that almost all the facilitators, as well as the project coordinators, were multilingual also helped to create a more fluid linguistic space where language competence was seen as an ongoing and transformative learning process.

The participants developed a stronger sense of linguistic and cultural identity. **“Lemme hablar” reads the graffiti banner that the participants collaboratively produced, a strong message that conjugates pride and a clear sense of belonging in-between languages, cultural and gender identities. The banner brings together colloquial English and standard Spanish showing the ability to move freely between languages, claiming the right to be heard, accepted and included as a migrant woman.**

**“Yeah, we speak Spanish**

**Yeah, we are different**

**Yeah, we are unique**

**Yeah, we are women**

**and that makes us even more determined”**

wrote one of the young participants, in a poem that is used as an introduction to the Sin Fronteras Zine, and which describes the intersectional experiences of young Latin American women in London.

**“Together, we hacemos el nuevo mundo**

**and pide la violencia to stop para siempre.**

**My name is Helen and mi language es el español”<sup>26</sup>**

This is a collage poem made from cut-up magazine paper, which pokes fun at the colonial idea of the “New World” and offers a united voice for social change. Here, language and cultural identity are played out, subverted by using Spanglish to claim that Spanish is, in fact, their mother tongue.

The creative workshops showed how the multilingual participants use different discursive practices and strategies to construct and negotiate their identities. The participants also showed that their identities are not only defined by their language and culture heritage, but also by their identities as students (e.g. worried about GSCE results), as friends, and for their musical tastes.

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<sup>26</sup> Together we make the world/Violence asks to stop forever/My name is Helen and my language is Spanish

The project was proposed by LAWRS and demonstrated a good example of community and public engagement, and a successful collaboration between academia and the third sector.

- **Suggestion:** Due to time constraints we could not arrange a visit to the Council, as was initially proposed by the Council. Future activities could include regular invitations to the Sin Fronteras Youth Group from Southwark Council to visit the Council and offer talks or training sessions for the young participants. Alternatively, virtual meetings or talks can also be arranged. Existing youth work by the Council can look at the ways this initiative can lead to new forms of participation and collaboration focusing on language, ethnicity and engagement.

## Cartoneras Creative Engagement Project with Young Latin Americans



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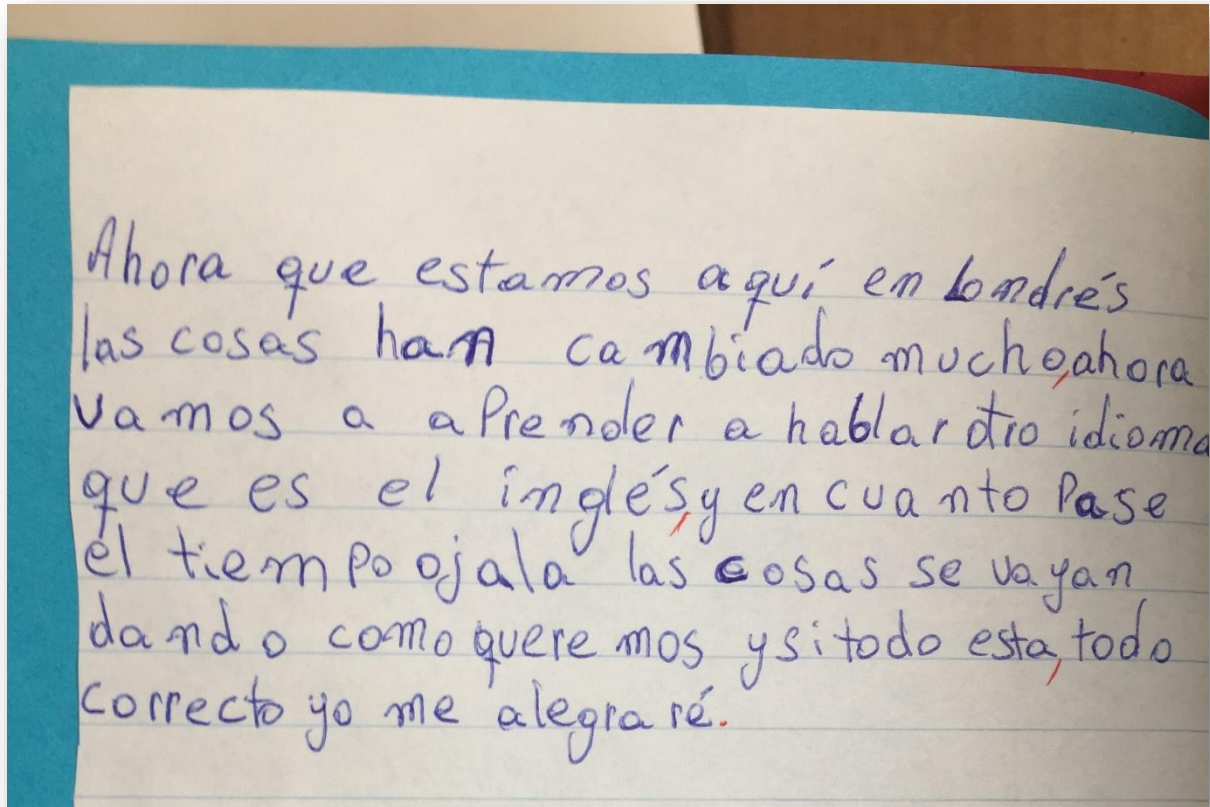
The [Cartoneras Creative Engagement Project](#) was a collaborative effort between two different AHRC projects in England – namely the OWRI’s Cross Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community from the Institute of Modern Languages Research, University of London and [Cartonera Publishing: Relations, meaning and community in movement](#), the British Library - and a group consisting of the [Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation](#) (IRMO), Southwark Council and the [Migration Museum](#).

Cartoneras (Cardboard Publishing) is a unique grassroots Latin American publishing phenomenon, which offers alternative forms of community engagement, activism, and social change.

The project took place in May 2019 and aimed to explore notions of community, identity, and language through a series of workshops, from creative writing to book making. The idea was to publish the voices of young Latin Americans in London as the UK was preparing to exit the EU. It included three different public outreach events:

- a. [Cartoneras Book Making Workshop at the British Library](#)
- b. [Cartoneras Final Exhibition at PemPeople](#), Peckham.

c. Cartoneras in London: Untold Stories from Latin America as part of the [Being Human Festival](#) in partnership with the **Migration Museum**, IRMO, University of Surrey and Southwark Council.<sup>27</sup>



“Now we are in London, things have changed a lot. Now we are going to learn another language, which is English, and I hope that, as time goes by, everything will work out as we expect. And if everything is OK, I will be happy”. An extract from a Cartonera art book written by a 13-year-old participant from Ecuador (my translation).

<sup>27</sup> The workshops were co-led by Chilean artist Cruz María Vallespir. The facilitators were: Lucy Bell (University of Surrey), Rahul Berry (Translator-in Residence, British Library, Institute of Modern Languages Research), and Patrick O’Hare (University of Manchester), with Juan Gallego and Florencia Ferrari (IRMO).





The importance of welcoming and hosting: decorating the room for the Cartoneras Creative project at the Latin American Forum team from IRMO, May 2019

The Cartoneras project has been deemed by IRMO Senior Programme Manager as the organisation's identity card:

“The new contacts made during the project have been fruitful. [...] Cartoneras facilitated the involvement of the young people in the planning and consultation to develop new projects, contributing to make them feel more invested in the programme and giving them more opportunities to work with new partners and to explore new spaces and ways of work”.

- **Suggestion:** The Cartoneras workshop format can be used by the Council, schools and organisations to talk about climate change or social justice, gather memories and stories from residents or promote literacy. Encourage the use of different languages and media to learn more about the community's needs and interests, in particular when working with young people.





Cartoneras Creative Engagement project exhibition with the Latin American Forum team from IRMO, Peckham, July 2019.

## Inti Raymi: Year of Indigenous Languages Celebration

In partnership with the Consulate of Peru in London, VOADES and [Comunidad Rimanakuy](#), this community event was conceived and delivered by the community itself. It included a Quechua class, Andean traditional dance show and food, as well as presentations by community representatives.

The event has allowed the community group to consolidate its work, delivering Quechua classes and cultural activities in partnership with the Consulate of Peru and the Institute of Latin American Studies, School of Advanced Study, and the Latin American House. They are now in the process of becoming a constituted voluntary group.

The event was held in a church hall in Southwark on 22 June 2019 and was attended by approximately 100 people.

**Suggestion:** Consider the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the Latin American community. Choose a language celebration week to support and organise activities that celebrate the borough's linguistic diversity.

## London Spanish Book and Zine Fair



In partnership with [La Tundra Revista](#), we sponsored and supported the first edition of [the London Spanish Book and Zine Fair](#) (LSBF). LSBF showcased books and zines published in Spanish and English as well as in other languages (e.g. Spanish-Japanese) by publishers in the UK, Europe and Latin America.

The fair took place on the 4-5 October at [InSpire](#) in Southwark. It featured more than 30 exhibitors, which included small and independent publishers, delivered a diverse

programme of talks and workshops in Spanish and English, and reached out to around **400** people.



Pictures by the London Spanish Book and Zine Fair, 2019.

- **Suggestion:** The Council, and particularly Councillors, can use annual cultural events, such as the London Spanish Book and Zine Fair to meet community members and exchange ideas, disseminate information about their work, promote a specific engagement activity or carry out a consultation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> We formally invited several Councillors from Southwark to the 2019 event, but unfortunately none could attend.





“I want to learn English to have a better job, be able to go out without getting lost, and have a good relationship with people”

“I would like to be able to communicate better with my child’s school”

“I want to be able to speak to my GP without an interpreter”

Despite high levels of employment within the community, Latin Americans in London face several barriers. Proficiency in English is one of the most significant barriers to accessing key services such as education, health, and social care services (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016; Berg, 2017; Granada, 2013). A lack of English language skills can also result in lower wages and limited educational and employment opportunities.

Access to ESOL classes is one of the main needs of the Latin American community in London and is in high demand. However, due to funding cuts in the last decade at a local and national level, English language learning providers are usually oversubscribed. Classes are generally scheduled at times unsuitable for those working in hospitality and cleaning services, and even if some classes are free and accessible, free childcare is not necessarily provided. This negatively affects women who are more likely to live in households with dependent children.

Working with the Latin American Women’s Rights Service, we co-created an [Online English Language Course](#) to support the organisation’s Language Café. In March 2020, as part of our partnership with Southwark Council, LAWRS and the Institute of Modern Languages Research joined forces to develop an online language teaching programme for and by Latin American women in London.

The course encompasses English language learning with vital information about life in the UK, and in particular in London, from practical information about how to access health services, understand the education system, to labour rights, as well as general knowledge on culture and politics, as identified by the learning community.

The Language Café was initially created by LAWRS in 2017 as a Spanish and English language exchange ‘café’ with Paxton Green Time Bank (PGTB) in Southwark. The Café was supported

by the Feminist Review Trust and led by women from LAWRS and PGTB who shared language skills and social opportunities, in an exchange called timebanking.

In its current format, the Language Café offers Latin American women the opportunity to learn English in an informal, safe, and community-based learning environment.

The course was developed during the COVID19 national lockdown and launched on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2020.

**450** Latin American women registered to attend the launch of the course.

- **Suggestion:** Southwark Council offers an array of [free online courses](#) for local residents. Incorporating language courses that reflect the Council's linguistic diversity and ESOL courses is vital to celebrate and promote the borough's linguistic diversity, foster social cohesion and encourage integration, participation, and engagement. The course can be further developed by focusing on civic participation and engagement, and Southwark Council can record interviews, talks, visits to the Council, short videos and/or general information to enhance knowledge and participation within Latin American women. Provision of free English classes or classes at a reduced rate outside working hours, that target migrants with NRPF, and/or working in the hospitality and cleaning industries has been consistently mentioned as a need for the community and documented as such in several reports. This is a good example of how the community can create and provide vital resources to support the Council's work.



Tracing migratory journeys with young Latin Americans in London, Cartoneras project, Latin American Youth Forum, IRMO, 2019.

## LATIN AMERICAN COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS IN SOUTHWARK

The Latin American organisations in London are long-established and are strongly attached to the community's diasporic history in the UK. From the Chilean Solidarity Campaign, set up in 1973 in response to the brutal overthrow of the democratic Chilean government of Salvador Allende by a military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet, to the grassroots women voluntary groups, the community has been actively advocating for the community's rights and political representation since the 1980s.

In this sense, the Latin American organisations and voluntary groups have played a significant role for the diaspora. They offer key contacts, multilingual support and information, as well as legal advice and advocacy campaigns, articulating the voices of the Latin American community through different channels and forms of activism. The organisations and community groups also offer a vital space for integration and belonging.

Most of the Latin American organisations listed below, are part of the [Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK \(CLAUK\)](#) and members of the Southwark Latin American Network.

**Although there are more Latin American community groups and organisations in Southwark, this section only briefly refers to the ones this project directly engaged with.**

[Carnaval del Pueblo \(CdP\)](#): contributes to raising the profile of London's Latin American community and in promoting an understanding of its cultural heritage. CdP aims to create events that are free and accessible for all, while showcasing the best examples of the vibrant Latin American cultures including music, arts and crafts from all over the continent. The organisation celebrates Latin America, and it uses party and carnival to explore themes such as diversity and inclusion.

[Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation \(IRMO\)](#): Based in Lambeth, IRMO is a community-led organisation that offers an array of services in key areas such as training and employment skills, as well as advice and advocacy work, a youth group, a family group, and weekly ESOL classes. IRMO is one of the most well-established Latin American organisations in London, whose work spans almost four decades.

[Latin American Women's Rights Service \(LAWRS\)](#): is a feminist and human rights organisation, which focuses on addressing the practical and strategic needs of Latin American migrant women displaced by poverty and violence in London. LAWRS offers culturally and linguistically specialist advice, information, counselling and psychotherapy, advocacy, development programmes, and workshops. LAWRS was founded in 1983 and has led ground-



breaking campaigns such as #StepUpMigrantWomen. They support 5,000 women annually. The organisation is based in Islington and Southwark.

**Latin American Disabled People's Project (LADPP):** was created in 1989 and became a registered charity in 1992. LADPP offers support to Spanish and Portuguese speaking communities in London. Some of their services include: Community skills for work and welfare, Integration Advice and Representation Project, a Befriending project, and several other free services, such as English classes, a knitting club and a weekly haircut service.

**Latin Elephant:** works to ensure that migrant and ethnic groups are adequately represented and engaged in regeneration initiatives in London, in particular in Elephant and Castle. With a strong research-based ethos, Latin Elephant promotes the contribution that migrant and ethnic communities make to London's diverse economies and cultures. Key research work includes: [The Case for London's Latin Quarter: Retention, Growth, Sustainability](#) and [The Latin Quarter: Elephant and Castle Community Vision](#). Projects include: the development of guides for micro businesses, as part of their Migrant & Ethnic Business Readiness Programme, and the [Petit Elephant Map](#), an interactive digital map that records the impact of the regeneration process for traders in Elephant and Castle.

**Voces Amigas de la Esperanza (VOADES-UK, aka Teléfono de la Esperanza or TEUK):** is a mental health charity that delivers several services and projects to improve the emotional health and wellbeing of the Spanish and Portuguese speaking communities in London. VOADES offers several services such as a permanent counselling telephone helpline, professional counselling sessions, including a family counselling service. It also delivers several free workshops and activities throughout the year, such as yoga classes, body tapping, and a befriending project.