

# No Longer Invisible: the Latin American community in London

*Trust for London and the Latin American Women's Rights Service commissioned Queen Mary, University of London, to undertake the first comprehensive survey of the Latin American population in London, a community which has been largely overlooked to date.*

## Key findings

1. There are an estimated 113,500 Latin Americans living in London which is almost four times the number recorded in the 2001 census (the UK figure is estimated to be 186,500). This is equivalent in size to other large migrant and ethnic groups in the capital. The largest nationality group are Brazilians followed by Colombians and there are also large numbers of Ecuadorians, Bolivians and Peruvians.
2. Along with other migrants the main reason for Latin Americans moving to London is economic. As a result this largely young and well educated population has very high employment rates (85%).
3. Although employed in all spheres of London's labour market the majority are unable to fully utilise their professional skills, and experience a sharp decline in their occupational status especially on first arriving in London. More than half are employed in low-skilled and low-paid jobs in cleaning, catering and hospitality services.
4. Over 40% of Latin Americans have experienced workplace abuse and exploitation. 11% of Latin American workers are illegally paid below the National Minimum Wage, which is 10 times higher than the average rate for the UK population (1.1%).
5. Despite lower than average incomes, take-up of public services and state benefits is low: 1 in 5 Latin Americans have never been to a GP, 6 out of 10 have never been to a dentist in the UK and only 1 in 5 receive some form of state welfare benefit.
6. Difficulties in obtaining adequate and affordable housing are a significant concern. Almost one-third of Latin Americans live in overcrowded accommodation shared with other households, primarily in the private rented sector.
7. The immigration status of individuals and their ability to speak English are critical to enhancing quality of life and opportunities, and are crucial to integration. As a result the most recent arrivals, particularly Brazilians and Bolivians, are more likely to experience hardship.
8. The level of money remitted by individuals to Latin America is significant. Although this helps in alleviating poverty back home, it can often undermine the economic well-being of those sending remittances.
9. The majority of Latin Americans (70%), including the second generation, perceive discrimination to be a major barrier to improving their quality of life.
10. Community groups and churches play an important role in the lives and wellbeing of London's Latin American community, particularly for those on low incomes.

## Background

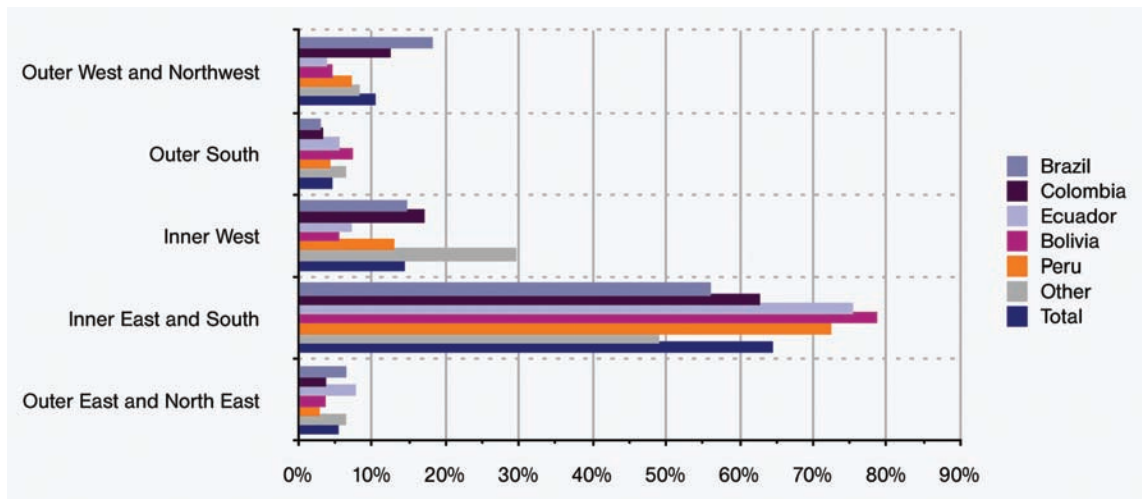
Despite increasing numbers of Latin Americans moving to London in recent years, and their important contribution to the functioning of the city economically, socially and culturally, very little is known about this community. *No Longer Invisible* is the most comprehensive research to date of this hidden community. Produced by Queen Mary, University of London the report establishes a robust estimate of the size of the community and explores a number of key economic and social features of the Latin American community in London. It draws its findings from a large quantitative survey, with over 1,000 respondents, complemented by 50 in-depth-interviews and several focus groups, covering different socio-economic groups and Latin American nationalities.

## Growing Population

The research sought to establish a robust estimate of the size of this community in the capital, not previously available due to shortcomings in the way official data is compiled, including the lack of a separate ethnic category for 'Latin American'. An analysis of several official datasets and triangulation of this against the quantitative survey produced a central estimate of 113,500 Latin Americans in London (and 186,500 in the UK). This includes regular, irregular and second generation groups. This makes Latin Americans a significant part of the city's population, comparable in size to other large migrant and ethnic groups such as the Polish-born population which numbers around 122,000<sup>1</sup>.

### Distribution of main Latin American nationality groups by London region

Source: Authors' questionnaire survey (n=933)



The Latin American population in London is young, growing in size, and residentially dispersed throughout the capital, though concentrated in Inner London. Brazilians are the largest single national group, and together with Bolivians, the most recent arrivals. Colombians are the second largest group and alongside Ecuadorians, the longest established national groups in London.

## Migration to London

Migration to London by Latin Americans is motivated by a range of factors, but is dominated by a lack of economic opportunities in their country of origin. Most arrive independently, but migration is often facilitated by existing family, friends and other social networks in London. The global economic crisis and consequential levels of unemployment in Spain are having an impact on secondary migration to London. As a result Latin Americans are increasingly arriving in the UK after migrating first to Spain, and to a lesser extent from other EU countries such as Italy and Portugal.

Most Latin Americans in the survey entered the UK with a temporary visa and only a quarter arrived in London with definite plans to settle. Most saw their stay as a short-term measure but over time their plans changed. More than half of Latin Americans in London have permanent immigration status. This includes 25% with British citizenship, 19% with EU passports, and 11% with other permanent residency rights. Nevertheless, irregular immigration status is an important issue for Latin Americans, with 19% without valid documents.

<sup>[1]</sup> ONS: <http://tinyurl.com/3dckack>

## Earning a living

Latin Americans have very high employment rates (85%), much higher than most other foreign born residents (55%) and the London population as a whole (61%)<sup>2</sup>. Although most are well-educated and are employed in all spheres of London's labour market, one-third cannot speak English which affects their economic and social integration.

Their position in the London economy is in direct contrast to the jobs they held in Latin America, where more than one-third worked in professional and managerial jobs, such as teaching, engineering and social work. The majority of Latin Americans face a sharp decline in occupational status, with 70% working in elementary jobs in cleaning, catering and hospitality services on first arriving in London. A small minority are able to recover some of their status, but only 17% are currently working in professional and managerial jobs.

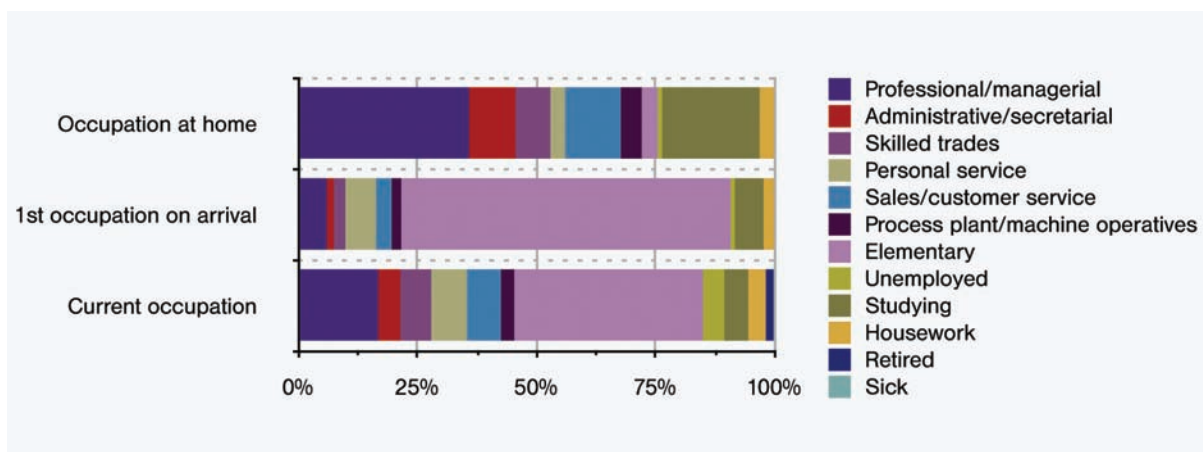
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### Changes in economic activity through migration and settlement

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Source: Authors' questionnaire survey (n=935, n=453, n=948)

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A large proportion of Latin Americans work unsociable hours which are often fragmented. Many jobs in the cleaning, catering and hospitality sectors are only available for a few hours at a time forcing people to combine a number of part-time jobs in order to make ends meet.

## Workplace abuse and exploitation

Many Latin Americans are concentrated in low-paid and low-skilled jobs, often employed on an informal basis without labour rights and employment protection, and are therefore more likely to face exploitation and discrimination. Workplace abuse and exploitation is significant with 40% of those working experiencing problems. This includes not being paid for work, verbal abuse and unfair dismissal. Significantly, 11% of Latin American workers earn below the National Minimum Wage, which is 10 times higher than the average for the UK population (1.1%)<sup>3</sup>.

## Coping on low incomes

Despite many Latin Americans earning low incomes, almost two-thirds send an average of 12% of their weekly personal income to families back home. 40% arrived in London indebted to families and financial institutions in order to pay for their migration. Many have to make substantial economic sacrifices in order to maintain a flow of money back home and repay debts incurred to finance their migration. Partly as a result 40% have had to borrow money for everyday living expenses.

The economic adversities faced by many Latin Americans affects their wider living conditions as many cannot afford decent accommodation with 45% reporting living in inadequate housing in London. Two-thirds live in private rented accommodation which is higher than the London average (21%)<sup>4</sup>, and almost one-third share their homes with other families indicating that overcrowding is a significant issue.

<sup>[2]</sup> Analysis of APS 2008: <http://tinyurl.com/3wdkc73>

<sup>[3]</sup> ONS: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=591>

<sup>[4]</sup> DCLG: <http://tinyurl.com/6xkkdla>

## Accessing public and community services

A high proportion of Latin Americans do not access public services, instead relying on voluntary and private providers. Despite the prevalence of low-paid work, only 1 in 5 receive state welfare benefits. This is usually in-work support related to low income such as tax credits and housing and council tax benefits.

1 in 5 Latin Americans have never been to a GP and 6 out of 10 have never been to a dentist in the UK<sup>5</sup>. Conversely 4 in 10 have used private health services. However, one-third of Latin American adults have pursued education courses, most commonly English language.

Community organisations provide important support to enable individuals to adjust to life in the UK and improve their circumstances, with one-third of Latin Americans having used their services. Churches and social networks also offer valued support, but social interaction outside the community is limited. Generally, those who have been in London longest enjoy better working, living and social conditions. New arrivals, for example Brazilians and Bolivians, are more likely to experience hardship.

## Second generation Latin Americans

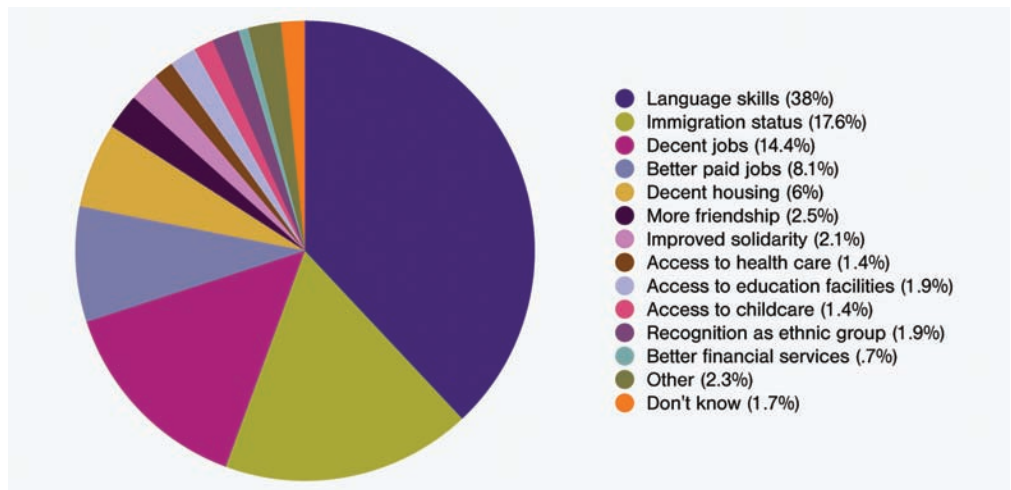
The second generation have improved their lives compared with their parents' generation. Everyone has legal status and can speak English, a high proportion are studying, and there is a shift away from working in elementary occupations. However, two-thirds reported experiences of discrimination in the workplace, racism in schools and at the hands of the police. This suggests that even second generation Latin Americans are encountering barriers to integration.

## Tackling obstacles to integration

While some sections of the community have settled successfully, a significant proportion faces multiple obstacles to their integration. For some regularising their immigration status in this country is central to overcoming many of the challenges they face such as workplace abuse and accessing public services.

### Main needs identified by Latin Americans

Source: Authors' questionnaire survey (n=432)



Other key concerns included English language difficulties, concentration in jobs with low prospects of social mobility, poor housing conditions, exclusion from social, health and welfare services and experiences of marginalisation and discrimination. Almost 70% of Latin Americans perceive discrimination to be an issue in their everyday lives.

These concerns feed into the main types of support identified by Latin Americans themselves as needed to reduce disadvantage and exclusion. These revolve around pathways to regularising immigration status and gaining citizenship; accessible English language classes; reliable immigration advice; and access to services and support to help the community to become better integrated into the working, social and cultural life of London.

<sup>[5]</sup> Although not a direct comparison, in the last two years nearly 52% of London's population has seen an NHS dentist. If private dentists were taken into account this figure would be significantly higher. NHS UK: <http://tinyurl.com/6h7pww4>

## Recommendations

### Ethnic Monitoring

1. Ethnic monitoring needs to include a 'Latin American' category as well as improving recording of other large ethnic communities in the capital. This is particularly important for the Greater London Authority, other London-wide public agencies and local and health authorities with significant Latin American communities, in order to support their inclusion in relevant policies, strategies and in service planning and delivery.

### Employment rights

2. Government, trade unions, employers and other civil society groups need to increase awareness of employment rights and provide access to advice, given the large number of Latin Americans experiencing labour rights infringements.
3. The Government should consider extending the Gangmasters Licensing Authority's remit to cover sectors with highest levels of exploitation, including cleaning, catering and hospitality services.
4. Campaigns to raise awareness of the National Minimum Wage and to secure its implementation need to include Latin Americans as a key target group. Access to advice and support needs to be provided, targeting employment sectors where the law is most frequently infringed.
5. Employers and training agencies in London should consider offering career development support to enable Latin Americans to contribute their professional skills and experience to the wider economy, particularly in sectors where there is a skills shortage.

### Public services and benefits

6. Statutory health providers, particularly those delivering primary care, need to tackle inequalities of access to health care facing Latin Americans. Take-up campaigns should outline available services, how they can be obtained and include details of eligibility. The focus should be on areas with significant Latin American populations.
7. Central, regional and local government should work more closely with community groups to ensure better awareness of welfare benefits (including housing benefit) amongst those who are entitled to receive them.
8. Local authorities in London with large concentrations of migrant communities must regularly monitor housing conditions in private rented accommodation with a particular focus in tackling overcrowding and disrepair in multiple occupancy dwellings.
9. English language is pivotal to the integration of all migrant communities, including Latin Americans. Opportunities to learn the language need to be more widely available regardless of length of residence and immigration status. Classes need to be affordable, provided at times which are accessible to those working anti-social hours, and delivered via a range of providers including by employers.
10. Translation and interpretation services in Spanish and Portuguese need to be made available by providers of essential services throughout London.

## Immigration

11. Legal aid provision for immigration advice is vital for migrants with little or no understanding of English and the legal system in the UK such as Latin Americans. This is particularly needed for women experiencing violence who rely on such assistance to extricate themselves from violence in the home and other spheres.
12. Government should consider the regularisation of migrants who have established roots in the UK but have no settled migration status here. This would increase their contribution to the UK economy and would help prevent abuses against vulnerable workers.

## Funding community services

13. Whilst there are concentrations of the Latin American population in certain wards and boroughs in London, it is a community spread across the capital. Funders and commissioners need to take account of this and ensure pan-London and sub-regional funds are available to support community organisations addressing the needs of the whole community.
14. There is a need to better support and fund community organisations which are the first port of call for Latin Americans in need. In particular, there is a need to strengthen capacity to address the needs of Brazilians who are the fastest growing and most recent migrant group in this community.

### Trust for London

[www.trustforlondon.org.uk](http://www.trustforlondon.org.uk)

Trust for London is the largest independent funder tackling poverty and inequality in the capital. Established in 1891, the Trust makes grants totalling £7 million a year, supporting around 400 voluntary and community organisations in London at any one time.

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

[www.lawrs.org.uk](http://www.lawrs.org.uk)

LAWRS is a charity established in 1983 directly engaging with over 4,000 Latin American migrant women in the UK every year. It delivers programmes which focus on promoting economic security, tackling violence against women and girls, and on improving opportunities for successful integration.

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### Queen Mary, University of London

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Queen Mary, University of London is one of the world's leading universities, featuring in the 2010 Times Higher Education's Top 200 World University Rankings. The School of Geography is ranked joint first in the country in terms of research.

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The full report and summarised translations in Portuguese and Spanish are available from:  
[www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/latinamericansinlondon](http://www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/latinamericansinlondon)

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