

REBUILDING LIVES

ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2021 - MARCH 2022



ORGANISATION

Middle Eastern Women & Society Organisation

Registered Charity Number: 1150129

ABOUT US

SUPPORTING WOMEN TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES

MEWSo promotes social inclusion for the public benefit, in particular, but not exclusively, among women of Middle Eastern and other migrant descent. Many of these women are socially excluded because of their social and economic positions. We help them become socially included, address their most pressing needs and encourage them to integrate into wider society.

Raising public awareness of issues affecting women and girls and talking about the reasons behind their inequalities.

Training for frontline professionals on harmful practices

Legal advice and signposting

Social and recreational activities to reduce isolation and build connections

Counselling and group therapy in community languages

IT and English classes.
Advice around employability

Support for women in polygamous relationships

LGBTQ+ advice & support

Domestic violence and welfare advice and support

Supporting girls affected by virginity testing and hymen reconstruction practices

MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER



I am pleased to report that the past year has been exceptionally successful for our organisation. Due to the generosity of our funders, we managed to support more women than ever before.

Our campaigns led to legislative change. We strengthened our partnerships and developed new ones. We maintained our position as a trustful grassroots partner advising policy makers on the issues affecting our communities. We were able to pilot new activities and generate long-term income, ensuring the sustainability and efficiency of our organisation.

This year we continued the trend to expand our organisation. We recruited many new volunteers and extended our outreach across London. This year we were successful in bringing in £267,622, a substantial increase of 38%.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'H' and 'T' followed by a horizontal line.

Halaleh Taheri,
Founder and Executive Director

OUR TEAM



HALALEH TAHERI

Founder and Executive Director

"I've worked with **MEWSO** for a such a long time. **MEWSO** gave me a voice and power to help women in difficult situations.

The director and staff are amazing. I consider **MEWSO** as my second family"

ZAHRA HABRI

Senior Domestic Violence Advisor



ELLIE ANGUS

Fundraising & Project Manager



"I love working at **MEWSO** because of the sheer variety of communications work I'm involved in. From developing the website and writing the newsletter to designing flyers and brochures and editing videos. And, knowing that it's all about providing help and support to very vulnerable women makes it all the more worthwhile."

AUDREY THOMPSON

Communications Coordinator

FATOS USTA
LGBTQ+ Coordinator



"I joined **MEWSO** in 2019 because I wanted to give back to the community that raised me.

MEWSO not only provides services, but our dedicated team is active in changing harmful practices within our community. I am proud of the small part I play in a much larger machine of societal change."

ROSE FATHERAZI

Project and Service Manager



SODABEH GASHTASEBI

Senior Welfare Advisor

"I'm proud of the holistic support we offer to women, from providing them

with advice and guidance to advocating for their rights and empowering

them through skills-based training. Not to mention this year's outstanding achievement of banning the virginity testing and hymen reconstruction harmful practices - a ban that will make a lasting, impactful and positive difference to women's lives."

LORIS KONAIZEH

Volunteer Engagement & Programme Manager



AMAN ZANOON

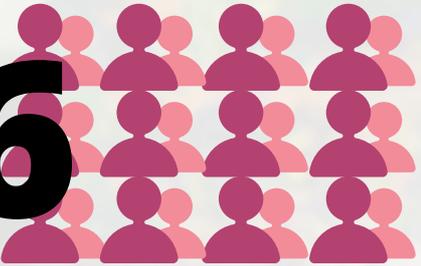
Campaign Coordinator

VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers are at the core of what we do, and we definitely couldn't reach this far without their support, passion and commitment. They share our vision of creating a safe, and equal society for our women and have been with us every step of the way, helping us overcome challenges, reach more people in need, demonstrate our impact, raise more money and celebrate our achievements.

We are keen to provide the very best volunteering experience to anyone who volunteers with **MEWS**o and make sure their time is well-spent by creating rewarding, enjoyable, meaningful, and inclusive volunteering opportunities that reflect our values and culture.

We truly look forward to continuing our journey with our amazing network of volunteers and are excited to achieve more goals together that will change our beneficiaries' lives for the better.

16 

"My volunteer work helps me to understand other people's lives and their situations, which always encourages and pushes me to think positively about my own life."

Volunteer

148hrs

Volunteers help us in many different aspects of our work: from befriending, crowdfunding, and social media to research, translations, interpreting, and workshop support.

"It is an ongoing learning experience, where our emotional and social intelligence and knowledge grows. We know more about ourselves by talking to other people, being empathetic, helping them and listening to them when they talk. Volunteering is needed to help educate ourselves about life"

Volunteer

OUR ACTIVITIES

Conversational English classes

We continued to deliver our informal English classes as a way to provide women with opportunities to practice their language skills and boost their confidence.



"I have been attending the sessions every time I could. I must say I feel more confident when shopping in big supermarkets and I am no longer shy to ask staff around the shop if I need information about products."

A, 63

Creative classes

From sewing to soap making and talks about various forms of art, our creative classes have provided an outlet to many women to express themselves, learn new skills and develop their creativity.



42 women improved their mental health through individual and group counselling in Farsi.



87 women attended our workshops, sessions and classes.



IT support

We continued to support elderly women with getting to grips with digital technologies, mostly on an individual basis.

Singing group

Our singing choir welcomes women with all vocal abilities. Next to singing traditional songs in group settings, the women are able to attend individual sessions as well.

OUR ACTIVITIES

Money Management and Employment Advice

Throughout the year we have been providing one-to-one sessions with an advisor or in small groups so women improve their financial health and employability.


4 women who received money management and employment advice undertook voluntary work.

Domestic Violence and Welfare Advice

We supported 253 brave women to flee domestic abuse and regain independence so they can rebuild their lives. About 15% of those received specialised support around court procedures (adult protection, non-molestation order, etc.) as we worked with our pro-bono solicitor partners to address their needs.



Walks in Nature and Picnics

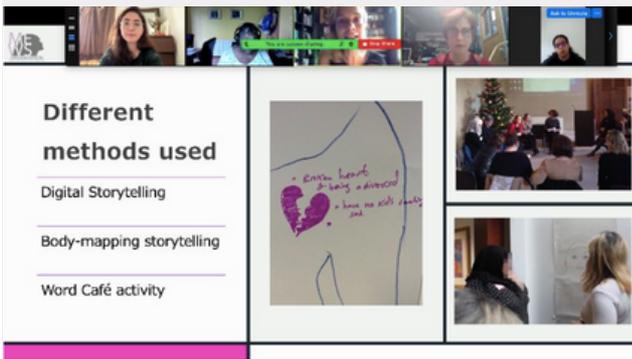
This year we were finally able to meet in person! Our outdoor walks and picnics offer women from minority background opportunities to socialise and build connections, as well as chances to explore the hidden gems of our city and learn interesting facts about the past.



OUR ACTIVITIES

Family Matters

Throughout the first year of our project aimed at supporting women affected by the practice of polygamy, we organised two large workshops where we used different techniques of storytelling to break the ice and build a safe and supportive environment, where women were encouraged to share what kind of support they hoped for.



Training Frontline Professionals

We trained over 80 frontline professionals on issues related to polygamy practice, virginity tests and hymen reconstructive surgeries, and domestic abuse among migrant women.

Weekly support groups where women can support each other, share life experiences and create friendships.

28 women in polygamous relationships supported through counselling, domestic violence, welfare and housing issues.



Supporting Refugees

We supported those hit the hardest by the Covid-19 pandemic by distributing hardship funds to 70 refugee families in Hackney. As a trusted partner of Westminster Council, we supported with advice and signposting over 20 women recently fled from Afghanistan. We secured funds through our crowdfunding campaign to deliver activities for their families to help them feel welcomed in our society.

STAYING CONNECTED

We organised several events for our service users, partners and supporters, some were online and some, finally, were in person, face-to-face.

Our Arts Festival celebrated the talents of migrant women, and during our International Women's Day celebration we showcased the variety of activities we provide to our communities.

As part of the Finsbury Park Network, throughout March we organised women's day events with taster sessions of the variety of activities **MEWS**o and our partners offer.

We also held a LGBTQ+ event where brave women shared their experiences showcasing the need for targeted, emotionally supportive and practical help.

We expanded our social media reach and our monthly MEWSletter doubled its subscribers, manifesting our increased visibility and reach. If you would like to stay connected, sign up for our updates and follow us on social media.



MEWSo's appearance at the FiLiA2021 conference, the largest annual feminist conference in Europe, was "a great success".



Showcasing some art & craft works made by talented migrant women.



Our most recent Arts Festival was an opportunity to meet in-person, after years of isolation due to Covid.

CAMPAIGN TO BAN VIRGINITY TESTS AND HYMEN REPAIR PRACTICES

Since 2019, **MEWS**o has fought long and hard to get virginity testing and hymen reconstructive surgeries banned, and this year our campaign aims were finally realised. With the help of our coalition partners - Karma Nirvana and IKWRO - we have been able to publicise the campaigns and gain much needed help from Members of Parliament, health professionals and the relevant Royal Colleges. And, though there is still much to do in educating professionals and raising awareness in our communities, we now have the legal means to protect girls and young women from the damaging mental and physical affects of these procedures.

As the first organisation to call for these harmful practices to be banned, this new law is a huge victory for **MEWS**o. For almost four years, we have been raising awareness on the issues of forced virginity tests and hymen reconstructions. The public understanding (and consecutively concerns) of these matters is gradually increasing, and we are looking forward to the next stage of our campaign, namely sharing facts and information about these harmful practices with teenagers, their parents and the wider community.



RECOGNITIONS

Our campaigning efforts were noticed by funders and supporters. We are profoundly grateful to the London Community Foundation / Citi - London Impact Awards for awarding us with the Standout Champion award, and to The Sheila McKechnie Foundation for the Best Coalition award in partnership with our sisters from IKWRO and Karma Nirvana.



SAFETY BEFORE STATUS

Throughout the year, we were involved in consultations with the Home Office to provide evidence on the pathways and barriers to access to domestic abuse support services for women with insecure immigration status. We are proud to state that our involvement gave the important grassroots perspective in informing the recommendations of the ground-breaking Safety Before Status report.

The report outlines key short and long-term policy measures to ensure support and protection for all victims and survivors of domestic abuse, regardless of their immigration status. The reports' recommendations encompass a huge step forward in protecting migrant women, as it is hoped it will minimise their fear of deportation and encourage them to seek help and support.

THANK YOU

THANK YOU to all our funders, partners, volunteers and staff members for their ongoing support and commitment to protect women and rebuild lives.

We are extremely thankful for the trust and support of our funders and individual donors:

National Lottery Community Fund, Trust for London, Lloyds Foundation, London Community Foundation, GLA, MOPAC and MoJ, Hackney and the City, Westminster and Islington Councils.

We remain grateful to all those individuals who donated their time and skills to contribute and strengthen our services - Kathryn, Nihal, Saivan, Sharmeen, Sohaila, Lucheng, Houda, Nina, Marija, Fatima, Yara, Natasha, Laleh, Maryam, Sharon, Moulouk. We would like to thank trustees for their ongoing commitments - Cordelia Mayfield, Behnaz Fatherazi, Rejna Alaaldin, Dina Elrayyes, Guilène Marco, Maria Sookias, Noella Hacquard.

We appreciate the confidence our partners continued to have in us, so together we continue to tackle gender and social inequalities, Greenwich University, BME Healthforum, EAWWG, KWEMO, Standing Together, Sex Education Forum, Woman's Networks in Islington, Westminster, Hackney, Haringey, London Community Engagement Group, Karma Nirvana and the coalition to ban virginity tests, LAWA, Step Up Migrant Women, Solidarity Knows No Borders, Migrant Organise.

WOMEN'S
ORGANISATION
& Society Organisation



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