

# MEWSO

Middle Eastern Women & Society Organisation



# ANNUAL REPORT

2025-26

Rebuilding the lives of vulnerable and displaced women



[www.mewso.org](http://www.mewso.org)

Registered Charity: 1150129  
Since 2012



The Olive Club, Islington, on an outing to Tate Modern

# MEWSO

Middle Eastern Women & Society Organisation

## message from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & FOUNDER



This past year our organisation faced very heavy challenges. The economic situation in the country, the regional wars in the Middle East, and their impact on our communities, reduced people's financial power, making life very difficult for many of those we aim to help.

The mental health of many women who accessed our services deteriorated due to the ongoing wars, and we had to quickly strive to provide them with emotional support, whether one-to-one or group counselling, or network-based gatherings where the women are able to support each other.

In addition, we participated in several campaigns focusing on migrants and refugees, as immigration policies created an unprecedented crisis for so many. Political activists, social advocates, and supporters all worked hard to pressure the government to reverse these changes, unfortunately to no end. As a result, the situation for many of our service-users is increasingly harsh. And, the ability of organisations like ours to provide support is more difficult than ever.



We serve large Arabic, Persian, and Kurdish-speaking communities, and support the most vulnerable groups. Helping them adapt to these conditions required enormous efforts from our small team. However, despite all the shortages and limitations, we provided valuable and effective services, often beyond our capacity.

Financially, we are in a better position than last year. The improvement is still not enough as demand for our support continues to rise, and our budget is stretched to its limit. So, we continue to seek funding from as many different sources as we can, and always encourage donations.

Therefore, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all our staff, trustees, volunteers and supporters who have dedicated their time and energy, throughout this past year, to supporting women and vulnerable members of our communities.

Without this strong network of support, our organisation would not have been able to respond to the immense needs placed upon us. I would also like to thank all our funders, including Islington, Haringey, Hackney, and Westminster Councils, for their trust and continued support.

Despite the dark and worrying realities we continue to witness around the world, we remain hopeful that, together, we can help heal and strengthen our most affected communities.

*Halaleh Taheri*  
**Halaleh Taheri**

The logo for MEWSO (Middle Eastern Women & Society Organisation) is located in the top left corner. It consists of the acronym 'MEWSO' in a large, bold, red sans-serif font, with the full name 'Middle Eastern Women & Society Organisation' in a smaller, red sans-serif font directly below it. The entire logo is enclosed in a black rectangular border.

**MEWSO**

Middle Eastern Women & Society Organisation

## THE TEAM



**MEWSO**'s staff is made up of Halaleh Taheri, our Executive Director, welfare and domestic abuse advisors, a project manager, an outreach coordinator and a communications officer.

Almost all of us are from the communities we serve, with Middle Eastern, North African and Asian backgrounds. And, all are committed to providing high quality, tailored advice, along with classes and workshops designed to improve service-users' skills, knowledge and understanding of living in the UK, and improve their overall mental and physical wellbeing.

We speak Arabic, Kurdish, Farsi and English, have interpreters for other community languages, such as Turkish, Urdu and Hindi, and have access to a steady stream of talented volunteers.

Our Board of Trustees, equally ethnically diverse, is made up of women active and devoted to promoting women's rights and protecting the most vulnerable in our society. They oversee our activities, finances, policies, risk management, and long-term strategies and ensure we work effectively and responsibly.



# message from the CHAIR OF THE TRUSTEES



This is my first year as Chair of the Board of Trustees, but I know **MEWSO** so very well having worked for the organisation for several years in Project Delivery, Advice Services and Senior Leadership.

In the last few months I have witnessed the same dedication to protecting and uplifting the lives of vulnerable and displaced women as there has always been.

Our Board is diverse in its make up, but every one of us is committed to backing the staff and encouraging the organisation as a whole to continue to place women who are vulnerable to abuse, social exclusion, poverty and ill health, at the heart of everything they do.

I will continue to fight for women’s rights and defend those most in need, and I am proud to represent **MEWSO**, in all its endeavours, to do the same.

*Rose Fatherazi*  
**Rose Fatherazi**

Researcher & Programme Manager  
Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre,  
University of Oxford

# WHO WE ARE



**MEWSO** was established in 2010 to support migrant and minority ethnic women from Middle Eastern, North African and Asian communities. It became a charity in 2012, run by and for women.

We support and empower women, many of whom are migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; help them rebuild their fractured lives; and teach them skills and knowledge to help them secure their safety and independence.

The lived experiences of many of our team mean we can uniquely understand their challenges and provide culturally and linguistically accessible support. The help we give filters down to improve the lives of their children, their families and their neighbourhoods.

Our aim is to create strong, independent women who can stand up for themselves, their families and their communities.

The screenshot displays the MEWSO website layout. At the top left is the MEWSO logo. The main content area features a news article titled "Our Lives Are Not Border Policy" dated April 2020, with a sub-headline "Defending and protecting women from violence in the home and in the wider community". The article text discusses the impact of the UK's immigration system on women, particularly those from the Middle East, and mentions the "We Are Here Because You Were There" campaign. To the right of the article is a grid of small images. Below the article is a "NEWS" section with a grid of images. On the right side of the page is a "SERVICE UPDATES" section with several sub-sections: "Supporting The Iranian Community", "Anti-War Protest", "Counselling for Iranian Women", and "Keeping Up The Conversation". Each sub-section includes a brief description of the service and a small image. At the bottom of the page is the website URL "www.mewso.org".



## WHAT WE DO

More and more **our work involves** tackling the inequalities, disadvantages, discrimination, isolation, segregation, abuse and violence our clients face, almost on a daily basis. With less statutory support or nuanced cultural understanding, this represents some of our hardest obstacles.

**We deliver** culturally-tailored advice, advocacy and services such as befriending, counselling, social activities, and specialist support for women escaping gender-based violence. We work with women from communities where patriarchal values, cultural pressures and systemic inequalities have left them vulnerable to abuse, isolated, excluded, suffering severe financial hardship and poor health.

**We train** and share our knowledge on harmful cultural practices with professionals, service-users and community groups; and campaign to shift attitudes, raise awareness and change policies.

We remain one of the only organisations in London, **to advocate** specifically for women impacted by polygamy, forced virginity tests and hymen reconstructive surgeries. We also support LGBTQ+ individuals, those with insecure immigration status, and women with no recourse to public funds.

**Our aim** is to help create migrant and refugee-friendly VAWG policies and services; increased and targeted statutory support; early intervention; respect for women within their own communities; and strong, empowered women living the lives they chose to live.

# MEWSO

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## OUR ADVICE SERVICE



After much hard work by our Advice Team, we successfully gained **Advice Quality Standard (AQS)** approval, an independently audited quality standard, owned by the Advice Sector.

Equally, we have been members of **Advice UK** for several years, a body that supports its members in helping clients and in directly influencing policy-makers, decision-makers and funders.

All this has helped strengthen our connections with MARAC, meetings with multi-agency professionals discussing and sharing information about high-risk domestic abuse cases to ensure the safety of victim/survivors.

In addition, the Advice Team is looking forward to adding the IAA (Immigration Advice Authority) qualification to their skills so **MEWSO** can give accredited advice on immigration.





# OUR ADVICE SERVICE

Between April 2025 and March 2026, **MEWSO** supported nearly 1,000 women in a variety of activities.

**250**

VAWG (Violence Against Women & Girls) survivors

**120**

sessions of 1-2-1  
counselling

**95**

women participated  
in group therapy

**65**

therapeutic sessions delivered in Farsi and Arabic

**420**

women participated in our projects, workshops,  
services and social clubs



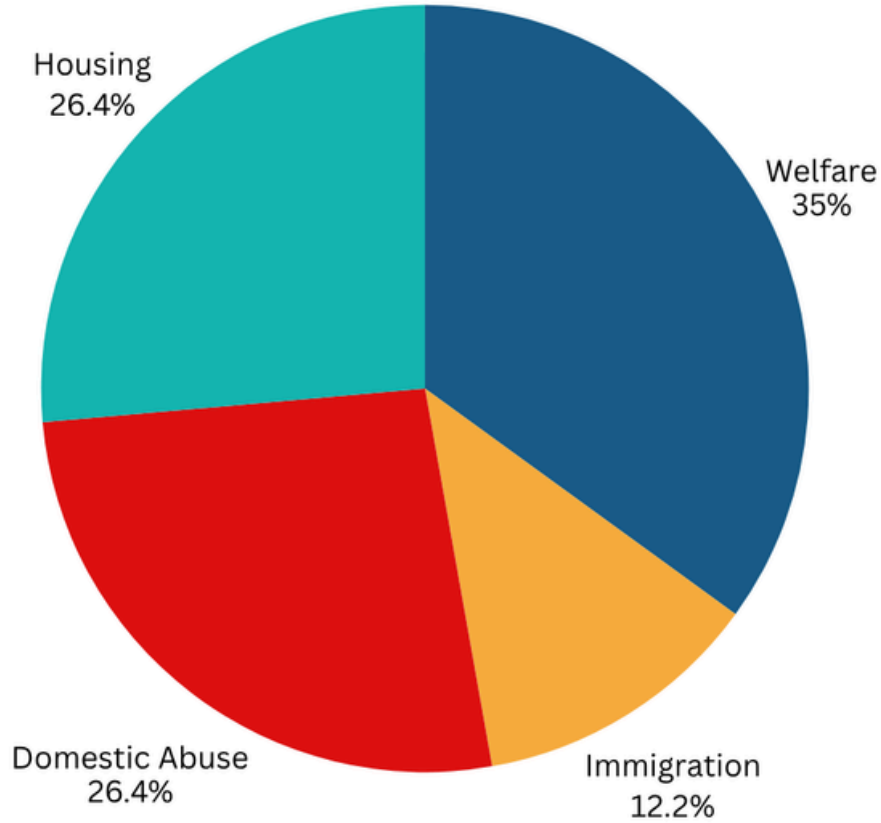
# MEWSO

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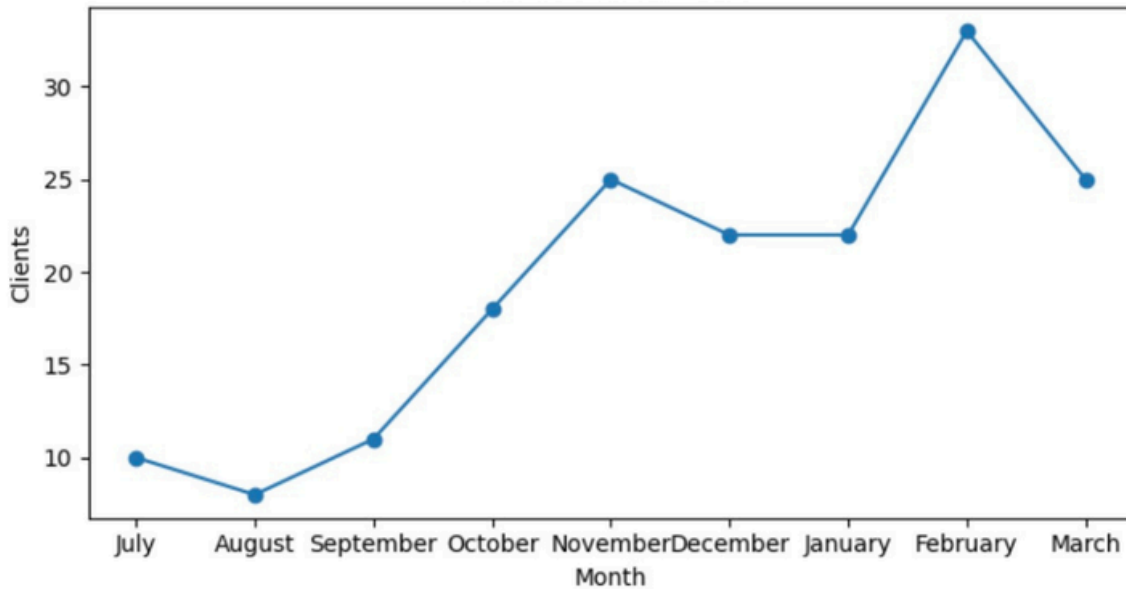
## OUR ADVICE SERVICE



### Types of Advice Support Delivered



### Total Clients By Month





# OUR ACTIVITIES IN WESTMINSTER

## Cook & Eat

Sessions that teach women how to cook their traditional meals using healthier ingredients and cooking methods without losing any of the taste. Then they all eat the food together as a way of building community.



## Crochet & Embroidery

As part of the Women's Social Club, Queen's Park, the women learn how to embroider and crochet all kinds of clothing and footwear. Each month, it is the women who decide what they what to learn next.

## Women's Social Club, Queen's Park - Days Out

Each month, our Outreach Coordinator organises a fun day out to a museum, art gallery, royal park, popular tourist spot, or even a beach. The activity reduces the women's stress, gets them outside their local neighbourhoods and helps them integrate into wider society.





## OUR ACTIVITIES IN WESTMINSTER



### Natural Green Living

These workshops teach the women about the environment and their footprint within it. They have learned how to make lavender bags, growing herbs and plants, and using up leftover food so that nothing gets wasted.

### Hair Care Day

The women in the Women's Social Club, Queen's Park, decided to have a day of hairdressing. So, local hairdresser, Karima, volunteered to give them each a cut and blow dry and taught them simple hair care techniques.



### Outreach Work

Every month our Outreach Coordinator sets up a stall or visits local hotels and community fairs, spreading the word about **MEWSO**, what we do and how we help women in the community.



# OUR ACTIVITIES IN WESTMINSTER



## **Women's Health & Wellbeing Event**

Along with the Sharan Project, we held activities and provided information promoting nutrition and fitness, good mental health, social advocacy, wellness through art, and seated yoga. Speakers talked about all stages of women's health, breast screening services and abusive cultural practices.



## **Vaccination Workshops**

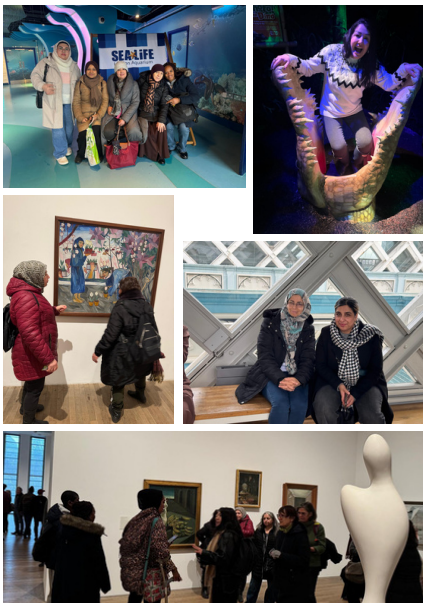
Sponsored by BME Health Forum and the NHS, we held a series of sessions in English, Farsi and Kurdish, educating women about vaccinations and their general health. The series explained the importance of flu vaccinations, Covid boosters, and the health issues around peri-menopause, menopause and post-menopause.



## OUR ACTIVITIES IN ISLINGTON & HACKNEY

### English Conversation

The regular class swelled in numbers as more women from Hackney came to improve their vocabulary and language skills. The class is designed so they can talk more easily to their GP, statutory services and even at the supermarket.



### Olive Club

Women in the newly reformed Olive Club have decided to visit the London Aquarium, the Tower Bridge Museum and engine room, Tate Modern, the upside down house in Westfields, west London, and Kew Gardens. The Club gives the women the chance to bond, integrate into wider society, and just have fun.



### Self-Improvement Workshop

These regular group therapy sessions, in Farsi, allow the women to become more self-aware and gain self-knowledge that improves their mental health and their overall wellbeing.





# OUR ACTIVITIES IN ISLINGTON & HACKNEY

## Know Your Healthcare Rights

A session, presented by Migrants Organise, educated the women on their rights when it comes to using NHS services. They learnt about the charging regulations, what is free and what is not, when it comes to GP and community services, and hospital and specialist care.



## Hate Crime Awareness Week

In a change to our usual invitation to the police and community safety staff from the local council to speak to the women, we arranged for iMIX, a charity that challenges the negative media image of migrants, to educate them on how to protect their stories. They learned how to share their experiences in a way that humanises them and shows society that they, like everybody else, just want to be safe and secure.





## OUR ACTIVITIES IN ISLINGTON & HACKNEY

### Outreach Work

As well as visiting local hotels, our Outreach Coordinator and other staff made a trip to the Hackney English Language Fair to distribute leaflets and talk to women about our services, in particular about our Mental Health, Advice and Crisis Support services. In one afternoon we signed up nine women, including four migrants and refugees who had arrived just two months before.



### Nowruz - Celebration and Commemoration

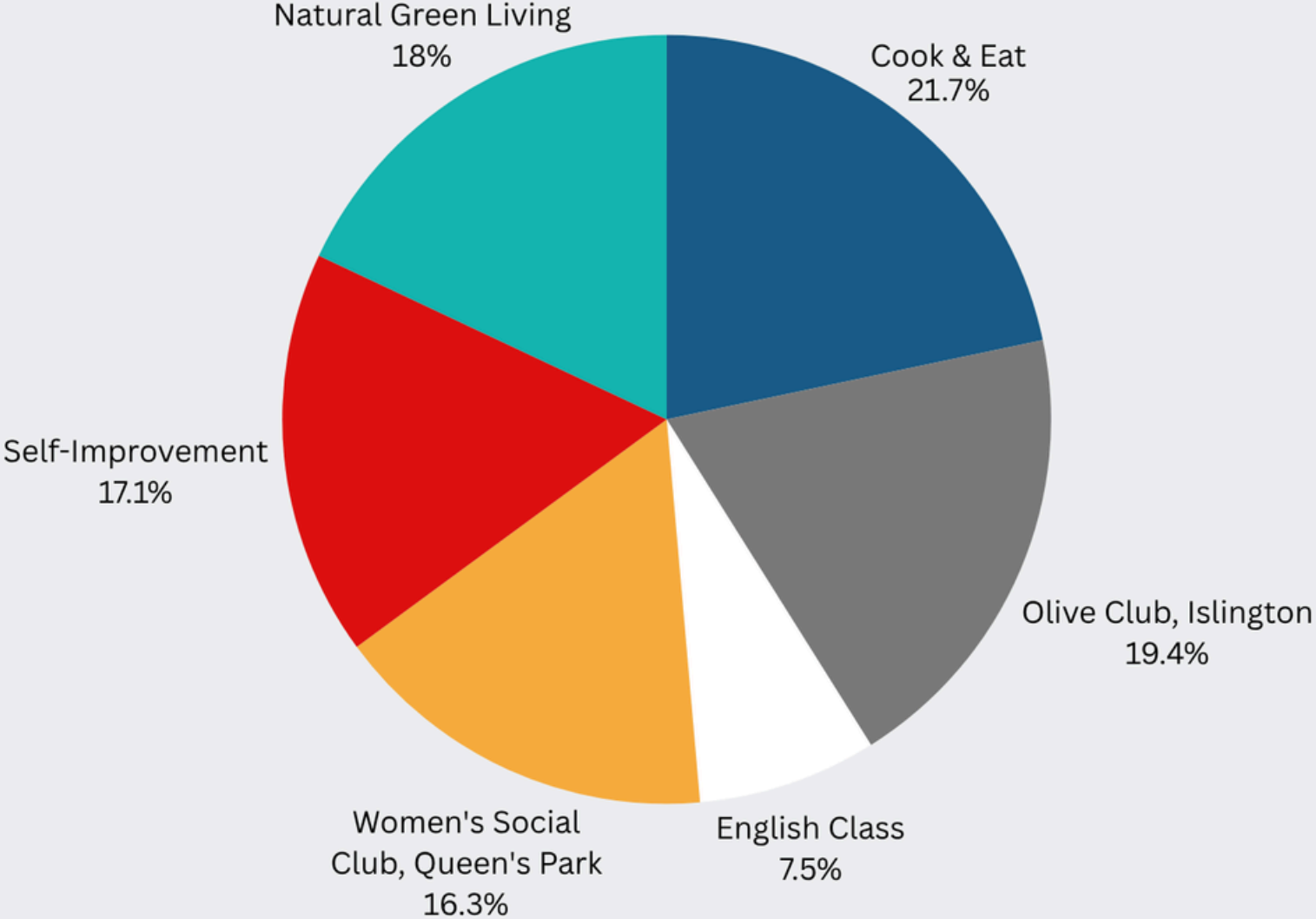
This year's Nowruz event was both a celebration and a sad occasion to support the local Iranian and Kurdish communities during a time of war. Those who attended remembered all the family and friends they have lost or who have been injured, but also celebrated the coming of Spring with food, music and dances from their homelands.



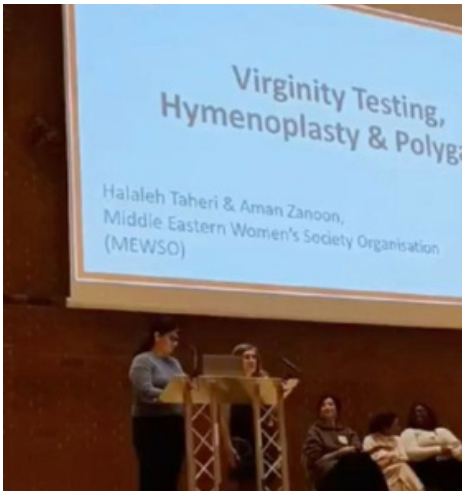


# OUR ACTIVITIES

Our regular classes, workshops & clubs as a percentage



# TRAINING PROFESSIONALS



This year, our training programme has been going from strength to strength.

We delivered training sessions on the realities and challenges of polygamous 'marriages' within minority communities: the legal, emotional and safeguarding implications.

And examined the illegal and harmful cultural practices that continue to take place out of sight, such as virginity tests, hymen reconstructive surgeries and FGM.

We train professionals who work in safe-guarding, domestic abuse advice and the VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) sectors. Our customers include London Boroughs Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham, the City of Westminster, and Lambeth; organisations such as the Gaia Centre and the national charity Refuge; and professionals like NHS consultants, refugee service managers, and staff and managers from refuges and children's charities.

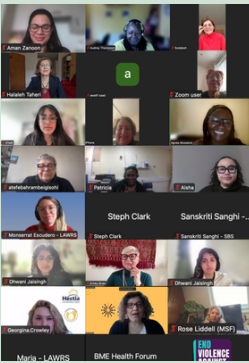
In 2025, we became Knowledge Ambassadors for Barnardo's, the children's charity, disseminating our experience and expertise to multi-agency groups across London, targeted service-users, community organisations and groups serving men and boys.



# CAMPAIGNS, COLLABORATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS

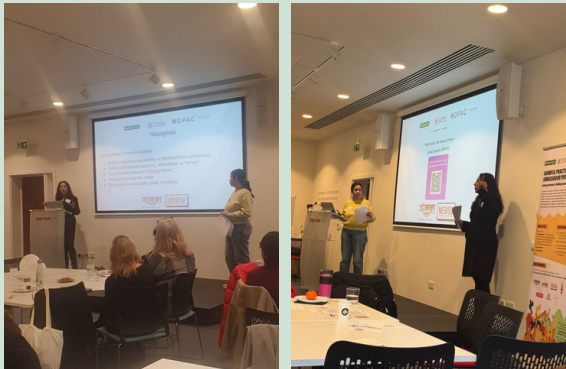


**MEWSO** held an online conference called **Our Lives Are Not Border Policy**, in recognition of International Women’s Day 2026. It resulted in developing several collaborations and partnerships to support women severely affected by draconian changes to UK immigration laws.



The changes severely impact migrant and refugee women’s access to justice, their safety, and their mental and physical wellbeing, and we aim to continue working together to achieve the greatest impact in their favour.

We were one of the lead partners in the **Changing the System Conference**, alongside the National FGM Centre and Barnardo’s, in response to ending harmful cultural practices.



Along with the Sharan Project, a fellow partner, we delivered interactive workshops to practitioners, community organisations, policy makers and victim-survivors. The workshops focused on tackling the 4Rs – Recognise, Respond, Record and Refer, and gave everyone practical tools and the confidence to take action in all such cases.

## CAMPAIGNS, COLLABORATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS

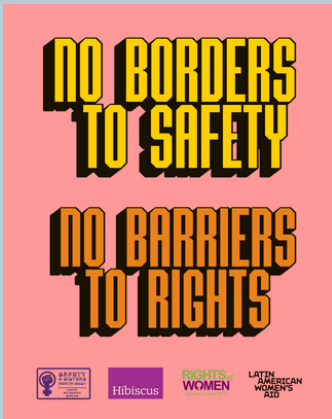


As a front-line VAWG organisation, **MEWSO** and 56 other **VAWG organisations** sent a joint response to Government stating our serious concerns that not **all** women are included in its new VAWG strategy.

This is because the strategy fails to tackle the well-evidenced barriers that face migrant and refugee women.

The response gave several recommendations, and rejected proposals to significantly extend the number of years it takes to earn residency, something that will harm black and minority migrant and refugee women the most.

As well as helping educate women about their rights to medical care, we are working to promote the work of **MedAct**, which supports health professionals that back healthcare as a basic human right and **Patients Not Passports**, which campaigns to end hostile environments that discourage migrants from accessing healthcare.





# CAMPAIGNS, COLLABORATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS



We are working collaboratively with the **Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance** to ensure housing policies take racism and other discriminations, such as disability, religion and age, into full account. This is to stop housing policy being twisted and misused by pressure from Far Right thinking that demonises society's most vulnerable.



We joined the campaign to make relationship and sex education mandatory for everyone up to, and including, 18 years of age. The campaign was started by the **Sex Education Forum**, the sexual health service, **Brook**, and the **End Violence Against Women coalition**, which includes **MEWSO**.

Extending RSE education will mean including sixth forms and colleges, where it is currently unavailable, in order to help prevent violence against women and girls.

**\*\*** Finally, but very significantly, **MEWSO** successfully became part of **two consortiums for VAWG organisations**, one of which secured a three-year contract with MOPAC for the **Domestic Abuse Secure Accommodation** project, helping to sustain our advisory role.



## OTHER ACTIVISM



**TOGETHER**  
28 MARCH LONDON



**MEWSO** staff joined several protests in opposition to the genocide in Gaza, the attacks on the Iranian people by the Islamic Regime, and the war on Iran by the US and Israel. These included the **Stop The War** coalition and the **Together Coalition**, against the Far Right and growing extremism.

Executive Director, Halaleh Taheri, spoke, at the **International Conference for the World's Women**, in Nepal, and condemned the growing abuse and violence against women world-wide.



The event honoured the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and saw delegates fly in from every continent to share their ideas and experiences.



Halaleh also spoke at the **Ideas for Freedom Conference** on immigrants rights.

Organised by the group Workers' Liberty, she lambasted those in power who scapegoat migrants and refugees to avoid their own political and financial policy failings being scrutinised.

**IDEAS FOR FREEDOM** 22-23 NOV 2025  
A festival of socialist ideas and debate

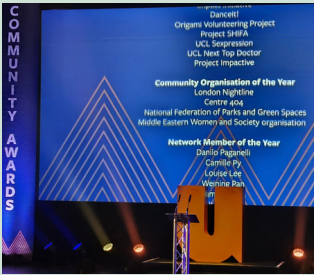


Hosted by **Workers' Liberty**  
22-23 November, Islington  
Free entry (professionally staffed), on-site accommodation, cheap food  
Tickets, full agenda, info: [workersliberty.org/IF25](http://workersliberty.org/IF25)  
+ Friday 21 November, 7pm, Debate on  
"The future of the left", Indian YMCA, W1T 6AQ



# AWARDS & RECOGNITION

**MEWSO** was given an **Award of Recognition** by the **London Community Foundation** in appreciation for our contribution to MOPAC’s Violence Against Women and Girls Grassroots Fund. The certificate reads: “Your courage in raising awareness of harmful practices is vital and we are honoured to support your work.”



We were also nominated for **University College London’s Community Organisation of the Year** award. We’re so proud to be recognised as one of the top four community organisations working with UCL.



Our Outreach Coordinator, Nabila, was **Highly Commended at the Health Equity Awards** for her women’s health and wellbeing projects. Organised by NHS North West London’s Integrated Care System (ICS), the awards recognise local heroes who empower communities.

# MEWSO

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## OUR FUNDERS

