

# Women without Status

Project at Isha L'Isha, Haifa Feminist Center



The Women Without Status Project was launched in 2018 at Isha L'Isha - Haifa Feminist Center. The project assists women with temporary or no legal status and advocates to change laws and promote policies that advance their rights and well-being.

The women we support include trafficking victims and survivors, asylum seekers, women who are married or in a relationship with an Israeli citizen or resident, as well as undocumented workers. These women come from various communities, including: Eastern European, Palestinian, African and Asian communities. Their life stories and backgrounds are very diverse and unique. What is common is that all of these women, regardless of their singular story, face significant personal and legal challenges.

Women without status in Israel face a variety of issues and challenges, including lack of access to public health services, lack of protective and welfare services, lack of employment rights, and lack of civil rights. Many of these women depend on male partners for their temporary status or livelihood, resulting in an increased risk of sexual and domestic violence. Nearly all of these women live in social isolation and suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Most have experienced traumatic interactions with Israeli immigration authorities, police, or governmental institutions. When facing violence or life threatening situation they are often afraid to seek assistance due to fear of being deported or of being separated from their children and families. Additionally, many of the women have language barriers that make it difficult to deal with representative of state services, to explain their needs and to seek help. Each of the women experiences difficult legal, mental, and health circumstances, which are often overwhelming and make it difficult for them to handle everyday life, resulting in depression and despair.

Isha L'Isha is a feminist organization that offers comprehensive, professional and specially tailored support through its Women without Status project. **Our aim is to affect the legal and social status of these women and to help individual Women without Status in Israel to feel safer, stronger, and empowered.**

Isha L'Isha counts with an extensive network of state officials, civil society organizations, professionals, lawyers, and volunteers that offer support to the women that reach out to us. Through a Forum of civil society organizations and state officials, we work closely with individuals and institutions to advance the well-being and safety of women and their families. In addition, we organize events for professionals (health care and medical service providers, social workers, and lawyers, among other) and the public to raise awareness about the many challenges that women without status face and how we can support them.

Some of the support we offer individual women, includes:

- Assistance in emergency situations and a 24/7 hotline for regular inquiries and emergencies;
- Accompaniment to different institutions such as court house, police, immigration offices;
- Legal support;
- Offering financial assistance through an Emergency grants to meet urgent needs such as health services, child welfare, clothing, medication, or food
- Providing support to access reproductive health services;
- Practical skills training, support groups, and workshops, including Hebrew courses, employment workshops, and workshops on social and legal rights

## How the project helps women?

Despite the significant challenges that women face, we have been able to provide meaningful and tailored support to 80 women and their families in 2018 and 2019. We know from direct feedback from the women that our Hebrew courses provided them with a sense of **security**. Participants reported that they would feel less anxious when addressed in Hebrew in public spaces. Through the courses they were able to know other women in their situation, make friends and feel more supported. Women also reported that the legal lectures and information provided were extremely helpful to debunk myths. Several women have reported being wrongfully informed and defrauded by unethical lawyers that charge high amounts of money in exchange of

legal permits that are impossible to get under the current law. Women felt **empowered** by having reliable information and having an address to ask if needed. Thanks to our assistance and support, women felt **stronger** and accompanied. They began to have some hope as their specific cases were making some progress and some women were able to access their rights. For example, the Welfare Department got involved in cases where women faced violence, some women were able to access a shelter or have a social worker support her. In other instances, women with Israeli children were supported to ensure that they receive children allowances and child alimony, children received vaccinations, and more. The emotional support was also very meaningful as women without status tend to be very isolated. **Even though all odds are against them, they feel that someone is on their side.**

With your support we could reach many more women that need our help. Together we could provide more women with the support skills and tools necessary to help improve their well-being and the well-being of their families and their communities. It is also important to raise awareness of their experiences and advocate for meaningful policy change.

For more information, please contact Ayala Olier, project coordinator at [Isha.wws@gmail.com](mailto:Isha.wws@gmail.com)

## About Isha L'Isha

Isha L'Isha, the Haifa Feminist Center, was established in 1983 and is the oldest grassroots feminist organization in Israel. It is one of the leading voices of women's rights in the country. The center is based in Haifa and most of our activities are carried out by volunteers. Isha L'Isha's mission is to advance the status and rights of women and girls and to promote peace, security and socio-economic justice from a feminist perspective through education, research, dissemination of knowledge and public events.