



HuMENA For Human Rights and Civic Engagement
HuMENA pour les Droits de l'Homme et l'Engagement Civique
هيومينا لحقوق الإنسان والمشاركة المدنية

A Report on the Legal and Social Situation of the LGBTQI+ Community in the Middle East and North Africa Region, and its Radical Transformation Between **2020** and **2023** (Lebanon as a Model)



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Executive summary

Consensual same-sex relationships remain criminalized in the majority of MENA countries. The countries of this region violate the rights of gays, lesbians, transgenders, and queer people using different laws, some of which are clear and explicit, and others that use broad expressions that are open to interpretation, which criminalize «sodomy», «debauchery», «violation of public morals and standards» and «immorality».

Nevertheless, in many countries of this region, there has been an improvement in the situation of the LGBTQI+ community in recent years in several aspects. However, in the last two years, 2022 and 2023, there has been a noticeable decline in the social and legal status of members of this community.

Therefore, this report examines the history of the legal and social situation regarding LGBTQI+ rights in the MENA region, focusing on Lebanon over the past two years (2022-2023).

The report analyzes the various cases that have occurred in Lebanon since the summer of 2022 against the rights of the LGBTQI+ community, including the decision of the Lebanese Interior Minister, Bassam Al-Mawlawi, to ban gatherings and activities related to this community, and the campaign of hatred and incitement by politicians and religious figures against homosexuals and transgender people that has continued for a significant period of time.

The report focuses on the motives and justifications behind these actions, and also addresses the broader trends, challenges and human rights violations faced by queer individuals in the region. It also highlights the efforts of local and international organizations working to promote the rights of LGBTQI+ people, and provides recommendations to address the situation effectively.

Introduction

As with any issue throughout history, the way the LGBTQI+ community is perceived has changed. Events have never been static, just as women today are subjected to various types of discrimination and persecution after they were gods in some ancient civilizations and a source of life, so the scene has shifted for the LGBTQI+ community, which has recorded its presence since time immemorial in many ancient civilizations, starting from the Pharaohs, Greeks and Japanese to Native Americans, which in turn often contained such relationships. Today, members of this community all over the world face persecution and discrimination in various forms, including in the education, services or health sector, right up to their homes and within their communities or surroundings, where many of them are ostracized, tortured or physically assaulted, and may often reach to the point of murder.

Of course, with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region being considered one of the most extremist and most rejecting regions for the LGBTQI+ community, it recorded the largest number of cases of persecution with the absence of legislation protecting them and with the existence of discriminatory laws criminalizing them and subjecting them to various penalties, which in some of these countries reach the death penalty. After years of struggle, advocacy and attempts at change, it cannot be denied that many countries in the world have witnessed remarkable progress in dealing with the LGBTQI+ community. However, the scene has changed in the past two years, especially in Lebanon, which is in a better position compared to other countries in this region, albeit to a certain extent.

The problem is that the legal and social status of LGBTQI+ people appears to be declining over the past couple of years, and in many cases even in the most developed countries, despite decades of progress. For example, in 2023, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), which is the largest LGBTQI+ civil rights organization in the United States, officially declared a «**state of emergency**» for queer people in the United States for the first time in over 40 years, following an unprecedented rise in anti-LGBTQ+ legislation this year. In its new report, «**LGBTQ+ Americans Under Attack**», the organization details more than 75 anti-LGBTQ+ bills

signed into law this year alone, more than double the number of last year, which was considered the worst year on record.

In light of this, the report aims to shed light on the social and legal situation of the LGBTQI+ community in the Middle East and North Africa, especially in the past two years, which witnessed a significant change in events, while studying the case of Lebanon in particular, where the situation is changing after a handful of decisions by men of authority and religion. For the second year in a row, Beirut has been absent from any events or public activities related to Pride Month for the LGBTQI+ community, whose members have returned to hide in closed rooms again, and hold gatherings and meetings away from the spotlight, for fear of repression by the security authorities and attacks by extremist religious groups, in light of the escalation of hate speech against them.

The report presents a historical overview of the situation of the LGBTQI+ community in the Middle East and North Africa, focusing on the laws that address them in the region, and how these laws violate the human rights principles stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also addresses the Lebanese issue, from the decision of the Lebanese minister of the interior, Bassam Al-Mawlawi, in the summer of 2022 to ban LGBTQI+ gatherings or holding events, to a fierce campaign in 2023 by clerics and the authorities to spread hatred and incitement against members of this community, and even to propose laws criminalizing the promotion of homosexuality, and consider the reasons and motives of these decisions. The report compares the situation in this region and in Lebanon specifically with international standards, and makes recommendations to apply the best practices that would play a role in improving their situation and putting an end to the violations to which they are subjected.

Introduction to LGBTQI+ Rights in the Middle East and North Africa

LGBTQI+ people are considered to be deprived of their rights in the Middle East and North Africa, which has a set of laws, most of which criminalize same-sex relationships, even consensual ones.

Sodomy, debauchery and public morality laws are among the tools used by states to violate the rights of members of the queer community, as its members are subjected to arrest, violence and discrimination in the public and private spheres. These violations have been documented in detail in a number of human rights reports, media coverage and in academic and political discourses. In international meetings and sessions, such as the Human Rights Council and the United Nations,¹ LGBTQI+ people are often misrepresented by countries that are selected from the region. Under pretexts based on arguments related to religious and cultural values, these countries undermine the rights of members of the LGBTQI+ community, and work to present the countries of the region in a homogeneous manner and as a unified entity in their view of the members of this community.

The countries of the region oppose the implementation of universal human rights with regard to sexual orientation and gender expression, and emphasize that respecting the human rights of LGBTQI+ individuals is contrary to the cultural and religious values of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

For example, in June 2016, Morocco opposed the assignment of the independent expert on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression to the UN Human Rights Council.² They considered that it contradicts «the values and beliefs

¹ The Human Rights Council has a unique mechanism, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). This process involves reviewing the human rights records of all 193 UN member states once every four years. The review provides an opportunity for all states to announce the actions they have taken to improve human rights conditions in their countries and overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights. The Universal Periodic Review also includes a sharing of human rights best practices across the globe.

² The mandate of the independent expert on protection from violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity was established with the aim of: «assessing the implementation of existing international human rights mechanisms in relation to ways to overcome violence and discrimination against people on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity, identifying and addressing the root causes of violence and discrimination». See UN Human Rights: «independent expert on sexual orientation and gender identity» available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SexualOrientationGender/Pages/Index.aspx>

of at least 1.5 billion people belonging to one civilization.»³ The same delegate also said that the mandate created ambiguity in young people and challenged the universality of human rights.⁴

However, the situation is not the same in the region, and saying so is considered contrary to reality. While the countries of this region, which have an Arabic-speaking and Muslim majority, do not recognize the rights of the LGBTQI+ community or even its existence, their laws vary between what explicitly stipulate the illegality of these relationships and vague texts that are left to interpretation.

Legal Framework:

Introduction to Homosexuality in the Laws of the Middle East and North Africa

In the legal framework, the majority of the countries of this region inherited strict and harsh laws against homosexuality from the French and British colonial judicial systems. After Jordan and Bahrain gained independence, each of them abolished these laws, the first in 1951 and the second in 1976, while other countries in the region preserved this legacy, sometimes changing the language and wording of the law.

In other cases, some countries in this region are subject to the provisions of Islamic Sharia, such as Saudi Arabia, where Sharia is the primary source of laws, and in which there are no written laws related to sexual orientation and gender identity, but judges use Islamic Sharia to punish people suspected of having homosexual relations or other «immoral» acts.

³ Rainbow Communities International Alliance, the international gay, lesbian, transgender and intersex organization -, finalizing the adoption of the sexual orientation and gender identity resolution, on June 30, 2016, available at:

https://www.igla.org/download/SOGI_Resolution_Vote_Compilation.pdf P. 96

⁴ Ibid

Explicit Mentioning of Homosexuality in the Law

In **Tunisia, Algeria, Oman, Morocco, Yemen, Libya, Qatar, Iran, Mauritania**, and part of **Palestine** (particularly in Gaza where its laws differ from the West Bank), laws explicitly prohibit homosexuality, either using gender-neutral language or mentioning both men and women.

In **Gaza**, the British Mandate Law No. 74 of 1936 is still in force. **Article 152** of it criminalizes "anyone who has sexual intercourse with another person contrary to the laws of nature" with up to 10 years in prison.⁵

In the **West Bank**, the law in force is the Jordanian Penal Code of 1951, and this law does not prohibit same-sex relations.⁶

One of the examples of explicit mention of homosexuality in the law is **Qatar**, which imposes penalties according to **Article 296** on any male, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, who «leads, incites, or entices by any means a male to commit an act of sodomy or debauchery».⁷

Also in **Mauritania**, same-sex relations are criminalized according to **Article 308** of the Penal Code, by "stoning in public" for every Muslim who "committed the crime of sodomy," and by imprisonment between 3 months and 3 years and a fine of between 5,000 and 60,000 ouguiyas (142 to 1,702 dollars) for every two adult Muslim women who committed the same act.⁸

Some countries in the region criminalize sexual relations between men, namely **Kuwait, Sudan**, and part of the **United Arab Emirates (Dubai)**.⁹

⁵ Penal Code No. 74 of 1936, <http://www.qanon.ps/news.php?action=view&id=16325>

⁶ Jordanian Penal Code (No. 16 of 1960) <http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/ar/jo/jo064ar.pdf>

⁷ Law No. 11 of 2004 promulgating the Penal Code, <https://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawArticleID=889&LawId=26&language=ar>

⁸ Legal Order No. 162-83 of July 9, 1983 containing the Penal Code, <https://www.justice.gov.mr/IMG/pdf/codepenalarabe.pdf>

⁹ The UAE has a federal system, with a comprehensive penal code in addition to a penal code specific to each emirate.

Examples of Countries That Use Ambiguous Expressions to Describe Homosexuality

Lebanon, Syria, and another part of the **United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi)**, prohibit "unnatural" sex and define it vaguely.

In **Lebanon, Article 534** of the Lebanese Penal Code punishes «any sexual intercourse contrary to nature» with up to one year in prison.¹⁰ This clause has been repeatedly used to prosecute people suspected of homosexuality.

However, in the past years, for more than 14 years, the courts have ruled in 4 cases that this substance cannot be used to prosecute consensual homosexual sex.¹¹ In 2007 it was the first case of this kind, where a judge criticized the wording of the law as follows: Man is part of nature and one of its elements... No one can say that any of his behavior is contrary to nature even if the action is criminal or offensive because these are simply the laws of nature. If the sky rained during the summer, or the weather came hot in the winter, or a tree gave us exotic fruits, all these things are consistent with nature and are part of its laws.¹²

As for the emirate of Abu Dhabi, the law stipulates a penalty for every «unnatural sexual intercourse».

Many countries use gender-neutral «morality» laws to prosecute people who have consensual homosexual sex. These provisions are extremely dangerous as they remain vague and open to interpretation, because they use terms such as «punch» without clearly defining them. In **Egypt**, the authorities used the «debauchery» law passed in 1951 to criminalize sex work, and later replaced it with law 1961/10 combating prostitution to prosecute sexual acts between men, which led to hundreds of arrests.¹³ In the same context, Bahrain also harasses and detains individuals suspected of belonging to the LGBTQI+ community using vague terms about «modesty».¹⁴

In **Iraq** and **Jordan**, there is no law criminalizing consensual homosexual sex, and the government does not always use «moral» provisions to criminalize it.

¹⁰ Lebanese Penal Code, 1943.

¹¹ For a discussion on the first three cases, see Lama Karama, Article 534 has been dropped: homosexuality is not «contrary to nature», Legal Agenda, July 11, 2016.

¹² International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Justice: A Comparative Law Casebook (Geneva: ICJ, 2011), p.43.

¹³ Human Rights Watch, "In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice in Egypt's Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct," 2004, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/egypt0304arabic.pdf>

¹⁴ Article 350 of the Bahraini Penal Code (1976) criminalizes anyone who "commits an indecent act in public."

Expressing Gender Identity... Between Outright Violation and Circumvention of the Law

Sexual non-conformity is not explicitly against the laws in the region except in the **United Arab Emirates** and previously **Kuwait**. The Kuwaiti Constitutional Court in 2022 annulled a law criminalizing «imitation of the opposite sex» established in 2007 after amending Article 198. In 2018, **Oman** was added to the list by criminalizing every man «disguised as a woman».

Accordingly, both transgender people as well as those with a “non-normative” gender identity are subject to persecution, arrest or torture.

In the United Arab Emirates, the Federal Penal Code punishes «any man who disguises himself as a woman and enters a place reserved for women or whose entry is prohibited at that time for anyone but women».¹⁵ In 2016, a Canadian model was banned from entering the United Arab Emirates due to her gender identity.¹⁶

In the rest of the countries in the region, there are no laws criminalizing gender transitioning or «imitating the opposite sex». However, in many of these countries, transgender women (i.e., from male to female) are punished and prosecuted under laws that are unclear or have nothing to do with gender expression or gender identity.

In Lebanon, transgender women are being restricted, subjected to harassment or sometimes even arrested, and attempts are made to punish them in accordance with Article 534, which criminalizes sexual relations «contrary to nature» if they have sex with men, as they are not recognized as women and this relationship is viewed as a homosexual relationship. However, as noted earlier, homosexual relations in accordance with this article have not been criminalized for more than 15 years.

On August 2023 ,¹⁵, an independent member of the Iraqi Parliament, Raed Al-Maliki, submitted a **draft law** aimed at amending the «Anti-Prostitution Law» No. 8 of 1988, criminalizing homosexual relations and the expression of gender identity. If the bill is passed, homosexual relations will be punished with death or life imprisonment, «promotion of homosexuality» by imprisonment of at least seven years and a fine, and «impersonation of women» by imprisonment of at least three years.

¹⁵ Government of Dubai, Article 359 of the Laws of the United Arab Emirates.

¹⁶ Asmae Bahadi, “Transgender Person Denied Entry to United Arab Emirates”, August 11, 2016.

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¹⁵ Government of Dubai, Article 359 of the Laws of the United Arab Emirates.

¹⁶ Asmae Bahadi, "Transgender Person Denied Entry to United Arab Emirates", August 11,2016.

The bill punishes the «promotion of homosexuality», and also equates same-sex relations with «sexual deviation», which it defines as «any sexual intercourse between a person and another person of the same sex if it is repeated more than three times».

The draft law addresses gender transition, specifically targeting transgender women (from male to female), with imprisonment between one and three years or a fine ranging between 5 million dinars (3,800 US dollars) and 10 million dinars (7,700 US dollars) for anyone who "perpetrates any act of transvestism," which the law also defines as "imitating women," and includes "wearing women's makeup and wearing women's clothing in public places or looking like women."

The draft law prohibits hormone replacement therapy and what it calls "sex reassignment" based on personal desire, as well as any attempt to change gender identity, punishable by one to three years in prison. The same penalty applies to any surgeon or other doctor who performs gender confirmation surgery. The law excludes intersex cases that require surgical intervention to confirm biological sex to be either male or female only.

On August 2023 ,8, the Iraqi Media and Communications Commission directed all media outlets and social media platforms operating in the country not to use the term "homosexuality," replacing it with "sexual deviation," and banned the use of the term "gender".

Lebanon – Radical Transformations in the Reality of the LGBTQI+ Community

In 2020, coinciding with the anti-government demonstrations and protests witnessed in Lebanon, a march raising rainbow flags took place, involving hundreds of participants in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, demanding the rights of the LGBTQI+ community. It was like announcing a clear presence of these marginalized groups in the Lebanese society, after their unprecedented appearance during the demonstrations that took place between 2019 and 2020. The march, which took place in the Pride Month, has been described as the «first gay pride march» in an Arab country. This has increased the hopes of the LGBTQI+ community in Lebanon for a more liberal future.

But the reality now is that Beirut, for the second year in a row, is absent from any events or public activities related to the Pride Month for the LGBTQI+ community, whose members have returned to hide and hold gatherings and events away from the spotlight, for fear of repression by the security authorities and attacks by extremist religious groups, in light of the escalation of hate speech against them. In the past two years, a series of decisions and actions have contributed to tightening the pressure on members of the LGBTQI+ community and dispelling hopes of improving their situation in Lebanon.

Starting with the decision of Lebanese Interior Minister Bassam Al-Mawlawi on June 2022 ,²⁴ to ban gatherings "aimed at promoting homosexuality." However, on the first of November of the same year, the State Shura Council decided to suspend the implementation of this decision after an appeal submitted by the "Legal Agenda" and "Helem" organizations.¹⁷ However, Al-Mawlawi did not give up and violated the decision of the State Shura Council by trying to prevent any gathering, meeting, or conference related to the queer community.¹⁸

In July 2023, the debate about homosexuality raged between supporters and opponents on social media after the Secretary-General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, launched an attack on homosexuals in a speech, saying that it originated from the United States of America and Europe, and that all Lebanese, either Muslims or Christians, should confront it "by all means and without

¹⁷ Legal Agenda, "Helem" Organization, the Interior Ministry's decision to intimidate homosexuality is no longer effective, 2015.

¹⁸ Asrar Shebaro, Al-Hurra, despite the decision of the "State Shura Council".. The Minister of the Interior of Lebanon "tightens the screws" on homosexuals, 2022.

limitations."¹⁹Nasrallah's speech attracted political and religious forces, a number of which began to make statements and spread anti-homosexuality ideas, which they considered to be in violation of customs, traditions, and religious and cultural values in the country.

This came in conjunction with the submission by 9 deputies of a **law proposal** stipulating the abolition of Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code, which was signed by 9 deputies, while 8 deputies of the "representatives of change"²⁰ abstained from signing. In the introduction of the reasons for proposing the law, it is stated that "Decriminalizing homosexuality does not mean legislating it, but rather decriminalization of individuals."

On the other hand, Major General Ashraf Rifi presented a **law proposal** to legislate the criminalization of homosexuality and its promoters. The proposal aims to amend the current version of Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code by punishing all "sexual intercourse against nature" by adding the phrase "between homosexuals, between a male and a male, and between a female and a female." The prison sentence was also raised, and the penalty now required imprisonment from one to three years. In turn, the Minister of Culture, Mohamed Mortada, also referred to the Council of Ministers a proposal for a **draft law** that he had prepared himself, with the aim of punishing the promotion of homosexuality or the possibility of gender transitioning.

As the hate speech escalated, a group calling itself the «soldiers of God», an extremist Christian group, stormed a club in Beirut and assaulted young men and women who were watching a comedy theater show. **Videos** have circulated on social media documenting the incident, where one of the attackers is heard saying, «This is Satan's place promoting homosexuality. In the land of the lord, this is forbidden... We warned you 100 times».

On September 30, 2023, the «March of Freedoms», which was called for in the downtown of Beirut, was attacked by kicking and beating by a group of young men under the pretext that this march supported homosexuality.

¹⁹ Asrar Shebaro, Al-Hurra, Nasrallah launches a battle against homosexuals in Lebanon... and fears of the "level of violence," July 24, 2023,

²⁰ The Lebanese Parliament includes 14 representatives from outside the traditional forces who were elected in 2022 and are called representatives of change.

This march was organized by associations, organizations, media and human rights institutions under the title "For a Full Guarantee of our Freedoms and in Response to Successive Violations". It was attacked by young men riding motorcycles who embarked on an anti-march under the title "Protect your Family", where they called for "Imposing the right values and morals, refusing to defend gay rights".²¹

²¹ Asrar Shebaro, Al-Hurra, under the pretext of supporting "homosexuality"... An attack on the "March of Freedoms" in downtown of Beirut, 2023.

Attacks and Incitements Against the LGBTQI+ Community... The Reasons and Motives

In recent years, the decline in LGBTQI+ rights has been at the forefront of the deteriorating human rights record of MENA governments. This decline refers in particular to the regional decline in human rights for all.

This decline includes attacks on fundamental rights, such as the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, as well as the introduction of abusive legislation, including cybercrime laws and laws that criminalize the expression of gender and sexuality, targeting dissent in general, and LGBTQI+ activism in particular.

In crises in particular, the use of anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric and legislation to mobilize a largely uninformed public against a marginalized group becomes a tool used by governments to scapegoat the most vulnerable groups. As Lebanon sinks deeper into the crisis it is going through, the authorities are suppressing the rights of the LGBTQI+ community and allowing unchecked violence against them. These attacks occur in light of a stifling economic crisis that has had dire consequences on human rights and has pushed more than 80 percent of the population into poverty, which has particularly affected marginalized groups.²²

These attacks are not new. The more powerful and visible intersectional activism around LGBTQI+ rights becomes, the more threatening and repressive the government becomes. Since 2017, Lebanese security forces have regularly intervened in human rights events and activities related to gender and sexuality, including by issuing an **entry ban** on non-Lebanese attending conferences related to these topics, which was canceled in 2021 under judicial rulings. Far from serving the public interest, the Lebanese government is undermining basic rights while failing to enact urgent economic and justice reforms.

²² From our interview with Rasha Younes, a senior researcher and LGBTQI+ rights advocate in the Middle East and North Africa at Human Rights Watch.

Individual and International Efforts

The escalation of hate speech in Lebanon is matched by individual and collective efforts, local and international, aimed at mitigating the consequences of these events. Sam (pseudonym), 22 years old, is a feminist activist who is working with colleagues to launch an initiative²³ that includes working on several projects, including amending the internal laws related to workplaces with start-up institutions and organizations. Through his work and activities, Sam seeks to use any means or platform that gives him an opportunity to defend the rights of marginalized individuals. However, after the recent events in Lebanon, he stopped all his activities for the time being and temporarily stayed away from social media, after receiving death threats. "The recent attacks have spread fear and panic to everyone from all over the region, and all places have become unsafe, even those that LGBTQI+ people have always considered an outlet for them," Sam explains.²⁴

In turn, Rasha Younes, a researcher and advocate for LGBTQI+ rights across the Middle East and North Africa at Human Rights Watch, focuses her work on researching and documenting human rights violations against LGBTQI+ individuals in Lebanon. This includes interviewing victims, witnesses, and sometimes government officials to gather evidence of discrimination, violence, and legal violations. Human Rights Watch works to raise awareness about the human rights issues faced by LGBTQI+ people in Lebanon through reports, press releases, and public statements. This extensive documentation aims to mobilize public opinion, both locally and internationally, to support the rights of these individuals. Human Rights Watch also cooperates with government officials and policymakers in Lebanon to advocate for legal and policy changes that protect and advance the rights of the LGBTQI+ community. This may include meetings, letters and public appeals to government authorities.

²³ Sam refrained from mentioning the name of the initiative for reasons related to his safety and personal security.

²⁴ From an interview with Sam (pseudonym).

In her interview with HuMENA, Younes explains her role at Human Rights Watch, saying, "I never work alone, but always in consultation and partnership with local and regional organizations and activists to mobilize Human Rights Watch's international platform to advance their work and messaging. On the international level, HRW engages with bodies such as the United Nations and regional organizations to highlight LGBTQI+ rights issues in Lebanon and advocate for international pressure on the Lebanese government to make necessary reforms. We also launch media campaigns, including on social media, to draw attention to LGBTQI+ rights issues in Lebanon and generate public support as well as contribute to shifting narratives." Younes concludes, "LGBTQI+ rights are fundamental human rights and stifling them as an excuse to keep a portion of society marginalized under the false pretext of so-called public morals is detrimental to everyone's human rights."

Conclusions

Issues of protecting the rights of the LGBTQI+ community are considered one of the most prominent challenges in the Middle East and North Africa region, as they are taboo topics that are prohibited to address, and their repression is taken for granted by the governments of this region. Members of this community in the countries of this region are exposed to numerous violations, ranging from arrest and intimidation, to imprisonment or even torture. These countries are often similar in their perception of the LGBTQI+ community and their dealings with it, especially from a legal perspective, and the data do not indicate signs of change. Rather, data and indicators show a noticeable decline in the rights of the LGBTQI+ community in the region in recent years.

This comes despite the fact that these countries are a party to many international conventions that recognize the protection of freedom of expression, the fight against torture, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination, but their system does not respect or include basic standards of protection, and customs and traditions remain the master of the situation.

Recommendations

Recommendations for civil society in the Middle East and North Africa region:

- Intensifying efforts by local and international organizations and putting international pressure on Arab governments to make the necessary reforms and improve the situation of the LGBTQI+ community in the region.
- Providing cash assistance and livelihood support to mitigate severe social and economic impacts on people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and gender characteristics.
- Consult with people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and gender characteristics and with organizations on needs and gaps, to integrate (needs and gaps) into gender-responsive programs.

Recommendations to the international community:

- Ensure the protection of groups and organizations that come together to ensure sexual and physical rights.
- Continue to expand multi-sectoral services targeting the specific needs of the most marginalized LGBTQI+ people and those with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, especially trans individuals.
- Support advocacy efforts to update current national laws that address the issue of homosexuality or gender expression in a way that decriminalizes it, especially those whose texts are open to interpretation, in line with international standards and the international conventions that these countries have signed.

- Enact policies and procedures that take into account non-binary understandings of gender, with regard to access to governmental and non-governmental services.
- Calling for legislation that allows trans individuals to amend the gender on their identity cards and official papers.
- Support efforts to prevent arbitrary arrest and detention of trans individuals and other marginalized groups due to their legal status.
- Supporting LGBTQI+ organizations with financial resources.

Recommendations for the LGBTQI+ community:

- Participate in workshops and programs that aim to introduce the LGBTQI+ community and its social and legal status, in order to educate them and to know their rights and how to behave if they are arrested or subjected to violence, etc.
- Use all platforms, whether digital or otherwise, to dispel fears about the LGBTQI+ community, spread a state of collective awareness about its reality, and remove false ideas about it.
- Using arts and cultural production to raise awareness due to its influence and the important role it plays in conveying messages.
- Building alliances and raising awareness through all available means, such as media outlets, organizing campaigns through social media, direct awareness among potential allies, and undeclared awareness.

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