

Gender and Sexuality Activism in Exile

**A Toolkit for human rights defenders
and LGBTI activists**



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

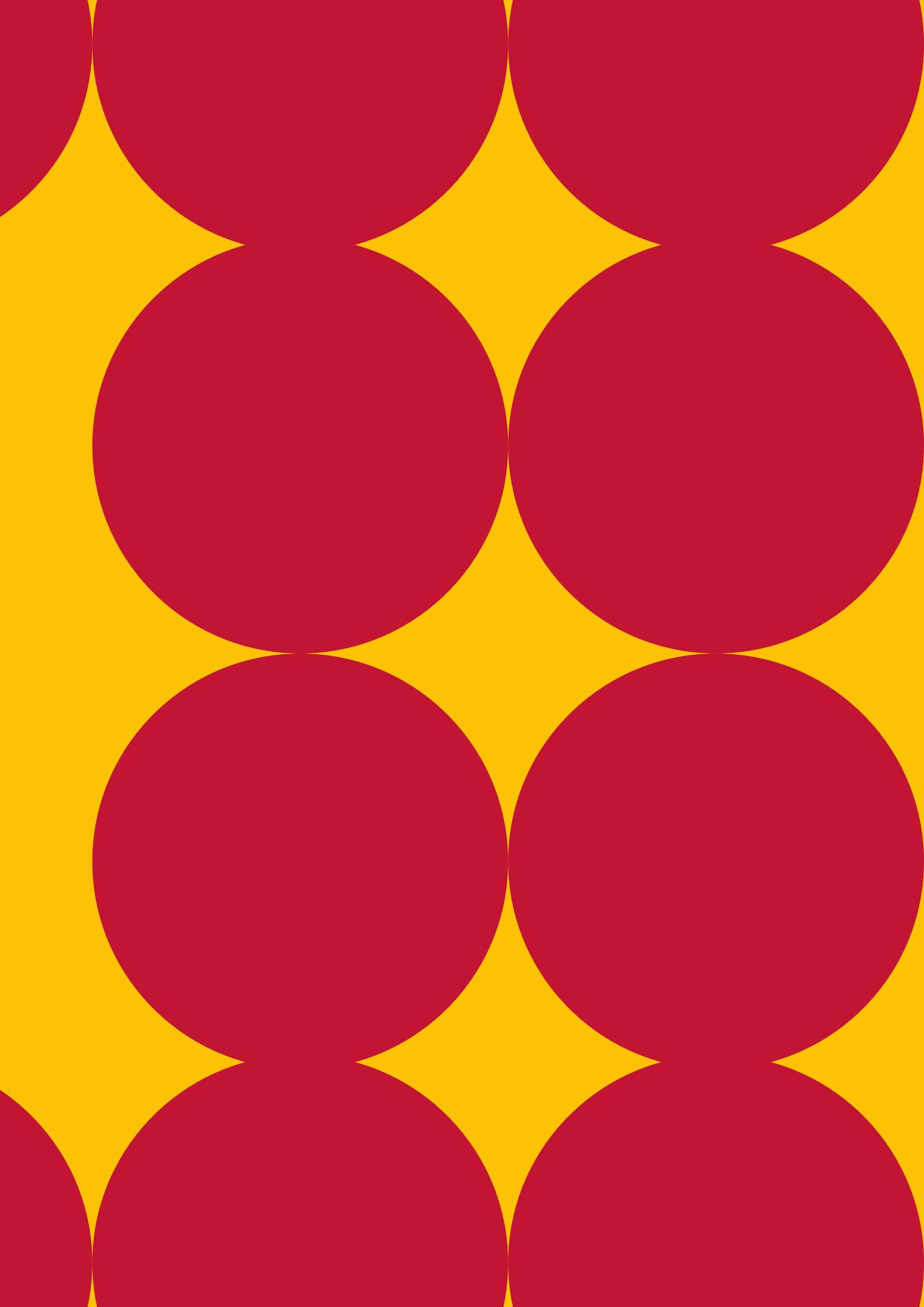
GENDER AND SEXUALITY ACTIVISM IN EXILE

A Toolkit for human rights defenders and
LGBTI activists

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About HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement

HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and expanding civic space in the Middle East and North Africa. With headquarters in Brussels and a regional office in Beirut, HuMENA supports human rights defenders and civil society actors, particularly those in exile and diaspora, through strategic advocacy, evidence-based research, and capacity-building initiatives.

Operating across the region, HuMENA works to uphold fundamental freedoms, including the rights to expression, peaceful assembly, and association. Its programs equip individuals and movements with the tools and networks needed to navigate repression, organize safely, and sustain their activism.

HuMENA places a strong emphasis on inclusive justice, working alongside women, refugees, LGBTQ+ individuals, and marginalized communities. By integrating social justice, gender equity, and climate justice into its work, HuMENA fosters resilient civic ecosystems and supports transformative change driven by people and movements.

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Introduction

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where armed conflicts are intertwined with political disputes, repressive regimes hold all the power in most countries in this region, and conservative and regressive ideas prevail, issues of gender and sexuality have always been a highly sensitive and dangerous field for activists and human rights defenders. As they fight to dismantle the system of gender-based oppression and discrimination that which not only women but also expands and intensifies against those with non-stereotypical gender and sexual identities, many activists working on these issues find themselves targeted, persecuted and harmed by both the authorities and their own communities. In a context of increasing repression, arrests and smear campaigns, many of these activists have had to make the difficult decision to leave their home countries and go into exile.

Being in exile, as hard as it may be, does not imply the cessation of the struggle. Rather, it is a new space that carries with it complex opportunities and challenges; as activists abroad have the capacity to express and work more freely, engage in cross-border networks and alliances, and access international mechanisms to defend their causes. Simultaneously, they face a new reality of isolation and psychological trauma, language and cultural barriers, and accusations of collaboration or betrayal from their home communities.

This toolkit is an attempt to support the journey and struggles of activists and defenders of gender equality and gender-related rights living in exile. As it aims to provide a practical and conceptual roadmap to assist them in understanding the new context in which they find themselves, and in resuming or recommencing their activism in a safe and functional context.

The toolkit is segmented into several interconnected sections. It first defines the concepts of activism, gender, sexuality, and exile. Then, it raises key questions about the realities and experiences of activists from our region who have gone into exile. It then proceeds to provide practical tools for Exploring the New Context, reconstructing self-image, and building cross-border alliances, with a focus on the significance of self-care and mental health and well-being. It also briefly highlights the paths of action that are available in exile in relation to gender

and sexuality issues, such as involvement in opposition political organizations in exile, cultural and artistic production, digital advocacy campaigns, and international advocacy processes.

About this Toolkit

This toolkit is not merely a theoretical knowledge article, but also an attempt to generate a space of solidarity and common reflection among activists from different countries in the MENA region who have taken their issues across borders. It is an invitation to re-envision gender and sexuality activism from across borders, without ever losing connection to our roots, or our deep belief in our rights and the rights of our communities to freedom, equality, and dignity.

This toolkit is intended to help activists raise questions as much as it is to provide them with knowledge content. It is a journey that combines the personal and the public, as it is impossible to truly separate the two from each other: the personal is by necessity political, and our personal perspectives and decisions influence and are influenced by the public sphere/space.

For whom this Toolkit is for

This toolkit is designed to provide some answers, many questions, and points of reflection for activists, human rights defenders, and those working on gender and sexuality issues who have moved into exile and are seeking to initiate /or re-launch their activities. While the content of this toolkit is dedicated to gender and sexuality activism, most parts of this toolkit can be used by activists in exile with different and diverse backgrounds and issues they are active in advocating for.

Use this Toolkit

This toolkit can be used in a variety of manners depending on the purpose of its use. The first section and the appendix can be referred to as knowledge resources that provide a structured and concise knowledge of a range of terms in the context of gender and sexuality activism, the second section is a personal guide that seeks to accompany exiled activists as they resume their work and struggle, while the third section contains research content that analyses the context of gender and sexuality activism in exile.

In order to fulfill the purpose of the toolkit, the reader needs to interact with the included exercises. By completing them, you are effectively creating your own personalised version of the toolkit. These pages - which contain exercises - can be printed and written in the designated spaces, or your thoughts and interactions with the exercises can be written on external sheets of paper and attached to the toolkit.



Before we start

Stay safe!

If reading this toolkit or conducting any of the activities listed herein causes you any intense emotional response, or triggers negative feelings associated with past incidents.

please stop reading for the time being.



SECTION ONE:

**KEY
QUESTIONS ON
ACTIVISM,
GENDER AND
SEXUALITY,
AND EXILE**

Section One: Key Questions on Activism, Gender and Sexuality, and Exile



For instance, HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement defines activism as:

What do we mean by activism?

When violations of basic human rights occur, or when societies, or parts of it, suffer from some of their basic needs not being fulfilled. This is when certain individuals engage in activism to demand an end to these violations or to the fulfilment of these needs. It is the demand to change the status quo that enables us to create a better world. From the word 'activism', the words activism, activist and activist are also derived to refer to the people who practise these activities.

Activism usually refers to action taken in order to challenge those in positions of power to bring about positive changes in society. These changes may be social, political, economic or environmental in nature. Due to the difficulty of categorising these activities, or the goals, causes and interests they serve, it is also difficult to create a single definition of activism. However, each activist, group, or organised entity can develop its own definition while maintaining the essence of the idea of activism, which is a planned and directed "action" that aims to make an impact and change the status quo.

“ The work to advocate, promote, direct, lead, and produce social, political, economic, or environmental change. The term can be defined as a series of actions including the mobilisation of resources, collaboration, and lobbying for change. Activism is predicated on principles that distinguish it from other forms of endeavour that can be undertaken by individuals or groups. The adoption of rights-sensitive principles in all its forms is imperative, encompassing non-discrimination, continuity, cumulative, intersectionality, and participation. The objective of activism is to enhance the quality of life for designated groups and to safeguard their rights without compromising those of other groups. In summary, activism is a collective endeavour aimed at fostering a more humane, respectful, humanist, and equal world.”

This definition aligns with the current perspective of the word “activism”, which is inherently broad. The word is nowadays associated with political, social and economic movements for change, and has become synonymous with words such as struggle, and close to other terms such as human rights advocacy. In the contemporary world, the term activism is used to refer to the work of those who advocate for democracy and political freedoms, supporters of media and press freedom, human rights defenders, feminists, and LGBTI rights defenders.



Reflection Activity (1): Why do we Become Activists

Following a thorough examination of the preceding paragraphs, would it be beneficial to consider the underlying motivations that led to your engagement in activism within your motherland, during periods of exile, or in both contexts?

In order to organise the ideas under discussion, the following categories may be used to divide the reasons:

Reasons Related to the Close Circle: Family/ Friends/ Partner

Reasons Related to your Person and your Identity

Other Reasons!

Reasons Related to the Local Community and Linked to the Homeland in which you Used to Live

This distinguishes the efforts and actions that fall under the concept of activism from other actions, considering that activism is a description of actions that are continuous, or intended to be so, that happen in a planned manner, and are not coincidental or unusual actions in the lives of those who do them.

There are countless activities that activists can undertake to achieve change. Any individual or collective action that draws attention to a particular issue can be considered part of their activism. While some forms of activism are traditional, such as demonstrations, strikes, petitions, and advocacy campaigns. Other forms of it are unconventional, and are invented by activists every day!

What do we Mean by Gender and Sexuality?

" Gender is a term used to refer to the relationships, roles and proper behaviour that society predetermines for both men and women, in accordance with social legacies and a cultural framework that comprises a set of customs, traditions and values prevailing in a given society at a given period of time.^[1] The term 'social gender' is used as the Arabic equivalent of the word gender in most countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region."

Gender is a social concept for distinguishing between human beings rather than a natural concept like sex. Gender refers to the biological characteristics that define a person as female or male. Although these two sets of biological characteristics are not mutually

[1] Hind Mahmoud & ShaymaaTantawi, Guide of Young Women-Feminists 'Initiatives, Nazra for feminist studies, Cairo , 2016.

exclusive, with some individuals possessing characteristics from both sexes, they distinguish humans as male and female. In common usage in many languages, the term gender refers to ‘**sexual activity**’^[2] but the previous definition of the word is the one used in this guide.

Gender generally refers to the roles, social functions and behaviour expected of a person simply for being a man or a woman. The following table shows the main differences between gender and sex:

Biological Sex	Gender
Reflects the biological distinctions between males and females at birth	Expresses the social roles and responsibilities imposed by society on men and women
Often static, these qualities are often unchanging over time	It changes over time as societies change the roles of men and women based on the evolution of time.
The differences between males and females are the same all over the world	The differences in social roles between men and women vary according to many determinants, including race, religion, colour, social class, religion, culture, age and marital status. As well as the political, economic and social systems in which they live.

Gender is defined by the Arab Forum for Individual and Family Sexuality as:

“**Sexuality is a lifelong aspect of humanity. It combines sex, gender identity, gender role, sexual orientation, sexual arousal, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Sexuality is expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships.**

Although sexuality may encompass all of these dimensions, not all of them are practised or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction between biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, moral, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.”^[3]

A direct definition of gender and sexuality can be observed in Stevie Jackson's study:

“**Gender and Sexuality: Sociological Approaches**" 1st Edition, where she states: "The term gender has been used since the early 1970s to denote culturally constructed femininity and masculinity as opposed to biological sex differences. Sexuality-Erotic identities, desires and practices is usually conceptualised as distinct from, but related to, gender. The concepts of gender and sexuality both take 'sex', a highly ambiguous term, as a point of reference. Thus, Stevie Jackson emphasises that neither gender nor sexuality expresses fixed biological traits,

but rather both are socially and culturally shaped by biological difference, with sexuality being associated with the body, while gender is based on gender-based power relations and reflected in social roles.”^[4]

[2] Arab Forum for Education, Sexuality and Reproductive Health (Muntada Al-Jensaneya)

[3] WikiGender: <https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9>

[4] Gender from a Feminist Perspective, Hala Kamal, Aya Sami, Women and Memory Foundation..

The two terms are related to several other concepts and issues that represent spaces for activism and struggle, such as: anti-discrimination and gender-based violence that is often directed towards women, or people belonging to gender and sexual minorities such as transgender, LGBTQ, and others.

It is important here to note that a woman's subjection to a form of violence for being a woman - such as sexual harassment - is also influenced by other factors and determinants such as social class: rich women's exposure to violence and discrimination is significantly different from that of poor women, as are the level of education, skin colour, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation and other aspects of that woman's

sexuality. This is also known as intersectionality. 'Intersectionality' is a feminist theory developed by feminist legal scholar Kimberly Crenshaw to analyse the experiences of women of colour, and the intersectionality of racial and gender discrimination that affects not only women but also women of colour face in the legal and judicial system and the right to and access to public services. The theory then evolved to include all the intersections of forms and systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination, and their intersection with gender, ethnicity, colour, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, gender, and mental and physical capacities, to deconstruct and understand women's complex experiences Intersectionality ^[5]

[5] WikiGender: <https://bit.ly/3CG1WGf>



Reflection Activity (2): Risks and Blessings of identity

How do we identify ourselves? What does this definition achieve for us? What prohibitions does it enforce? These are the main questions to be addressed of this activity.

In the red circle

(to the left)

write the risks, the opportunities that you will lose due to having a specific human attribute. For instance, such actions may result in the loss of employment opportunities or the risk of being evicted from one's residence.

In the green circle

(to the right)

write what the stipulated characteristics are of benefit to you, for example, Muslim residing in a predominantly Muslim country, a situation that affords you the liberty to engage in religious practices and freedom to practice religious rituals.

In the middle

introduce a definition of yourself incorporating a set of characteristics, which represents a part of your human identity. Attributes such as: male/female/non-binary. Homosexual/heterosexual/bisexual/Educated, poor, white/black, religion, ..etc.

Now we have to think: What did we gain by choosing to go into exile and what did we lose as a result of this step? Is it possible to partially compensate for these losses? For example, if going into exile resulted in the loss of a well-paid job opportunity. Is it possible to find an alternative job in exile?



Exile: Why We Are Here

Exile is the forcible removal of a person from their homeland to a new country, which is called 'exile.' This is a punishment that has been practiced by countries since the dawn of history against people who break laws or cause inconvenience to the rulers, and these rulers do not want to imprison or kill them.

In our modern history and contemporary world, the punishment of exile has been associated with political opponents and leaders of popular movements, and the idea of exile has evolved from being a forced removal of a person to a voluntary departure of that person to escape repression, persecution or persecution. While most legal systems around the world have prohibited 'exile', international human rights law considers it a violation of the right to freedom of movement.

The major difference between yesterday's and today's exile is the process of exile itself. In the past, a person was punished with exile. In the modern world, that person is pursued, imprisoned, tortured or harassed until they are forced to leave their home country.

Across the Middle East and North Africa, as a result of armed conflicts, political unrest or socio-economic conditions, tens of thousands of people have opted to go into exile, seeking a safe and stable life. In some cases, this was in pursuit of life itself, after their presence in their home countries posed a serious threat to their lives.

For many activists, going into exile was not a closure to their struggle for freedom or against human rights violations. Rather, it was a continuation of their activism beyond the dangers that accompanied their struggles in their home country.



Reflection Activity (3): Inventory of Gains and Losses

Now we need to think about the following: What have we earned by choosing the exile? What we lost as a result of this step? Is it possible to compensate for these losses, even partially? For example, if departure for the exile, resulted in losing a job opportunity with a satisfactory salary. Is it possible to find an alternative employment whilst residing in exile?

Can this Loss be Compensated? How?

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Because of our Presence in Exile, We Lost:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Exile Advantages/ Benefits for us:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

SECTION TWO: HOW DO WE INITIATE/ RESUME OUR ACTIVITIES IN EXILE?

Section Two:

How do we Initiate/ Resume our Activities in Exile?

The exile currently includes advocates for various causes and human rights from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Their national context varies according to the nature of the causes they support, and their activism in exile also varies and is influenced by that cause. Those concerned with gender and sexual diversity are a prime example on this hypothesis. Their ideas are not welcome in both their home countries, and in many other countries around the world. As such, the choice of exile for these people / this group has been reduced to a limited number of countries that do not persecute sexual and gender minorities. Unfortunately, within these same countries, as a result of rapid and violent political and social changes, voices against the rights of many groups such as refugees and asylum seekers, gays and lesbians, and other members of the LGBTI community are currently being raised. Ain.

1) Exploring the New Context

The preceding introduction does not imply that exile countries are no different in suppressing ideas than the countries from which the activists fled, but it was necessary to emphasise that activism in exile is not a smooth road. The following activity will help us explore the new spaces that being in exile has opened up for us.



Reflection Activity (4): Here and There

Now we will try to compare between the activities that you can implement individually or collectively to serve your cause without being at risk in your home country (there), and in exile (here) ...The activity categories will be listed, and then the two lists with the longest entries will be more examined, as it comprises a greater number of activities. The new activities (here) in the aforementioned list represent novel spaces that have been opened for us in exile.

Activities Available in Exile (Here):

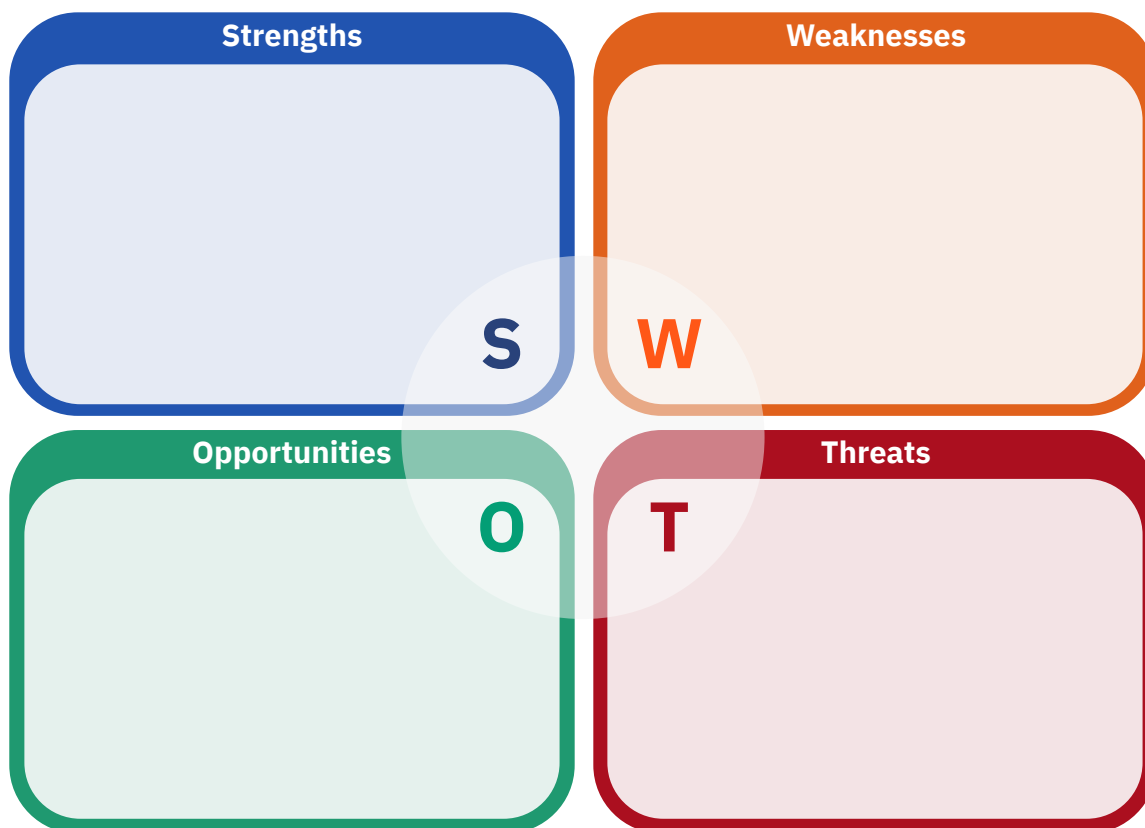
Activities Available in the Motherland (There):

In addition to the above analysis, a great contextual analysis tool, used in various planning methodologies, is the Quadrant Analysis Tool or

SWOT analysis. The idea of this tool is to identify four types of points and draw them as four small squares that make up one large square:



Activity (5): Quartet Analysis (SWOT)



think our causes are. We also enjoy the full range of human rights, which we advocate for all human beings. So let's try not to forget that!

After the brief exploration of the context in the previous section, and before thinking about implementing specific activities to serve the causes we believe in, we need to ensure that we update our understanding of who we are and how moving to exile has affected it. The following activity will assist us in observing and reflecting on these changes.

Reflection Activity (6): Think about our New Image

Your Relationship with your Body

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

The following activity will help us to identify the advantages and spaces that each type of activism offers for each of us. Following conducting this activity, we can then decide to practice individual activism, look for an organizational framework to work within, or even combine the two..

4) Building Cross-Border Alliance

Whether we practice individual activism or work in groups, cross-border alliances are one of the essential and vital tools for activists working in the field of gender and sexuality, especially in the context of working in exile. In the wake of repressive regimes, conservative social frameworks, and restrictions on feminist and queer movements in many countries, these alliances have become a strategic means of breaking isolation, sharing experiences, maximising impact, and accessing support in situations of danger. Building solidarity and partnerships with organizations and individuals in multiple places around the world who share the same ground and values gives activists additional strength, not just in terms of political pressure, but also in terms of psychological and psychological support.

Cross-border alliances provide an international dimension to our issues, demonstrating that the struggles of those seeking freedom and equality are indivisible and that the suffering of victims of violations is also indivisible. International alliances also help us amplify the voices of marginalised groups in particular and give them the opportunity to raise their plight in international forums, thereby enhancing their opportunities to gain access to their human rights. Alliances facilitate the aggregation, organization and resources -sharing (knowledge, funding, technical and legal support) that may be difficult for activists to access while working from exile on their own or within a limited collective framework.

Alliances also represent one of the primary protection mechanisms for activists, as they create mutual protection networks that minimise the risks that individuals or groups may face as a result of their activism, and provide safe channels to exchange information, expertise and experiences. Through these networks, human rights defenders can construct collective narratives and produce alternative knowledge that resists authoritarian narratives and societal stigmatisation against people from diverse gender and sexual orientations and identities.

Furthermore, cross-border alliances transcend cultural, linguistic, and geographical barriers, giving feminist and queer movements a space to adopt new activist strategies and create context-sensitive tools

of resistance. In doing so, they form a bridge between local and global struggles and remind us that gender and sexuality issues are not isolated local battles, but instead are part of a global struggle for justice, freedom, and equality.

Hence, coalition building becomes a political and resistance work in its own right, going beyond simple cooperation to become a conscious act of solidarity that assumes the responsibility of supporting the most marginalised groups and creating shared spaces to resist all forms of violence based on gender and diverse sexual and gender identities.

The below principles assist us in building strong and effective alliances:

- 1 Always Start with Existing Relationships:**
 The first starting point for any coalition should be to approach trusted circles of individuals and organizations to be the nucleus of this coalition, then we begin to seek people and organizations that intersect with us in principles and goals, whether in the homeland, in exile, or even at the global level. It is also important to diversify the background of the coalition's components to include the three categories previously mentioned.
- 2 Transparency and Credibility:**
 Transparency means that information related to the alliance's objectives, methods of operation, sources of funding, and the roles of participating parties is clear and available to all members. Credibility means adhering to declared promises and values, and acting with integrity without misleading or exploiting relationships. Transparency and credibility in the relationship with allies enhances mutual trust, creates a safe environment for joint action, and reduces the likelihood of conflicts or suspicions between the parties, which could lead to the collapse of the alliance in the future.
- 3 Democracy and Decentralisation:**
 Cross-border alliances require to be based on democratic principles that ensure everyone's participation in decision-making processes and respect for different opinions within the alliance. Decentralisation allows for a fair distribution of roles and responsibilities among members, and prevents the monopolisation of leadership or control of the direction of action by one party. These principles ensure that the coalition is a collective, participatory space that takes into

consideration different contexts, identities, and experiences, and fosters a sense of shared ownership of the struggle and goals.

- **4 Recognise all Human Rights for all Humans and Observe Intersectionality:** Our alliances have to consider the intersectionality of causes. For example, advocating for women's rights cannot be undertaken without linking them to social justice, and the violations faced by LGBT people cannot be considered in isolation from the violations and targeting of other minority groups. Our coalition should respect and recognise all human rights.
- **5 Mutual Respect and Recognition of Difference and Diversity:** Our experiences as individuals and groups vary, as do our convictions about many things. It is necessary to reach agreement on the ground that will bring us together in the coalition, which is of course part of the ground of human dignity and rights, and at the same time we must all show acceptance and respect for the diversity and differences between the components of the coalition.
- **6 Endeavouring to be a Safe and Secure/Harm-Free Space:** Coalition members are required to adopt clear and detailed policies that ensure our shared space is free from any form of discrimination, violence or harm, and respects different gender and sexual identities.
- **7 Continuous Assessment/Evaluation:** It is important to establish a periodic framework to assess the work and impact of the coalition, and whether we are still heading in the right direction or have drifted from our previously agreed-upon path.



Activity 8: Potential Alliances Map

 Initially, we need to draw the following figure on a larger-size paper/ sheet.

2 At the following level (Exile Country), write the persons and entities who share the same principles and are active in advocating the same cause that you are interested in within the country where you reside at the present time.

1 In the small/ central circle, write your name.

3 At the next level (Home Country), write the people and the entities who share the same principles and active in supporting the same cause that you care about within your motherland.

4 At the following level (Regional and International Scope), write the people and the entities who share the same principles and activate in the advocacy of the same cause that you are interested in at the regional and international level.



Every person or party we put in the map of potential alliances, we must think about how to reach it, and what gains will be achieved for each of us with this partnership, and finally how we will maintain the durability and continuity of this partnership.

5) Self-Care/ Wellbeing in Exile

Amidst our efforts to advocate for rights and freedoms, a simple but essential question is often overlooked: How do we take care of ourselves while fighting for rights? The answer to this question is usually ignored by most activists because a large part of them believe that the issues they are lobbying for, and the rights they are defending, are more important than themselves.

Self-care is not a luxury In the context of activism, particularly for those working on gender and sexuality issues in our region, self-care is often seen as a luxury or an opulence that should not come up in the midst of a crisis. However, this overlooks the fact that the sustainability of our labour and effort, and our ability to be in solidarity with others, is essentially contingent on our ability to take care of ourselves and our mental and physical health. Constant stress, repetitive trauma, and the feeling of guilt over our inability to help all victims of violations are all draining for activists and put them at risk of collapse or at least burnout.

For activists living in exile, the question of self-care becomes increasingly important. Exile is not only a geographical relocation, but a complex psychological experience in which feelings of loss, isolation, and fear are intertwined with the constant pressure to maintain the struggle and deal with the challenges of the new context. Psychological issues and challenges that activists face in exile may include:

⚠ Cultural alienation and a sense of separation from their original communities.

⚠ Social stigmatisation within their home countries, sometimes extending to the countries of exile too.

⚠ The constant pressure of trying to succeed and survive in a new atmosphere.

⚠ Dealing with the past traumas that drove them into exile.

⚠ Constant worry for their family members, colleagues and fellow activists who remain at home.

⚠ The psychological burnout resulting from dealing with victims' accounts on a daily basis.

⚠ Distance from traditional circles of support, which may consist of friends, family, or others.

In the following sections, we will try to outline a simplified framework to foster psychological safety and well-being in exile:

There are a few simple actions that can be maintained as a daily routine that can assist us in taking care of ourselves. These actions do not, by themselves, replace specialist medical support if needed, however, they can help us delay the critical point at which we need professional support.



Activity (9): Daily Wellness Line

- On the right side of this table, write a list of things that make you feel good, these may include listening to music, dancing, eating a certain food, talking to a certain person, praying, and other things, try to write as much detail as possible in this list.
- On the left side, identify three timings each day where you ask yourself: What have I done/will I do that makes me feel good today? You don't have to do the actions right away or at certain hours, but make sure before the day ends that you have done at least one action from your list that day

Timing

What did I do today that made me feel good?

I feel good when:



Activity 10: Circles of Support

In the larger/outer circle, write down people and entities that you think could provide you with support if you need it.

In the small circle, write down the people and entities that regularly provide you with support when you need it.

The types of support you may need, and that these people and entities can provide, will vary. Try to write down everyone who offers/could offer you support and the form of support each person/entity could offer.

The diagram shows two concentric circles. The outer circle is larger and contains seven horizontal lines for writing. The inner circle is smaller and also contains seven horizontal lines for writing.

Once you have completed this activity, you will have two lists: the first list represents current sources of support and the second list represents potential sources of support. When in danger or in trouble, the ready-made lists will help you deal with the situation quickly.



Reflection Activity (11): Moving Forward

Reaching this activity means going on a long journey of meditation and gaining knowledge. If you are a person who has resumed your activism in exile: How would you describe your current role in supporting your cause(s) after moving into exile? How do you plan to develop this role in the future?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

The following tips will assist you in taking care of yourself:

- ✓ Self-care is an ongoing process that requires awareness and daily practice. Being diligent about it helps your cause as well as yourself. Your cause has nothing to gain if you lose a supporter as a result of psychological burnout.
 - ✓ Let's try to set clear boundaries between activism and our personal lives, and acknowledge that a temporary hiatus from activism is not an abandonment of the cause.
 - ✓ Creating safe support circles of friends and colleagues in exile will go a long way in breaking the sense of alienation towards the new place.
 - ✓ Building bonds with the new local community and engaging in social and cultural activities will help minimise isolation and alienation.
 - ✓ Communicate with family and friends back home in a balanced way that does not drain your energy.
 - ✓ Recognise and deal with negative emotions such as sadness, anger and guilt, rather than denying them.
-  Finally: Please do not hesitate to seek professional psychological support if you need it. The above tips can help you cope with normal stress but are not a substitute for professional psychological help.

At the end of our talk on self-care and self-wellness, it is crucial to emphasise that self-care is also a political and resistant act. In the face of regimes that attempt to destroy activists physically and psychologically, taking care of oneself and seeking joy and comfort is a challenge to these regimes. Self-care is not a withdrawal from the struggle, but an essential part of its continuity.

SECTION THREE:

GENDER AND SEXUALITY ACTIVISM IN EXILE

Section Three:

Gender and Sexuality Activism in Exile

A multitude of approaches are adopted by activists in their efforts to advocate for gender equality and gender-related rights in exile. The nature of the issue/causes, the background of the advocates, and the skills and expertise available to them determine the path they take to support the issue. Some (of these activists) may prefer to work autonomously, leveraging the possibilities afforded by the internet, which has resulted in the emergence of individuals wielding as much influence as entire institutions. In contrast, others organise themselves into groups and collective organizational forms, embarking collectively on the pursuit of change

Some individuals and groups opt to address the public in an attempt to effect a change in their views, while others engage in organised activities with a view to exerting pressure on governments to take specific actions that align with the causes they advocate.

This section aims to analyse the context of gender and sexuality activism in exile by identifying the main pathways that activists take to support gender and sexuality-related issues and rights.

First Path: Political Organization

Some gender and sexuality activists are engaged in general political organizations that emerge in exile as political opposition groups to the ruling regime in a specific country. These groups seek to mobilise international support for their political demands,

expose the repressive and/or undemocratic practices of a particular political regime, and then wait for the appropriate political conditions to return to their home countries. These organizations adopt general programmes that are not specifically concerned with gender or sexuality, but with the presence of activists concerned with these two issues within these organizations. Consequently, these activists seek to integrate their demands into the general programmes of these political groups.

Within the context of the Arab diaspora experience in exile, there is a paucity of examples of gender activists who have chosen this particular path. This may be attributed to the nature of opposition groups in exile, which are predominantly conservative or affiliated with radical religious organizations. Alternatively, this may be attributable to the strategic focus of activists on presenting their issues in a more focused context, without integrating them with other broader issues. This approach would allow the achievement of the desired visibility and dissemination of ideas and activities related to gender and sexual pluralism.

Second Path: Artistic and Cultural Production

Countries of exile characteristically exhibit a less stringent regulatory environment with regard to freedom of expression, a circumstance that engenders greater autonomy in artistic and cultural production, particularly with respect to subjects that are not endorsed by substantial segments of conservative societies, as is exemplified in the Arab region. It is evident that gender equality and feminist and/or queer artworks are subjects of significant scrutiny in most Arab countries, where such works are frequently challenged upon publication. This is predicated on the approval of these artworks by the relevant censorship authorities, a prerequisite for their publication or exhibition in the majority of Arab countries.

Exile offers an environment for the incubation of artistic and creative work that is freer in nature. This, in turn, enables creators, artists and content creators to express their ideas freely.

Historically, geographical boundaries have functioned as a barrier between cultural and artistic productions created in exile and those produced by citizens in their home countries. However, the evolution of communication tools, the proliferation of social media, and the expansion of the Internet's reach to new social segments within the Arab region have significantly diminished the relevance of these boundaries. The value of these borders has been significantly diminished.

Third Path:

Digital Advocacy Campaigns

Digital spaces are playing an ever-increasing role in influencing political, economic and social life. Social media is the most prominent space where change advocates, activists and human rights defenders are active. However, treating social media as a mere mobilisation tool or a space for supporters of a cause is inadequate, especially in the Arab region where the public sphere is restricted by repressive laws and practices that make it risky for citizens to exercise their human rights to express, assemble, organise and participate in public affairs. Social media can currently be viewed as an alternative or compensatory public sphere.

Gender and sexuality activists are one of the most common categories of activists who relied early on social media for their advocacy- even before the mass exile, because these platforms provide them with the anonymity they need to protect their personal safety in societies that are mostly unwelcoming to the ideas they put forward, and also provide them with quick and easy access to a wide audience.

The advent of social media has effectively transcended traditional geographical boundaries, thereby enabling individuals to function in a state of exile. Moreover, these platforms are either free or / almost free / incur negligible costs.

Digital advocacy campaigns are based on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, ...) as a medium that incubates campaign activities, which usually target mobilising

support for gender equality and gender-related rights, or altering citizens' perceptions towards these issues and rights, and inviting them to adopt attitudes more consistent with the values of equality and human rights..

For a thorough understanding of the general principles of organising digital campaigns, please refer to the [Digital Advocacy and Campaigns Guide/ Handbook](#), published by the Arab Social Media Development Centre – 7amelah.

Fourth Path:

Cross-Border Advocacy

Advocacy is the process through which advocates and supporters of the cause organise themselves to influence this cause they are defending. It is also 'the methods and means that serve to achieve the desired change in policies or practices, influence the decision-making process at the local, regional or international level, or challenge and change the perceptions of citizens and community leaders about the targeted causes.'^[6]

The present toolkit focuses on a specific form of advocacy, namely cross-border or transnational advocacy. The present toolkit focuses on a specific form of advocacy, namely cross-border or transnational advocacy. This is characterised by the mobilisation of activists at the international level with the objective of achieving a cross-border impact within a specific country or, alternatively, an impact at the international level as a whole. Examples of such mobilisation include petitions directed at the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the text of a particular convention, or appeals to the Security Council, the executive council of the United Nations, to take certain actions. In the context of gender and sexuality activism, advocates of these issues seek to mobilise and unite efforts on a global scale to achieve gains within a specific region or country, or on a global level. This phenomenon transpires through a concerted effort to align perspectives and adopt

[6] Advocacy in Restricted Spaces: A Toolkit for Civil Society As a PDF file: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/2020_Lifeline_Advocacy_Toolkit_v11_10272020.pdf

shared positions, fostering collaboration through networking and direct interactions that occur informally during official international events, such as the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women meeting, or during informal events and conferences organised by international NGOs. These events attract a diverse array of participants, including organizations, groups, activists, and occasionally government delegations and UN human rights experts.

Fifth Path:

Utilizing International Mechanisms for the Protection of Human Rights

A large segment of activists identify themselves as human rights defenders. This is a term for people who work individually or collectively to promote respect for one or more fundamental human rights, and recognise the other human rights of all human beings. Being in exile, usually in the Global North, provides a space for these individuals to engage with international human rights protection mechanisms within the United Nations with the purpose of using these mechanisms to put pressure on governments in their home countries to take certain actions to promote gender equality and gender-related rights such as body ownership and integrity, health and reproductive rights, and others. "All countries have ratified at least one of the nine core human rights treaties, as well as at least one of the nine optional protocols. Eighty percent of states have ratified four or more instruments. This means that states have an obligation under international law to respect, protect and fulfill human rights.

✓ The obligation to respect means that States must refrain from interfering with or curtailing the enjoyment of human rights.

✓ The obligation to protect requires States to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses.

♥ The obligation to fulfill means that States must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights.^[7]

There are two types of human rights monitoring mechanisms within the United Nations system: treaty-based bodies and charter-based bodies. The ten human rights Treaty Bodies, made up of committees of independent experts, monitor implementation of the core international human rights treaties. The charter-based bodies include the Human Rights Council, Special Procedures, the Universal Periodic Review and Independent Investigations. UN Human Rights provides expertise and support to all of the different mechanisms.

The system of international mechanisms for the protection of human rights is composed of two main types of mechanisms, the first type is contractual mechanisms or treaty-based bodies. These are committees made up of independent human rights experts. They monitor the implementation of the core international human rights treaties that states have acceded to or ratified. The work of two of these committees is most relevant to gender and sexuality issues. They are:

 **Human Rights Committee:** Monitoring the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocols

 **Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women:** Monitors the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol.

The working mechanisms of these committees, methods of communication and meetings schedules can be found on the official website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) here.

The second type of mechanism is the Charter Bodies, a set of human rights protection bodies established under the UN Charter, including: Human Rights

[7] . A glimpse of human rights, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights>

Council, Special Procedures, Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and independent investigations mandated by the Human Rights Council.

Here, we will refer only to the special procedures, which consist of a group of independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic perspective, i.e. on a specific topic, or country-specific, i.e. on the human rights situation in a particular country. Special procedures conduct field visits at the invitation of various countries of the world to urge them to respect human rights and follow up on those countries' compliance with human rights standards on the ground. These experts also take some measures to address various human rights violations, including submitting urgent appeals to states that include recommendations for specific actions, and these experts also receive individual complaints about human rights violations within the scope of their mandates. The work of the following mandate holders relates to gender and sexuality work and activism:



Independent Expert on protection from violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.



Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences.



Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls.

The working mechanisms of these committees, methods of communication and meetings schedules can be found on the official website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) [here](#).

Sixth Path:

Documentation, Narrative and Archive Building

In a world where official narratives dominate the history of countries and peoples, these narratives often marginalise and exclude minority voices, grassroots movements concerned with adopting alternative social value systems, as well as non-

stereotypical ideas and their proponents. Documenting and archiving non-mainstream narratives is a tool of resistance.

Gender and sexuality activists are at the forefront of the categories whose narratives (as individuals and social movements) are marginalised. Therefore, documenting, archiving, making available, and preserving these activists' experiences from being lost and forgotten are certainly nonconventional forms of activism.

After going into exile, activists enjoy more space to reflect on and document their own experiences, and some publish their individual testimonies in the form of social media posts, podcasts, or even footage. Documentation can also be part of research publications produced by specialised organizations, and these publications can be utilised in awareness-raising and advocacy work conducted by these organizations or other organizations and individuals concerned with these people's experiences and struggles.

These narratives do not only document violations, but also convey experiences of survival, unconventional forms of organization, the novel tactics used by activists, and life trajectories where politics intersect with body, identity, and exile. Documentation can be both collective and individual, in the form of written testimonies, audio recordings, documentary films, or even digital blogging. In all circumstances, documentation and self-narrative enable activists in exile to reclaim their voices in the face of exclusion and distortion. It reshapes memory from the perspective of marginalised persons.

In exile as well, where activists have no or few connections to their home communities, documented narratives, stories, and experiences can build bridges to the homeland and create a cross-border feminist queer archive that is not owned or controlled by states and governments, but instead by the people themselves.

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

This glossary is based on the efforts made by a number of Arab queer and feminist organizations to translate and coin Arabic-language definitions of gender and sexuality-related terms, in order to help understand these terms in a concise manner.

Sex/Biological Sex

The biological characteristics that define a person as female or male. While these two sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive, with some individuals possessing characteristics from both sexes, they nevertheless differentiate humans as male and female. Biological sex is determined by a consequence of genetic and hormonal factors..

Biological Intersex

Individuals who fall outside the dominant binary classification of biological sex as “male” or “female” due to different biological sex compositions, such as the presence of two reproductive organs (uterus and penis, vagina and undescended testicles, etc...) or differences in subordinate sex characteristics, and other differences that we may or may not recognise.

These individuals may choose to reconcile with their current situation and therefore do not need medical intervention, but in other cases they may request gender correction according to their genetic makeup (female chromosomes or male chromosomes), they may request gender correction according to their internal or external dominant genitalia, or they may choose gender correction according to their psychological and mental affiliation. In all cases, the free choice of these people must be respected.

Gender

The overlapping relationships and social roles between men and women that vary from society to society and from time to time according to the cultural and prevailing social values in society, which are human-made and we are not born with them and therefore can change over time.

The term was introduced by John Manne in 1955 to between social role and biological sex, but before that it was used for purely grammatical and linguistic purposes, not as a tool of analysis in the social sciences. It reappeared in Western feminist theory in the 1970s.

Sexuality

One of the human aspects immanent to the human being for life. It combines sex, gender, socialrole, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and procreation. Sexuality is expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, positions/attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships.

Although sexuality may encompass all of these dimensions, not all of them are practised or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, moral, legal, historical, religious, spiritual and other factors.

Gender Identity

It refers to how the self defines itself, man, woman or other person, and whether or not the definition corresponds to the biological sex determined by genes and hormones. Gender identity is made up of five elements: Biological sex, gender, social role, sexual orientation and sexual behaviour.

Sexual Orientation

It is a term that describes an individual's primary sexual and/or emotional attraction. 'Sexual orientation' is not a term for one and only a single type of orientation, but is holistic, encompassing many types of orientation, including: Homosexual (same-sex orientation), heterosexual (opposite-sex orientation), bisexual (bisexuality), gender non-conforming, and other types of sexual orientation.

Gender Identity

An individual's own sense and perception of themselves and their experience with regard to their gender. It is the subjective sense of being a man, a woman, or otherwise. For the majority, biological sex (determined by genes and hormones) and gender (determined by social norms) are aligned. While there are different forms and degrees of this alignment, most of them ultimately align with the gender polarity (masculinity and femininity/male and female).

There are individuals who experience different gendered experiences where they feel, to varying degrees, that their biological sex and gender are not aligned. Individuals who experience this sense of mismatch between their biological sex and gender are called transgender. Some individuals see gender reassignment as a necessary step to reach an internalised gender expression that is right for them, but not every transgender person will necessarily work to reassign their biological sex.

Gender Dysphoria

It refers to the state of gender dissatisfaction when there is an absence of congruence between the biological sex assigned at birth and the sex to which the person feels they belong, resulting in severe inner conflict by rejecting the external appearance of the body, rejecting the genitals, as well as rejecting the social role imposed on this individual.

Transgender

Transgender is a term that describes the experiences of individuals who do not feel that they belong to the gender they were assigned at birth. These individuals have different experiences of how their gender identity fits with the biological sex they were assigned at birth and the gender they identify with, feeling like men living in women's bodies, or women living in men's bodies, regardless of the nature of the genitals they possess.

Transsexual

It describes transgender people who choose to undergo hormonal and/or surgical interventions in order to transition from the biological sex with which they do not feel in harmony with. Currently, the term is used as a generic term equivalent to transgender to encompass all people with this type of identity.

In the current context of the Arab region, the following terms are used to refer to the same people:

- Trans and transgender
- transgender people
- Trans people
- The Trans

Non-binary Gender

This is an attempt to translate the term Non-binary can also be translated as sex/gender non-conformist. It is a term that refers to a person who does not feel a sense of belonging to either side of the sex/gender binary, neither male nor female. Agender, bigender, genderfluid, genderqueer, and genderqueer can all be considered non-binary identities.

LGBTQ Community

The term “LGBTQ community” is used collectively to refer to people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. LGBTQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning. The term serves as an umbrella for a diverse range of identities and experiences and is commonly used when discussing issues related to equality, rights, discrimination, representation, and inclusion.

Queer

The term queer refers to those who do not adhere to the prevailing social norms, reject stereotyped and defined gender and sexual identities, and thus live multiple and diverse gender and sexual experiences at different levels and degrees.

Initially, the term was used to denigrate homosexuals, but nowadays it has expanded to describe multiple identities and social phenomena that differ from the mainstream, and accordingly, the term queer is applied to all categories of LGBTI people and others who live experiences that differ from traditional binaries (male-female, man-woman, ...) and is now widely used to express the movement to advocate for the rights of gender and sexual minorities.

Feminism

The term feminism can be categorized into three aspects: 1. Feminism as a science, consciousness, and resistance. Feminism as a science is: "the in-depth study of the distinction and discrimination between men and women in various fields of life, based on a set of direct and indirect facts, and the attempt to grasp the causes of this distinction, which feminists call the gender gap. Proposing the best ways and means to overcome it." 2. Feminism as consciousness is: "the conscious awareness based on past facts, and this conscious realization shows that injustice and discrimination against women is not merely a historical coincidence, not a cultural or historical problem

or an issue related only to poverty or ignorance. In

spite of these reasons, discrimination is also linked to a complex package of direct and indirect factors, which solely fall on women yet the whole society suffers the consequences." 3. The term 'feminism as resistance' refers to the construction of 'feminism as a method of resistance' and the vision of feminism as a movement as a tool to disseminate knowledge and raise feminist awareness. This is achieved by raising awareness of all forms of discrimination, organising campaigns and using different and innovative tools to confront what women are subjected to.

As an ideology, feminism today stands for not only gender equality, but also for changing all social power relations that oppress, exploit and marginalise any individual on the basis of gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion, nationality, geographical location, class, caste or origin.

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Secondly : Previously Mentioned Various Topics on the Following Websites:

1. Site of United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights>
2. Arab Forum for Education, Sexuality and Reproductive Health (Muntada Al-Jensaneya):
<https://www.jensaneya.org/en>
3. alQaws Site for Sexual & Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society:
<https://alqaws.org/siteEn/index/language/en>
4. Transat Site:
<https://bit.ly/42dp5Ng>
5. Wiki Gender:
<https://genderiyya.xyz>

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