



ASTRAEA LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE

Regional Analysis of LGBTQI+ Organizing in Southwest Asia and North Africa

September 2024

Executive Summary



In 2022, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice commissioned a report from independent researchers Nora Noralla and Lamyâ Achary to assess the landscape of LGBTQI+ activism in the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region. The resulting report, “Regional Analysis of LGBTQI+ Organizing in Southwest Asia and North Africa,” investigates the context in which LGBTQI+ groups operate in SWANA, outlines their needs, challenges, and limitations, and offers recommendations to donors operating in the

region. Principal research included focus groups with representatives from 36 different organizations or collectives from seven countries in the SWANA region (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, and Kuwait) and an anonymous survey distributed to the SOGIEMENA mailing list. As representative case studies, the legal, social, religious, and political contexts of Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, and Kuwait are discussed in-depth.

Despite a hostile environment and scarcity of support, LGBTQI+ people have still managed to organize across the SWANA region in the past two decades. There are active LGBTQI+ organizations that work on the local, national, and regional levels across the region. Governments in the region employ anti-LGBTQI+ legal and policy frameworks that actively limit the human rights of LGBTQI+ people and subject them to violence and criminalization. LGBTQI+ organizations must navigate a legal framework that outlaws their existence and activities, alongside growing anti-LGBTQI+ sentiments sweeping the region. These organizations navigate their hostile context by establishing unique work strategies based on their understanding and analysis of the realities they work in.

To avoid legal restrictions, most LGBTQI+ groups operate underground without official registration or with registration in a safe country outside the region. Groups often rely on secure networks they establish within the LGBTQI+ community to reach their audience. The work portfolio of those groups is diverse and includes direct grassroots services, strategic litigation, research, and advocacy.

“LGBTIQA+ organizations exist without communicating or organizing with each other. There is a lack of trust between organizations because of the lack of funding they get.” - participant from Lebanon

LGBTQI+ organizations in the SWANA region necessarily employ diverse strategies tailored to the specific contexts in which they operate. From community-centered approaches to advocacy, awareness-raising, service provision, grassroots work, and online advocacy, these organizations demonstrate resilience and creativity in their efforts to advocate for LGBTQI+ rights and well-being. Despite facing numerous challenges, they remain steadfast in their commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable society for LGBTQI+ individuals. While they are currently limited to short-term action, their dedication and perseverance in the face of harsh societal and legal challenges shows potential for the growth of the movement.

“We focus more on small scale communal organizing due to the hostile context we are operating in. Kuwaiti transgender people have been organizing for a while on their own. We

have no access to funding and no information regarding it.” - Independent activist

The LGBTQI+ movement in the SWANA region faces a common challenge: a lack of visible strategies. While organizations and activists are working tirelessly to advocate for LGBTQI+ rights, the absence of specific short and long-term plans poses significant obstacles to sustained progress and systemic change. This lack of visible strategies hinders the ability of LGBTQI+ organizations to establish comprehensive plans for sustained advocacy, policy reform, and societal change.

“Competition over funding and being guided by the agendas of funders influence the priorities set by certain organizations. Instead of setting the priorities based on the needs and lived experiences of LGBTQI+ communities, the priorities are often set based on the funder’s agenda.” - participant from Morocco

The LGBTQI+ movements in the SWANA region face several additional challenges that hinder its progress and impact. Challenges include societal hostility, legal restrictions, limited access to funding and resources, lack of data and research, and the need for coalition-building and cross-border solidarity. These challenges underscore the urgent need for improved accessibility to funding for LGBTQI+ organizations in the SWANA region. It is necessary to establish transparent and secure channels for financial support to address the issue of gatekeeping by monopolistic organizations.

Drawing from the experiences of activists and analysis of the legal, social, religious, and political contexts, the research team offers the following recommendations for donors operating in the SWANA region:

- Enhance reporting to provide accurate and nuanced coverage of LGBTQI+ issues and the local context
- Address funding challenges and gatekeeping practices by diversifying the distribution of grants, and prioritize funding for trans-, sex worker-, and youth-led groups, who are often the most impacted but least funded
- Strengthen capacity-building programs to enhance activists’ skills in areas such as report writing, grant writing, funds management, record keeping, and accounting

- Establish accountability mechanisms to prevent incidents of corruption and misconduct
- Improve organizational planning and strategic development to enable organizations to plan for the long term and address systemic issues
- Promote networking and access to collective knowledge within the LGBTQI+ movement, overcoming barriers such as risks, language differences, and reluctance to expose networks
- Expand activism strategies and evidence-based research to inform advocacy strategies and policy recommendations
- Encourage collaboration and solidarity with other social justice movements and marginalized communities to amplify the impact of the LGBTQI+ movement

For a full list of recommendations, more participant perspectives, survey results, and case studies on the LGBTQI+ movement in Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, and Kuwait, view the full report, "Regional Analysis of LGBTQI+ Organizing in Southwest Asia and North Africa," at astraeafoundation.org/publications

Notes: For the safety of independent activists and organizations, all responses and quotations have been anonymized. Research was completed in September 2023 and may not reflect any subsequent legal, social, religious, and political developments in the region.



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