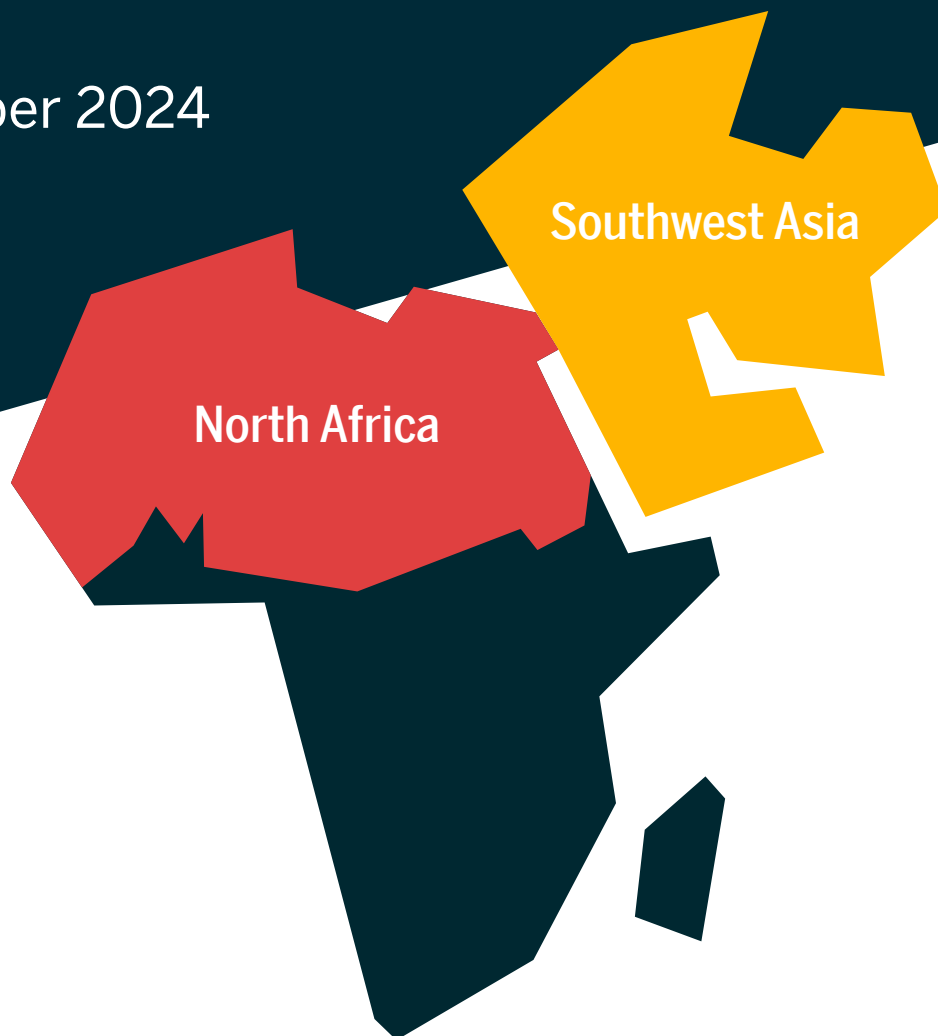




ASTRAEA LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE

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

September 2024



“Regional Analysis of LGBTQI+ Organizing in Southwest Asia and North Africa” investigates the context in which LGBTQI+ groups operate in the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region, 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 via 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. Working on the local, national, and regional levels, LGBTQI+ organizations must navigate a legal framework that outlaws their existence and activities, alongside growing anti-LGBTQI+ sentiments. 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.

“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

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. In addition to strategy, SWANA LGBTQI+ movements face several additional challenges, including 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.

“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

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 astraeaoundation.org/publications