

# Between Stigma and Survival: A Data-Driven Mixed Methods Analysis of Transgender Experiences, Rights and Priorities in the MENA Region

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## A Data-Driven Mixed Methods Analysis of Transgender Experiences, Rights and Priorities in the MENA Region

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# Executive Summary

Transgender individuals in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) face a significant crisis characterized by discriminatory legislation and widespread social stigma, which threaten their safety, dignity, and overall survival. This report aims to critically analyze these urgent challenges and presents a comprehensive framework for funders, policymakers, and civil society to deliver effective support. The findings are based on a mixed-methods analysis, including a survey of 102 transgender individuals across 14 countries, supplemented by 22 in-depth interviews. The demographic profile of the respondents indicates a predominance of youth (65% aged 18-26), urban residency (94%), and a notable representation from conservative backgrounds (77%).

## A. Key Findings

- **Systemic Criminalization:** Transgender individuals encounter systematic criminalization, which manifests through both explicit legal frameworks and, more frequently, through the de facto application of ambiguous morality laws. A majority of survey respondents (51%) reported that this reflects the legal reality in their respective countries, a situation further exacerbated by the fact that 28% of respondents are unaware of the laws that affect them. This lack of awareness contributes to arbitrary arrests and digital entrapment.
- **Barriers to Recognition and Health:** The absence of clear pathways for legal gender recognition (LGR) emerges as a primary challenge, cited by 62% of participants, with 74% of judicial cases resulting in rejection. This situation creates a detrimental “catch-22,” where LGR often necessitates surgeries that are themselves criminalized, forcing individuals into hazardous underground markets.
- **Pervasive Social Stigma:** The social environment is overwhelmingly hostile, as affirmed by 87% of survey respondents who described it as a context in which being transgender is perceived as a “taboo and a sin” or a “mental illness.” This sentiment is acutely felt, with 85% of participants identifying “social and familial stigma” as a principal challenge, alongside “hate speech,” which accounted for an additional 9.02% of the challenges noted.

## B. Community Priorities

The community’s primary priorities focus on long-term structural change and immediate survival needs:

- **Top Advocacy Goals:** The foremost objectives for legal and policy reform are **access to legal gender recognition** (24.91%) and **access to gender-affirming healthcare** (22.74%).
- **Most Needed Services:** The most pressing grassroots requirements include **health services** (26.44%), **legal aid** (22.61%), and **emergency services** such as shelters and relocation support (20.69%).

## C. Summary of Recommendations

This report presents a definitive call to action for key stakeholders:

- **Policymakers** are urged to decriminalize transgender identities, establish clear and accessible processes for legal gender recognition, and regulate access to gender-affirming healthcare.
- **Funders** are encouraged to adopt a dual-track strategy that supports both long-term advocacy for systemic changes and the immediate, life-saving services that the community requires for survival.

- **NGOs and Civil Society** are called upon to provide the essential grassroots services identified by the community, such as health support, legal aid hotlines, and emergency shelters.
- **Corporate actors and the broader human rights movement** are urged to implement inclusive workplace policies to combat economic discrimination and to amplify the voices and leadership of transgender activists, ensuring that their unique challenges remain central to human rights advocacy.

# **Note on Terminology (Glossary)**

This report serves as an advocacy guide and aims to reflect the realities transgender people in the MENA region face from a legal standpoint. While the authors of this report use appropriate and progressive language to describe transgender issues, much of current law and policy in the region uses outdated and offensive terminology. Instead of using more proper terms such as gender, transgender, or gender-affirming healthcare, law and policy circles use terms that reflect their views on socio-religious and heteronormative structures. A glossary is provided to explain key terms that are continuously used in transgender law and policy issues in the MENA region.

- **Sex Identity Disorder or Gender Identity Disorder:** The origin of this term comes from the outdated DSM-III to describe what is now known as gender dysphoria. In some places, such as Egypt and Iraq, the word gender is replaced with sex to highlight intolerance towards people who are not on the cisgender and heterosexual binary. In official legislative and policy circles, sex is seen as a fixed biological concept while gender identity is considered an ideological and improper term.
- **Sex Change:** These are the official terms used to refer to gender-affirming healthcare for transgender people in the case files. As opposed to the term transition, the term change is used to describe the Fiqh's rule that prohibits changing Allah's creation. The term highlights how the procedures are prohibited Islamically. People in law and policy circles in the region view transgender people as mentally ill and have no medical reason to transition.
- **Sex Correction:** Sex correction is used to describe sex reassignment surgeries undergone by intersex people. Fiqh rule describes sex correction surgeries as the ideal way to align intersex people within the binary and return them to a role on the cisgender and heterosexual binary. People in law and policy circles in the region view intersex individuals as having a medical need to transition. The use of the term "correction" in opposition to "change" is also symbolic, as changing Allah's creation is prohibited, but correcting it for medical reasons is accepted.
- **Transsexual:** Similar to the case with gender identity disorder, the term "transgender" is not used. Instead, the term "transsexual" is employed to reflect a person transitioning from one binary sex to another rather than someone who will develop a gender identity outside the binary.

# Introduction

Transgender individuals in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) encounter significant human rights violations that stem from a hostile legal and social environment. The pervasive criminalization of transgender identity and expression, along with the lack of legal protections, fosters a vicious cycle of violence and stigma that is normalized among state authorities and the general public. Additionally, stringent restrictions on legal gender recognition and access to gender-affirming healthcare systematically marginalize transgender individuals from crucial sectors such as education, employment, housing, and medical services.

Although the severity of this situation is recognized within affected communities, there exists a notable deficiency in scholarly work that formally documents the repercussions of anti-transgender legislation and prevailing social attitudes in the MENA region. This report endeavors to address this gap by offering a comprehensive overview of the realities faced by transgender individuals, serving as a roadmap for advocates, researchers, policymakers, and funders. It examines the evolution and impact of legislation concerning criminalization, legal gender recognition, and gender-affirming healthcare.

Adhering to the foundational principle of “nothing for us without us” and employing participatory research methodologies that regard communities under study as partners rather than mere data sources, the report adopts a mixed-methods approach. This approach combines an extensive review of laws, policies, and academic and non-governmental organization (NGO) reports with new empirical data. Central to this research is a survey conducted between April and June 2024, which garnered 102 responses from transgender individuals across 14 MENA countries, supplemented by 22 in-depth qualitative interviews. By integrating quantitative findings with direct testimony, this report amplifies the voices of the region’s transgender community, contextualizes the data, and provides a nuanced understanding of their experiences.

The report is structured into two primary sections. The first section presents a contextual analysis that highlights the current violations of human rights experienced by transgender individuals, based on a literature review of laws and policies affecting them across key areas: criminalization, legal gender recognition, and gender-affirming healthcare. The second section focuses on the analysis of the aforementioned data, exploring how transgender individuals perceive their contexts, the challenges they identify, and their direct recommendations for change.

Ultimately, this work aims to inform key stakeholders, including activists, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), funders, and policymakers, about the urgent needs of transgender individuals in the MENA region, offering concrete recommendations to facilitate effective, safe, and contextually aware advocacy and service provision. Additionally, it seeks to initiate discourse within the region’s legal community regarding strategies to enhance the recognition and protection of transgender individuals and their rights by identifying potential entry points for action.

# Methodology

This study utilized a convergent parallel mixed methods design to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the needs and realities of transgender individuals in the MENA region. The foundational component of this study is an extensive desk review of existing materials, which includes academic research articles, reports from local and international non-governmental organizations, and media coverage. A critical analysis of laws, public policies, and religious fatwas was also undertaken to delineate the legal and social frameworks that directly affect transgender individuals' access to fundamental rights. This review establishes the systemic context for the challenges faced by this community.

This approach involves simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The rationale for this design is to achieve a more robust and nuanced understanding of the research topic through the triangulation of findings. Quantitative data provides a broad overview of trends and patterns, while the qualitative data offers in-depth, contextualized insights into the lived experiences that underline the numerical findings. Both data streams were regarded with equal significance and were integrated during the final interpretation phase to create a cohesive analysis.

The quantitative component of the study consisted of an online survey administered from April to June 2024. The survey instrument included multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions designed to gather data on demographics, socioeconomic characteristics, and experiences with legal, social, and medical challenges. The survey was disseminated through secure online channels and community networks, utilizing a non-probability sampling method to reach a total of 102 respondents from 14 countries across the MENA region. Concurrently, the qualitative component was executed through 22 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Participants for this phase were recruited through community contacts and partner organizations, with some also drawn from the pool of survey respondents who consented to further contact. The interviews were designed to explore the themes identified in the survey in greater detail, thereby allowing for an in-depth examination of personal narratives, the impact of discrimination, and the complexities of navigating hostile legal and social environments.

Data analysis for each component was conducted separately during the initial stage. The quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify frequencies, percentages, and key trends. For qualitative data, a thematic analysis approach was employed to code the interview transcripts, identify recurring themes, and develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives. In the final stage of analysis, the quantitative results and qualitative findings were integrated. This convergence process involved comparing the statistical trends from the survey with the detailed narratives from the interviews. For example, quantitative findings, such as the high percentage of respondents identifying social stigma as a primary challenge, was contextualized and illustrated with direct quotes and personal stories from the qualitative interviews. This triangulation of data enhances the validity of the findings and provides a more complete and humanized depiction of the realities faced by transgender individuals in the region. Throughout the research process, stringent ethical protocols were adhered to, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants, and implementing secure data storage practices. By integrating the survey results, interview outputs, and literature review, this report offers a comprehensive overview that informs the final recommendations, grounded in both the subjective needs articulated by community members and an objective analysis of the region's legal and social climate.

**Part One: Socio-Legal  
and Medical Realities: An  
Analysis of Law, Policy  
and Social Attitude Im-  
pacting Transgender Peo-  
ple**

# I. Criminalization

Laws criminalizing transgender identities in the MENA region demonstrate variability in the severity of their punitive measures and restrictions. The legislation employed to prosecute transgender individuals can be categorized into two primary types: de facto criminalization and explicit criminalization. The majority of states do not have explicit references to terms related to transgender identities; thus, the term “de facto” pertains to legal articles that explicitly mention acts associated with being transgender. Such legal articles often include terminology such as “cross-dressing” and “imitating the opposite sex.” An example of this is the Omani Penal Code, which was amended in 2018 to include language that criminalizes transgender individuals by penalizing the “impersonation” of women in public spaces<sup>1</sup>. Article 521 of the Lebanese Penal Code, which Lebanese authorities have opted to retain from the colonial era, also mentions “cross-dressing (see figure 1).”

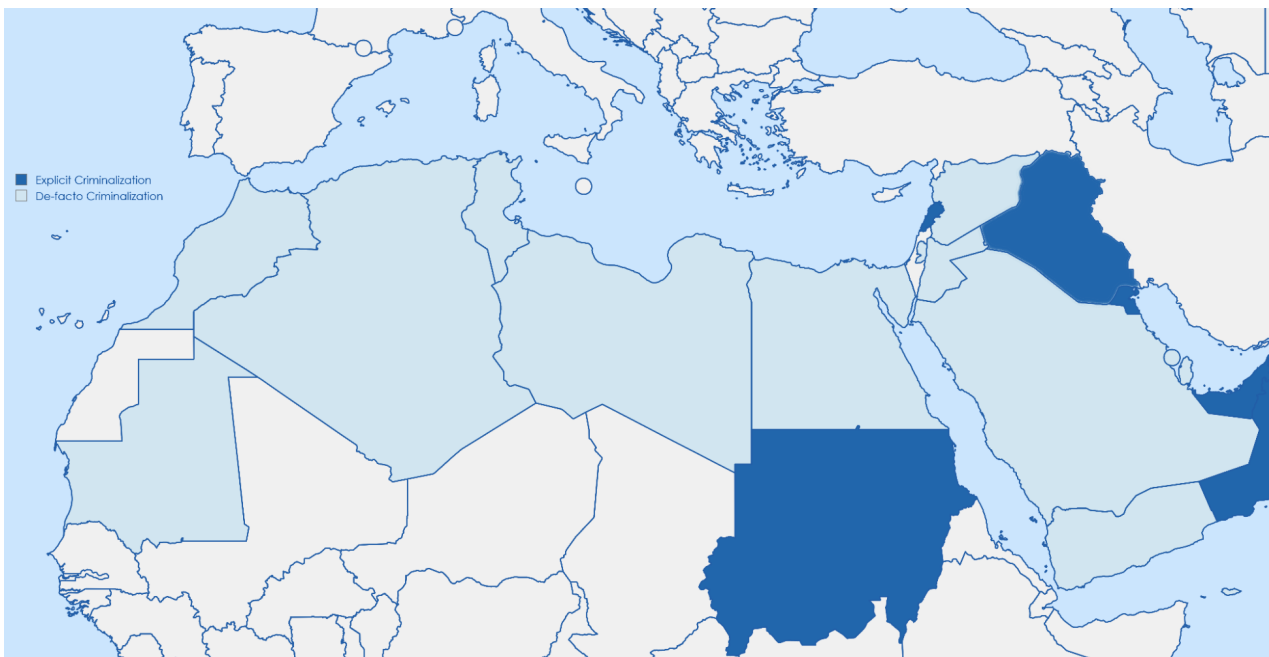


Figure 1: Map Depicting Variation in Transgender Criminalization in the MENA region.

A recent addition to these laws occurred in 2024, when the Iraqi Parliament voted overwhelmingly to amend Law No. 8/1988, which addresses prostitution, subsequently renaming it the “Law on Combating Prostitution and Homosexuality.” Article 7 of this law draws directly from the Fiqh terminology “Mukhannathun,” employing a verb form, “*ālthnt*,” to describe acts associated with being transgender. The term “*ālthnt*,” roughly translated as “sissification,” is used to refer to trans women, stating, “Every deliberate act to imitate the female sex is subject to punishment, except for those who do it to act.” The stipulated punishment is as follows:

“First: any person engaged in any activity related to Takhanoth (being transgender) or hinting at it is liable to imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years or a fine ranging from 5,000,000 to 10,000,000 dinars<sup>2</sup>.”

This new law signals a concerning development, as unlike previous laws with explicit criminalization, it does not solely criminalize acts associated with being transgender but also directly targets transgender identity itself through the use of Arabic terminology rooted in Islamic Sharia to justify punishments. Notably, Islamic Sharia does not stipulate clear punishments for the Mukhannathun, who were

<sup>1</sup> [Human Rights Watch \(2020\). “Letter Re: Arrests and Convictions Under Oman’s 2018 Penal Code.” Human Rights Watch. July 13, 2020](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Noralla, Nora. 2024. ‘Iraqi Proposed Amendments to Criminalize Transgender People Are Neither Islamic nor Constitutional](#)

effeminate men existing from the time of prohibition, and the punishment called for was merely to expel them from their homes<sup>3</sup>. Aside from this order, there are no clear penalties against such groups of people; thus, the law employs a false Islamic justification to impose criminal penalties against transgender individuals.

The second method of criminalization in the region, which is more common, is de facto criminalization. In this context, there is no explicit mention of acts that could criminalize transgender individuals; instead, governments rely on a blend of three legal categories: morality laws, vice laws, and sodomy laws. In countries such as Egypt, transgender individuals face indirect criminalization through the application of seemingly unrelated laws, such as anti-sex work or anti-cybercrime legislation<sup>4</sup>. In Tunisia, “moral” laws underpin the criminalization of transgender individuals. For example, Article 230 of the Tunisian Penal Code criminalizes sodomy, while Article 226 bis prohibits “unethical acts,” both of which are broadly interpreted to target LGBTQ+ individuals based on their gender expression as offenses against public morality<sup>5</sup>.

A third method of criminalization exists solely in Saudi Arabia, which has yet to codify its penal code. Consequently, criminalization is more commonly enacted through judicial interpretation of Islamic Sharia. This direct criminalization underscores the government’s allegiance to conservative Islamic doctrine, which perceives transgender identities as infringements upon religious teachings and threats to societal cohesion<sup>6</sup>.

Estimating the total number of arrests and instances of targeting of transgender individuals in the region presents significant challenges, primarily due to their often being categorized under the broader umbrella of LGBTQ+ individuals, where cisgender gay men constitute the majority of reported arrests. Furthermore, there is a notable lack of information regarding the circumstances surrounding their detention or imprisonment, including the legal frameworks under which these arrests occur, even in jurisdictions that explicitly penalize transgender identities. For instance, in 2017, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights documented 232 individuals arrested on the basis of perceived sexual orientation or gender identity from 2013 to 2017. Moreover, documentation efforts concerning arrests remain limited in scope, resulting in many incidents of targeting against transgender individuals going unreported<sup>7</sup>. This was achieved through the analysis of various official police statistics and reports provided by legal representatives, testimonies from defendants and detainees, as well as media monitoring, all conducted without any cooperation from law enforcement agencies. In the absence of support from legal counsel, the same institute was only able to document 25 and 43 arrests in the years 2020 and 2022, respectively<sup>8</sup>.

While many studies examining the arrests of transgender individuals across the region may be characterized by limited sample sizes, they reveal a discernible pattern regarding the circumstances of these arrests and the conditions of detainment across several nations. Law enforcement agencies in the MENA region have undertaken the responsibility of safeguarding public morality and order through systematic practices that include arbitrary arrests, detentions, entrapment, extortion, and torture of transgender individuals. The following section highlights key identified patterns and methods employed by authorities to facilitate the prosecution and perpetration of human rights violations against transgender people.

## **A. Arbitrary Arrests, Detention, and Deportation**

3 Almarri, Saqer. 2018. ‘Identities of a Single Root: The Triad of the Khuntha, Mukhannath, and Khanith’. *Women & Language* 41 (1): 97–109

4 Noralla, Nora. 2021. *Sexually Guilty: Custom Morality and the Prosecution of the LGBTQ Community in Egypt*.

5 Mawjoudin Initiative for Equality, “Defense Model on Article 230 of the Penal Code” (Tunis: Tunisia, 2022).

6 [Ryan, J. Michael, and Helen Rizzo. 2024. \*Sexuality in the Middle East and North Africa: Contemporary Issues and Challenges\*. Syracuse University Press. JSTOR](#)

7 [Hamid, D. A. \*The Trap: Punishing Sexual Difference in Egypt\*. Al Qahirah: Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2017](#)

8 [Noralla, Nora. 2024. ‘A Complete Guide on Laws, Policies and Case Law Impacting the Human Rights of LGBTQ+ People in Egypt’.](#)

Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code criminalizes unnatural sexual intercourse; however, law enforcement in Lebanon infrequently detains individuals engaged in sexual activities. Generally, arrests related to homosexuality or behaviors that deviate from traditional gender norms are arbitrary in nature, particularly given that the legislation does not explicitly criminalize homosexuality or gender non-conformity. Nevertheless, the existence of explicit “crossdressing” statutes and ambiguous morality laws grants law enforcement officials the authority to arrest, investigate, and interrogate individuals based on their appearances or behaviors at their discretion<sup>9</sup>. Lebanon, similar to other states within the region, employs legal provisions that criminalize homosexuality and unnatural sexual intercourse as a means to arrest and detain transgender individuals. Notably, there exists a lack of differentiation between homosexual behavior and transgender identity in this context.

In a 2016 interview conducted by Legal Agenda Lebanon, a Syrian transgender woman refugee recounted her arrest in Beirut following an interaction with a male individual. This incident occurred after she was approached by a police officer who instructed her to present her identification<sup>10</sup>. Lebanon criminalizes “crossdressing” within gender-segregated spaces; however, this legislation has also been employed to prosecute transgender individuals in public areas. Following her notification to the officer regarding her transgender identity to clarify the incongruence between her appearance and gender marker, she was forcibly taken to the Ramlet Al-Baida police station by her hair. Subsequently, she was arrested and detained, where she endured physical abuse, sexual harassment, and maltreatment<sup>11</sup>. Like many other queer and transgender refugees in the region, the individual also experienced detention in a General Security prison as a consequence of her refugee status. This reflects a broader pattern of law enforcement practices in Lebanon and the MENA region, where non-normative gender expression is utilized as a basis for arresting queer and transgender individuals. Following such arrests, a formal investigation typically ensues, during which investigators may promise the release of detainees’ contingent upon their admission of the allegations presented by law enforcement authorities<sup>12</sup>.

In Kuwait, transgender women are systematically targeted and detained due to possessing feminine traits beyond their control, such as “soft voices” or “smooth skin,” despite their efforts to present as masculine in public spaces to evade police persecution<sup>13</sup>. Individuals in the transgender community frequently endure repeated arrests and mistreatment at the hands of law enforcement. Moreover, they are coerced into signing declarations stipulating that they will not “imitate the opposite sex again” prior to their release. Many transgender individuals find themselves arrested without any substantial documentation of their detentions, aside from the abuse and torture they suffered while in custody. This phenomenon is exemplified in Qatar, where transgender individuals are sent to conversion centers following arrests for exhibiting gender non-conformity, yet they possess no official record of their detainment<sup>14</sup>.

Transgender individuals may similarly experience violence perpetrated by non-state actors in regions that have historically been conflict zones or are currently experiencing conflict, such as Iraq and Syria, where human rights organizations have documented instances of abuse. This form of criminalization is among the most underreported, as many individuals refrain from reporting such incidents due to fear of retribution and a lack of legal resources. For instance, a report from Human Rights Watch features the account of an Iraqi transgender woman who recounted her torture by terrorist groups in proximity to her residence, where she was subjected to physical harm using razor blades and screw-

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9 [Human Rights Watch Report, “It’s part of the job”, Ill-treatment and Torture of Vulnerable Groups in Lebanese Police Stations, 2013, available on](#)

10 [Sarah Wansa, “Detained Transgender in Lebanon: This is What Happened to Me”, Legal Agenda, 23/2/2016,](#)

11 Ibid

12 Joint Report by Helem and AFE, “Universal Periodic Report on Homosexuality and Gender in Lebanon”, Submission of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on its 23rd Session to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, March 2015

13 [Human Rights Watch Report, ““They Hunt Us Down for Fun” Discrimination and Police Violence Against Transgender Women in Kuwait,” 2012,](#)

14 [Moss, Lauren & Parry, Josh, 2022. World Cup 2022: <I am very afraid>, says Qatari transgender woman. BBC UK, 2 December 2022](#)

drivers while returning home from work. Previously, these groups had doused her with gasoline and set her ablaze. Furthermore, this same group had murdered her friends in 2012 for their sexual orientation, subjecting them to similar torture<sup>15</sup>.

As previously illustrated in the case of a Syrian refugee and a transgender woman in Lebanon who experienced detention on two occasions due to her refugee status, numerous states within the MENA region systematically employ immigration status as a mechanism to oppress transgender individuals. For instance, in 2022, Kuwait deported over 3,000 non-Kuwaiti citizens who were perceived to “resemble or imitate women.” This action was predicated on assertions from the Ministry of Interior regarding a purported increase in “crossdressers” and “suspicious advertisements targeting young people.”<sup>16</sup>

## B. Dating App Entrapments and Digital Surveillance

In recent years, regional authorities have acknowledged the significance of regulating transgender access to online environments in a manner analogous to their management of offline spaces. With the escalation of state-sponsored digital surveillance among Arab states, law enforcement agencies are increasingly utilizing digital platforms to target queer and transgender individuals on social media applications and dating websites. A prevalent method of apprehension throughout the region is entrapment, wherein law enforcement agents establish fraudulent online profiles with the intent of deceiving queer individuals into arranging in-person meetings for dates, subsequently leading to their arrest. Egypt stands as the most prominent and severe illustration of online assaults directed at queer and transgender individuals<sup>17</sup>. Human Rights Watch also documented over 20 cases of digital entrapment using Grindr and Facebook in Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq<sup>18</sup>. There are also independent reports online showing evidence of the entrapment of queer and transgender people across the Levant such as Iraq<sup>19</sup> and in the Gulf in places like Saudi from various media outlets<sup>20</sup>.

Entrapment and extortion directed at queer and transgender individuals extend beyond state mechanisms. In Lebanon, certain rogue law enforcement officials have engaged in the blackmail of queer and transgender individuals in Beirut, coercing them to pay substantial sums of money in exchange for the avoidance of arrest<sup>21</sup>. The affiliation of these individuals—whether they are part of the formal Lebanese law enforcement apparatus or are private citizens—remains ambiguous. In a similar vein, criminal gangs in Egypt employ comparable entrapment strategies as those utilized by the Egyptian state to target queer and transgender individuals, including acts of physical violence, robbery, and the recording of victims in compromising situations for subsequent blackmail<sup>22</sup>. In Iraq, militias go online to find queer and transgender people to kidnap and torture them<sup>23</sup>. There are virtually no consequences for targeting queer and transgender people online as authorities do not offer protections to queer people and reporting incidents to police might result in investigating the victim as opposed to the harasser.

Even in instances where entrapment is not employed as a direct tactic against transgender individuals, digital evidence—including social media posts—can be utilized to prosecute transgender persons

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15 Ibid

16 [Noralla, Nora. 2023. ‘Transgender Discrimination Continues in Kuwait, Despite a Court Ruling](#)

17 [Rigot, Afsaneh. “Digital Crime Scenes: The Role of Digital Evidence in the Persecution of LGBTQ People in Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia.”, March 7, 2022.](#)

18 [Rasha Younes \(2023\). “Middle East, North Africa: Digital Targeting of LGBT People. Arbitrary Arrests, Torture Follow Online Abuses, Illegal Phone Searches.”](#)

19 [Irfaa Sawtak \(2020\). “مقتل مواطن عراقي ورسالة من القاتل في يده” Irfaa Sawtak. 21 May 2020.](#)

20 [Simpson, Jack \(2014\). “Gay Saudi Arabian man sentenced to three years and 450 lashes for meeting men via Twitter.” The Independent UK. July 25, 2014.](#)

21 [El Chamaa, Mohammad \(2023\). “Panic in Lebanon’s LGBTQ+ community amid fresh fears of extortion.” L’Orient Today. 11 January, 2023.](#)

22 [Vanessa Bowles et al. \(2023\). “LGBT people hunted by gangs and police in Egypt.” BBC UK. 31 January 2023.](#)

23 [Irfaa Sawtak \(2020\). “مقتل مواطن عراقي ورسالة من القاتل في يده” Irfaa Sawtak. 21 May, 2020.](#)

for their non-conformity to traditional gender norms and queerness. A pertinent example is the case of Kuwaiti transgender woman Maha al Mutairi, who was arrested for “imitating the other sex” based on her online posts that detailed the mistreatment she experienced from Kuwaiti police following her arrest related to her gender identity<sup>24</sup>. Conversely, individuals who have been arbitrarily detained for exhibiting gender non-conformity are frequently subjected to the unlawful confiscation and search of their mobile devices by law enforcement. This practice is not only employed to access personal information but also to identify contacts of other queer and transgender individuals, thereby facilitating potential entrapment and extortion.

Certain states have begun to employ cybersecurity legislation in conjunction with established morality laws to facilitate the arrest and entrapment of transgender and queer individuals. For instance, in 2018, the Royal Omani Police apprehended a group of transgender women following their dissemination of images and videos from a gathering on social media platforms<sup>25</sup>. The Omani Penal Code, specifically Article 266(d), criminalizes the act of “imitating the opposite sex.” In addition, the women involved were charged with disseminating materials contrary to public morals and facilitating the distribution of such materials, as outlined in Articles 17 and 31 of the 2018 Cyber Crime Law. This legislation effectively empowers law enforcement agencies to confiscate and search individuals’ mobile devices for any content considered to be in violation of public morality.

## **C. Crackdowns on Queer and transgender Spaces**

Law enforcement agencies in the MENA region conduct raids on both public and private spaces identified as associated with or frequented by queer communities. These crackdowns are publicized in a manner that bolsters the self-proclaimed image of law enforcement as moral protectors within their respective nations, ultimately jeopardizing the lives of transgender individuals. Local media outlets function as primary sources of information regarding the arrests of transgender individuals, often conflating queerness with gender non-conformity. This conflation is evident in sensationalized headlines, such as those reporting the arrests of “gay weddings” or “gay parties” throughout the region. Such incidents may arise from actual private wedding events involving queer individuals, exemplified by the arrests of queer and transgender individuals in Saudi Arabia in 2018, or from targeted operations aimed at queer nightlife, as demonstrated by the Lebanese Police’s raid on Ghost, a queer nightclub in Beirut in 2013.

Eliciting nationwide or regional outrage exacerbates public animosity towards transgender individuals and communities. The exposure of the limited privacy afforded to queer communities exacerbates already dire conditions under public scrutiny. For instance, when a transgender individual faces challenges in securing employment or housing due to discrepancies between their identification documents and gender expression, they also risk further jeopardy from law enforcement and civilians.

# **II. Legal Gender Recognition**

The complete absence of a legal gender recognition procedure that enables transgender individuals to change their gender identity markers on identification documents significantly impacts the transgender community in the MENA region. The failure to legally acknowledge the existence of transgender individuals hinders their ability to secure essential needs such as employment, housing, and medical treatment.

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<sup>24</sup> [Reuters \(2021\). “Rights group urges Kuwait to overturn transgender woman’s conviction.” Reuters. October 14, 2021.](#)  
<sup>25</sup> [Whitson, Sarah Leah & Reid Graeme \(2020\). Letter Re: Arrests and Convictions Under Oman’s 2018 Penal Code. Human Rights Watch. July 13, 2020.](#)

No country within the MENA region has established legal frameworks that address gender recognition for transgender individuals, both positively and negatively. Due to the lack of an official procedure, many individuals seek legal gender recognition through de facto means. For instance, in certain countries within the MENA region, citizens may apply to amend their personal information through their respective Civil Status Departments. Consequently, many transgender individuals utilize this mechanism to apply for a gender marker change, despite such applications being outside the intended function of the mechanism. When these cases are rejected, individuals may file a judicial claim. In other countries, changes to civil records are not permitted without a judicial order, leading transgender citizens in specific areas of the MENA region to directly approach the judiciary. However, this procedure largely proves unsuccessful for transgender individuals<sup>26</sup>.

Islamic scholarship engages with gender identities that exist outside the cisgender and heterosexual binary in two principal ways. First, individuals who are biological exceptions to the binary, such as intersex individuals, may have their identities tolerated, provided they undertake a medical transition back into the binary. Jurists have also developed criteria to categorize intersex individuals as biologically male or female. Conversely, individuals who are social exceptions to the binary, such as transgender individuals, are often deemed sinful, with recommendations for counseling to return to a binary-compliant identity. Consequently, Islamic Fatwas differentiate between intersex and transgender individuals, asserting that altering Allah's creation is prohibited except in cases of biological or medical necessity. Legal and policy discussions within the MENA region often conceptualize intersex individuals as biologically ill or possessing birth deformities, permitting them to transition medically and socially, yet they encounter numerous challenges and lengthy processes<sup>27</sup>.

Although fatwas may demonstrate a certain degree of acceptance toward intersex individuals, the legal frameworks within the region remain inadequately equipped to facilitate necessary document alterations for these individuals. The procedural structure is intentionally designed to be restrictive, effectively marginalizing transgender individuals from accessing equivalent resources. Even when intersex individuals are granted permission to amend their documents, they are required to provide evidence of their intersexuality and undergo extensive evaluations by judicial authorities. Moreover, the process is frequently prolonged, costly, and psychologically burdensome for intersex individuals whose documentation does not align with their gender identity. Only two countries within the region have established provisions that permit intersex individuals to modify their documentation without enduring a protracted judicial process: Saudi Arabia's Article 39 of the Civil Status Code and Morocco's Article 28 of the Civil Status Law<sup>28</sup>.

While there are no specific Fatwas pertaining to transgender individuals issued by religious authorities across every country in the MENA region, most countries that adhere to Sunni Islam generally abide by the Fatwas of Sunni authorities, such as Al-Azhar in Egypt<sup>29</sup>. The Islamic Fiqh Council in Saudi Arabia, alongside countries that adhere to Shia Islam, such as those following the rulings of Al Sayyed Sistani or Al Khomeini, maintains a consensus regarding the prohibition of transgender individuals from accessing gender-affirming healthcare and the rejection of transgender identity. Furthermore, these religious authorities restrict sex reassignment surgeries exclusively to intersex individuals<sup>30</sup>.

In 2024, the Egyptian authorities implemented a new directive aimed at closing the loophole that transgender individuals had previously exploited to obtain legal gender recognition. This action reflects the authorities' adherence to Islamic principles regarding transgender and intersex individuals.

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26 [Noralla, Nora. 2024. 'The MENA Trans Archives Series: Understanding Modern Fiqh on Intersex and Transgender People in the Middle East and North Africa Region](#)

27 Noralla, Nora. 2024. 'Transgender Legal Recognition in North Africa: Between the Hammer of Sharia and the Anvil of the Judiciary'. *Arab Law Quarterly* 1 (aop): 1–45.

28 [Noralla, Nora. 2023. 'Policies of Erasure: How the MENA's Region Intersex People Are Made Invisible'. \*Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy\*](#)

29 [Skovgaard-Petersen, Jakob \(1995\) "Sex Change in Cairo: Gender and Islamic Law," \*The Journal of International Institute, Volume 2, Issue 3\*](#)

30 Tolino, Serena. "(g) Transgenderism, Transsexuality and Sex Reassignment Surgery in Contemporary Sunni Fatwas." *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 17 (2017): 223-246.

The new directive mandates that all applicants seeking legal gender recognition must undergo chromosome testing to ascertain whether they are intersex or transgender. If an individual is determined to be transgender, their application is rejected; conversely, if they are identified as intersex, the application proceeds for consideration<sup>31</sup>.

Thus, the process of obtaining legal gender recognition through de facto means is predominantly impractical, particularly in the context of prevailing legal and religious precedents that challenge transgender identities. Furthermore, the lack of a comprehensive legal framework governing the procedure for legal gender recognition, in conjunction with limited legal acknowledgment of transgender identities, necessitates that judicial authorities assess each gender recognition application based on their individual interpretations of the law. Notably, there have been instances of successful legal gender recognition cases through this approach in certain jurisdictions, such as Lebanon. For instance, a transgender man was granted legal gender recognition and modifications to his legal identification documents in 2016; however, such cases remain exceptional. This type of success, while noteworthy, continues to be largely anomalous, as a statistical analysis of 19 judicial judgments regarding legal gender recognition revealed that 73.67% of cases were rejected due to interpretations of Islamic Sharia that prohibit transgender individuals from transitioning<sup>32</sup>.

Additionally, the comprehension of transgender identity and community remains constrained by cisgender and heterosexual binaries. Consequently, the majority of laws and policies addressing transgender issues inadequately acknowledge genderfluid and non-binary identities. This oversight imposes significant pressure on many transgender individuals in the region to conform to the existing, limited binary framework, thereby restricting their capacity to express their authentic gender identities. Despite the absence of a comprehensive legal framework governing legal gender recognition throughout the MENA region, nearly all cases of legal gender recognition require transgender individuals to present a diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder, accompanied by documentation of having undergone gender-affirming or sex reassignment surgery. This condition persists despite the fact that the majority of legal gender recognition cases are ultimately rejected, indicating that the system intentionally penalizes transgender individuals by necessitating medical and social transitions while simultaneously relegating them to a state of legal limbo due to incorrect documentation. This circumstance renders them vulnerable to discrimination in housing, education, employment, healthcare, and increases their susceptibility to police targeting.

### **III. The Necessity of Medical Transition: An Examination of Gender-Affirming Healthcare Policies**

Access to gender-affirming healthcare in the MENA region is significantly hindered by a confluence of explicit criminalization, restrictive medical policies, and entrenched religious and societal barriers. In recent years, several countries have effectively prohibited gender-affirming care by amending medical liability laws, imposing severe penalties on medical practitioners who perform gender-affirming procedures. These penalties include substantial fines, imprisonment, and the revocation of medical licenses. This legal framework has been enacted in countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Jordan, thereby fostering an environment in which safe medical transition is unattainable. This

<sup>31</sup> [Noralla, Nora. 2024. 'Egypt Moves to Close a Loophole Allowing Transgender Individuals Access to Legal Gender Recognition'. Cairo 52 Legal Research Institute, December 12.](#)

<sup>32</sup> [Noralla, Nora. 2024. 'The MENA Trans Archives Series: Understanding the Judicial Directions & Practices on Legal Gender Recognition in the Middle East and North Africa Case Law'.](#)

legal hostility is often justified by pseudoscientific narratives, such as the “chromosome trap,” which asserts that an individual’s chromosomes are immutable, thereby rendering any transition illegitimate. Such rhetoric has been institutionalized in policy in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf nations, explicitly to deny transgender individuals access to necessary care (See figure 2)<sup>33</sup>.



Figure 2: Map Depicting Trends in the Prohibition of Gender Affirming Healthcare in the MENA region.

The primary barrier to care stems from a legal and religious framework heavily influenced by contemporary Islamic Fiqh (jurisprudence), which delineates a stark distinction between two concepts: “sex correction” for intersex individuals and “sex change” for transgender individuals. This distinction is foundational to nearly all state policies regarding gender-affirming care in the region. According to influential religious authorities such as Egypt’s Al-Azhar and the Islamic Fiqh Council, whose fatwas are referenced throughout the region, intersex traits are classified as a “biological illness” or birth defect. Consequently, medical interventions aimed at “correcting” the body to conform to either male or female sex are deemed permissible, and even necessary, forms of treatment. This is framed as a restoration of the individual to their “natural” position within the gender binary<sup>34</sup>.

In contrast, transgender identity is characterized as a “mental illness” or disorder. From this perspective, the appropriate “treatment” is not medical transition, but rather psychiatric therapy designed to align the individual’s gender identity with their sex assigned at birth. As such, gender-affirming healthcare for transgender individuals is classified as a prohibited “sex change”—an unnatural alteration of “Allah’s creation”—and is consequently considered sinful under Sharia law. This distinction is codified in Egypt’s medical syndicate policy and echoed in the legal frameworks of numerous other MENA countries. Legal and religious prohibitions create an environment where access to safe healthcare is fraught with challenges. In countries that do not impose explicit bans, a legislative vacuum results in the absence of official programs or clear pathways to care. This situation compels transgender individuals to navigate a system in which access is contingent upon the discretion of individual, often antagonistic, medical and judicial authorities<sup>35</sup>.

Even when seeking healthcare is an option, stigma and insufficient training among medical professionals frequently result in abuse, harassment, and denial of services. As a consequence, numerous individuals turn to a dangerous and costly underground market for hormones and surgical procedures. These unregulated interventions are often performed in unlicensed facilities by inadequately trained practitioners, leading to severe health complications and even fatalities. The case of Ezz Eldin, a 26-year-old Egyptian transgender man who died from hemorrhaging after being prematurely dis-

33 Noralla, Nora. 2022. ‘The Middle East Has an Anti-Transgender Bills Problem’. *The New Arab*

34 Tolino, Serena. 2017. ‘(G) Transgenderism, Transsexuality and SexReassignment Surgery in Contemporary Sunni Fatwas’. *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 17: 223–46.

35 Noralla, Nora. 2024. ‘Access Denied: A Qualitative Study on Transgender Health Policy in Egypt’. *Social Science & Medicine* 348: 116867

charged from an unlicensed clinic in 2021, illustrates the significant risks associated with this phenomenon<sup>36</sup>. Similarly, a Lebanese transgender woman experienced a leg infection after independently undergoing hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and was denied hospital admission due to a discrepancy between her identification and gender expression. Her entry was ultimately secured only after a family member resorted to bribery. Additionally, economic crises in countries such as Lebanon contribute to the volatility of HRT prices, resulting in monopolization and lack of regulation<sup>37</sup>. Prices for one shot of HRT rose from approximately \$2 to \$100 dollars for three shots<sup>38</sup>.

This dire circumstance engenders a devastating catch-22. As detailed in the section on Legal Gender Recognition, numerous judicial systems mandate that applicants have undergone gender-affirming surgery to be considered for a change in their legal documents. By criminalizing and restricting the very medical procedures they require as a prerequisite, states create an insurmountable barrier, thereby trapping transgender individuals in a cycle of legal and physical vulnerability.

## IV. Social Background

In the countries of the MENA region, gender is predominantly conceptualized within a binary framework of «man» and «woman,» with roles correlating directly to «male» and «female» as designated at birth. Within this construct, gender is characterized as “the cultural and social attributes ascribed to men and women based on perceived biological differences<sup>39</sup>.” None of the countries in the region permit self-identification or provide the option of neutral gender markers. Moreover, many impose explicit limitations on the timeframe within which birth certificates must be measured, measured in days following the child’s birth, without allowing exceptions or the registration of blank gender markers, even for intersex individuals. This situation compels transgender individuals to be legally recognized as either male or female according to the designation assigned at birth, thereby precluding a neutral space for the exploration of gender identity and expression.

Conversely, non-conforming expressions are frequently penalized for their mere visibility, both legally and socially. An illustrative case is that of a young Moroccan non-binary artist who, after participating in an online podcast, faced a barrage of violent threats due to their gender expression. In seeking legal recourse, they attempted to file a complaint at their local police station but were instead arrested on false pretenses and subsequently served four months of imprisonment. This persecution, which spans both social and legal dimensions, pressures transgender individuals to conform to one side of the gender binary—often based on which expression would be safer for them—or to be rendered invisible in the public sphere. This marginalization forces them into economic precarity and deprives them of access to their fundamental rights<sup>40</sup>.

In 2016, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) conducted a survey that posed two distinct questions: “If a female child consistently dressed and expressed herself as a boy, would you find that acceptable?” and “If a male child consistently dressed and expressed himself as a girl, would you find that acceptable?” This global survey included responses from seven MENA countries<sup>41</sup>. Although the results may be subject to debate—given that the questions do not explicitly state that the child in question is transgender—an overwhelming majority indicated that they would not tolerate the dressing and expression of the opposite gender (See Figures 3 and 4).

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36 *ibid*

37 Noralla, Nora (2022). “Tough Territory for Transgender People in the Middle East and North Africa. Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia Should Ensure Access to Legal Gender Recognition.” Human Rights Watch. April 8, 2022.

38 *Ibid*

39 [Janeen Baxter and Heidi Hoffmann, “Gender,” \*Sociology\*, October 28, 2011.](#)

40 Stephanie Farah, Youssef Rizk, and Madona Azar, “Transgender Health in the Middle East Region: What Do We Know so Far? A Literature Review,” *Transgender Health*, May 4, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1089/trgh.2022.0080>.

41 [Carroll, Angus, and George Robotham. 2016. \*The Personal and the Political: Attitudes to LGBTI People Around the World\*. Geneva: ILGA.](#)

# Acceptance of a Female child who expresses herself as a Boy (FtM)

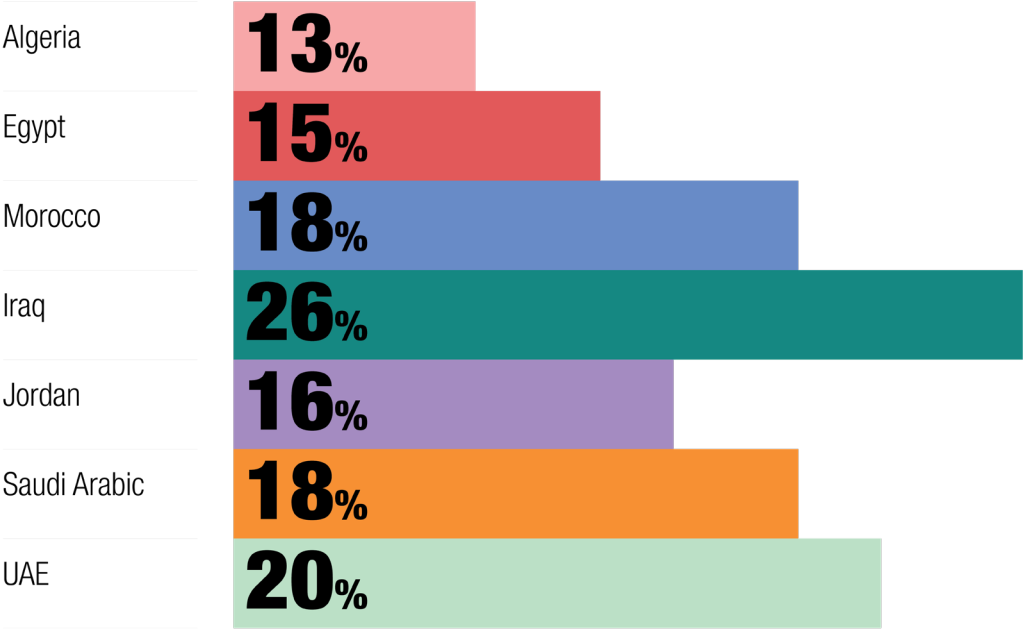


Figure 3: Percentage of respondents who answered «yes» to the question, «If a female child consistently dressed and expressed herself as a boy, would you find that acceptable?»

# Acceptance of a Male child who expresses herself as a Girl (MtF)

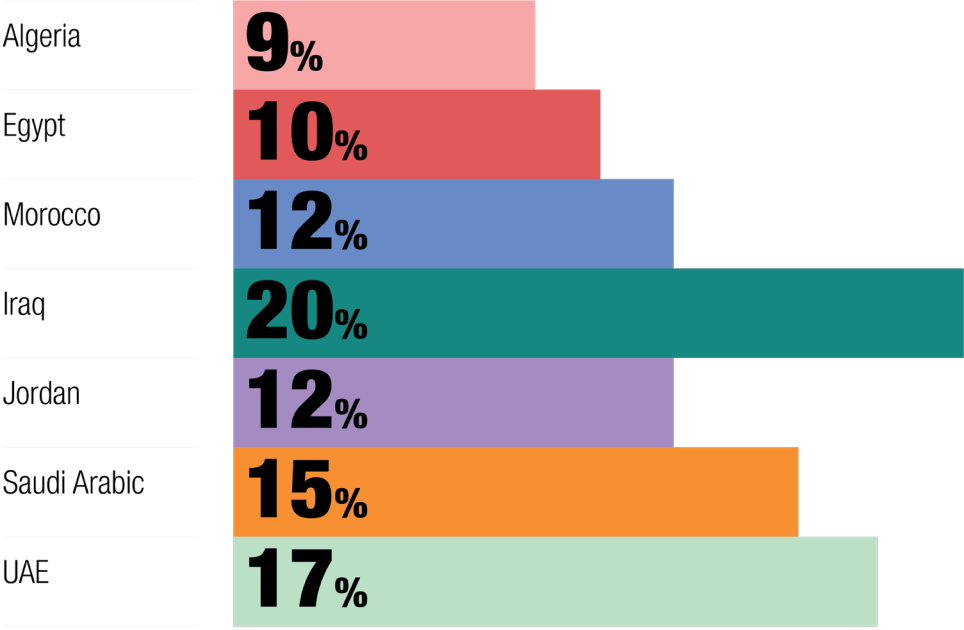


Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who answered “yes” to the question, “If a male child consistently dressed and expressed himself as a girl, would you find that acceptable?”

While these percentages, despite being low, paint a picture of growing acceptance, the realities on the ground, as discussed thus far and will be further examined, are markedly different, as most transgender individuals do not perceive any acceptance. Given the pervasive risk of arrest and legal prosecution faced by transgender individuals, it is imperative to comprehend the socio-political climate to which they are compelled to adapt. This understanding is crucial for contextualizing the challenges they encounter and identifying actionable responses. In this section, we will endeavor to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the entrenchment of transphobic legislation within the region's social context. We will analyze the various manifestations of these laws and societal attitudes toward transgender individuals and their capacity to achieve social integration. Furthermore, we will explore the specific challenges associated with accessing gender-affirming health-care and related services.

## A. Social and Religious Attitudes Hindering Change

Legislative shifts affecting transgender individuals in the MENA region are predominantly constrained by religious interpretations and cultural norms. Fatwas issued by prominent Islamic institutions, such as Al Azhar and the Islamic Fiqh Council, exert considerable influence in shaping both legal frameworks and societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality, with these religious edicts frequently cited as the basis for legislation in the region's legal discourse. These fatwas generally align with conservative interpretations of Islamic law, classifying transgender identities as transgressions of religious principles and thereby legitimizing societal stigmatization and discrimination against transgender individuals. Notably, both of these major institutions of Sunni Fiqh in the region have issued fatwas that adopt an unfavorable position towards transgender identities, declaring gender transition a sin<sup>42</sup>. This authoritative stance has emboldened local Islamic scholars to promulgate their own fatwas against transgender identities; for instance, the Moroccan Mufti has asserted that the concept of gender identity constitutes “a threat to Moroccan values, a distortion of the institution of family, and an unwarranted interference in the natural order established by the will of God.”<sup>43</sup> Courts called to rule in Legal Gender Recognition cases cite these Fatwas, whether to rely on them as a justification for their rejection<sup>44</sup> or to disregard them based on different interpretations of the religious text, namely the view that “necessities overrule prohibitions”<sup>45</sup>, meaning that even if the court rules in favor of legal gender recognition, this ruling is seen as an exception for extreme need, and not as an admittance of legal transition as a legitimate and normal process for transgender people.

Moreover, gender and familial norms, codified in legal frameworks such as inheritance laws and family laws, further entrench binary gender constructs and reinforce patriarchal structures within society. For instance, inheritance laws frequently favor male heirs over female heirs, perpetuating gender-based disparities and reinforcing traditional gender roles. Legal scholars contend that issues surrounding inheritance shares are exacerbated by the complexities of legal gender recognition and self-identification, raising the question of whether inheritance is determined by an individual's self-identified gender or by the so-called “natural” gender assigned at birth<sup>46</sup>. Family law often reinforces rigid gender norms and fails to provide protections for transgender individuals, thereby reflecting and exacerbating entrenched cultural attitudes towards gender and family dynamics. Transgender individuals frequently face deprivation of their rights to marry and establish families, with legal scholars urging officials to remain vigilant against conducting weddings involving transgender parties and advocating for the removal of children from the custody of transgender parents who come out after marriage and childbirth. This context highlights the social rejection, religious disapproval of transgender identities, and the reluctance of legislative authorities to challenge these perceptions, all of which contribute to the social isolation of transgender individuals. Consequently, they are effectively excluded from participating in social life and from being recognized as legitimate parties in social contracts such as marriage, parenthood, and inheritance. Any proposed alterations to the status quo that would include

42 Mohamed Fijel, “أحكام التحويل الجنسي في الفقه والتشريع والاجتهاد القضائي” (Thesis, 2018).

43 [“The Mena Trans Archives: Cairo 52 Legal Research Institute.” Cairo 52 Legal Research Institute |, May 2, 2024.](#)

44 Mohamed Fijel, “أحكام التحويل الجنسي في الفقه والتشريع والاجتهاد القضائي” (Thesis, 2018).

45 *ibid*

46 *ibid*

transgender individuals are often perceived as threats to established traditional values and the social order<sup>47</sup>.

## **B. The Impact on Transgender People's Everyday lives**

In addition to the previously examined physical harm that transgender individuals encounter during detention, the compounded effects of police harassment, mistreatment, and societal stigma and discrimination significantly exacerbate the emotional distress experienced by transgender individuals in their daily lives<sup>48</sup>

These challenges significantly intersect with the right to access justice, a right that is frequently unattainable for transgender individuals. The pervasive fear of persecution and discrimination often dissuades transgender persons from pursuing legal recourse, even in situations where their gender identity is not the central issue. This dynamic perpetuates a cycle of impunity for perpetrators of violence and discrimination against transgender individuals, thereby exacerbating their vulnerability and denying them access to essential legal protections. A 2023 study conducted by the Tawhida Ben Cheikh Group, which examined the attitudes of young LGBTQIA+ individuals in Tunisia, revealed that a majority of transgender respondents had experienced multiple forms of violence in the preceding year, with more than half identifying fear of persecution as a significant barrier to the realization of their rights<sup>49</sup>.

Additionally, there exists a significant deficiency in specialized mental and physical health care, including gender-affirming services, which exacerbates the challenges encountered by transgender individuals in the MENA region. Discriminatory policies and societal attitudes hinder transgender individuals from accessing essential healthcare services, resulting in untreated gender dysphoria, mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety, and an increased susceptibility to health risks. In fact, coming out to a healthcare professional could pose risk to transgender people due to the prevalence of so-called conversion therapy in the region<sup>50</sup>, a practice that is “inherently discriminatory, that [is] cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and that depending on the severity or physical or mental pain and suffering inflicted to the victim, [it] may amount to torture.” according to the UN’s Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>51</sup>.

Anti-transgender legislation and societal attitudes significantly contribute to psychological distress, social isolation, and the disenfranchisement of transgender individuals, thereby restricting their access to opportunities for education, employment, and societal participation. Discrimination within educational and workplace environments, in conjunction with prevailing societal prejudices, creates formidable barriers to economic stability and social inclusion for transgender individuals, exacerbating their marginalization and vulnerability. A demographic study conducted in Tunisia aimed to examine the stratification of various groups within the LGBTQIA+ community. The findings revealed that, while cisgender individuals were represented across a diverse spectrum of income brackets, 100% of transgender respondents reported a stable monthly income of less than 100 dinars (approximately 30 USD), in stark contrast to only 13% of cisgender respondents. Furthermore, the study indicated that transgender individuals—particularly transgender women—experienced significantly fewer opportunities for higher education, especially among those who reported coming out during their school years and who were economically dependent on their parents for educational support. The barriers to education are more explicit in certain contexts, as illustrated by the case of Sally Mursi in Egypt. Following her transition, Sally was expelled from Al-Azhar Medical School, which initiated an 18-year-long legal

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47 *ibid*

48 [Budge, Stephanie L., Sabra L. Katz-Wise, and Elliot A. Tebbe. 2016. “Transgender Emotional and Coping Processes: A Research Review.” \*Journal of Counseling Psychology\* 63 \(4\): 439–50.](#)

49 Hafedh Chekir and Hedia Belhadj, *Enquête Des Valeurs Relatives à La Sexualité, La Santé Sexuelle et Reproductive, et La Relation de Genre Auprès Des Jeunes LGBTQIA+ En Tunisie.* (Groupe Tawhida Ben Cheikh, 2023).

50 [Bishop, Amie. \*Harmful Treatment: The Global Reach of So-Called Conversion Therapy.\* New York, NY: OutRight Action International, 2019.](#)

51 [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2020. “Conversion Therapy Can Amount to Torture and Should Be Banned, Says UN Expert.” \*OHCHR Stories\*, July 13, 2020.](#)

battle in her pursuit of the right to continue her education. It was not until her case was escalated to the administrative supreme court that her entitlement to this right was formally recognized<sup>52</sup>.

Furthermore, the emergence of “transicide,” a term that refers to the systemic murder of individuals based on their gender identity, constitutes a pressing concern within contemporary society. This violence is projected to continue its upward trajectory, exacerbated by the prevalence of hate speech and the proliferation of anti-transgender legislation throughout the region. Such a hostile environment culminates in lethal outcomes, which the presentation categorizes into various types. Fatalities arise from medical malpractice and coercive conversion therapy. For instance, Ezz, a 26-year-old transgender man, died in Cairo in 2021 as a result of medical negligence after seeking treatment at an underground surgical facility. In 2023, Edan Knight, a 23-year-old Saudi trans woman, died by suicide following extreme conversion therapy imposed by her family. Honor killings represent another significant manifestation of violence. In 2022, Doski Azad, an Iraqi Kurdish trans woman, was murdered by her brother, who has yet to be held accountable for this crime. Similarly, Hajar Al-Asami, a Kuwaiti transmasculine individual, was killed by their brother in 2019, receiving a lenient sentence under honor killing statutes. The state is also implicated as a perpetrator of lethal violence. In 2024, Jojo, an Iraqi trans woman influencer, died under mysterious circumstances while in state custody in a male prison. That same year, a Syrian trans woman was murdered by authorities in northwestern Syria, allegedly in collusion with her family. Finally, murders perpetrated by social actors occur with alarming impunity. In 2024, Semsm, an Iraqi transgender blogger, was stabbed to death in public, and in 2023, Noor BM, another Iraqi influencer, was shot and killed; in both cases, the assailants remain at large. The presentation concludes that while documentation efforts are crucial for preserving the memory of the victims, the pervasive nature of this violence complicates comprehensive tracking.

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52 [“The Mena Trans Archives: Cairo 52 Legal Research Institute.” Cairo 52 Legal Research Institute |, May 2, 2024.](#)

# **Part Two: Voices from the Transgender Commu- nities Through Participa- tory Data Analysis**

# I. Demographics and Socioeconomic Characteristics

The survey was conducted between April and June of 2024, yielding 102 responses from 14 countries within the MENA region. Notably, only 9 respondents resided outside their country of origin, with merely 6 residing beyond the MENA region, indicating that 94% of respondents were living within the region at the time of completing the questionnaire. The majority of respondents came from three countries: Egypt, Tunisia, and Lebanon, followed by Jordan and Morocco, with a small minority from Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Algeria, Iraq, and Sudan. A significant majority, comprising 82% of the respondents, were aged 30 years or younger.

The demographic data delineates a portrait of a young and significantly vulnerable population. The majority of the 102 respondents are young adults, with 65% falling within the age range of 18 to 26 years. An overwhelming 94% reside in urban areas, suggesting that the transgender experiences captured in this survey predominantly reflect an urban context, where anonymity and community support may be more readily available. A noteworthy finding is that this community largely emerges from traditional societal structures, with 68% originating from middle-class backgrounds and 77% from conservative environments. This contextual framework is essential, as it implies that most individuals are navigating their identities within familial and social settings that are not inherently liberal or accepting. The community exhibits considerable diversity in identity, thereby challenging the rigid binaries that prevail within the region's legal and social frameworks. While 41% identify as transgender women and 32% as transgender men, a significant 27% identify as non-binary or genderqueer/fluid. This diversity extends to sexual orientation, with only a minority identifying as heterosexual (26%), while pansexual, queer, gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities are notably prevalent. This illustrates a complex community whose identities resist easy categorization and frequent conflict with heteronormative social expectations.

For the interviews and focus group discussions, 22 participants took part from three countries: Egypt, Tunisia, and Lebanon, with 10 from Egypt, 8 from Lebanon, and 4 from Tunisia. The participants' ages ranged between 20 and 35, with an average age of 22. All participants lived in their home countries and resided in urban areas, with all identifying as middle class; 70% reported coming from a conservative background.

## II. How Do Transgender Individuals Perceive Their Socio-Legal Realities? The Dual Challenge: State Criminalization and Societal Stigma

Before analyzing data pertaining to the key challenges and recommendations identified by transgender communities in the region, it is crucial to investigate how these communities perceive their socio-legal realities. The existing literature paints a dire scenario for transgender individuals in this region, revealing a complex interplay of intersectional factors that contribute to an anti-transgender environment. This environment is characterized by the absence of legal gender recognition and gender-affirming healthcare, pervasive discrimination and violence, and the active criminalization and targeting of transgender individuals. When respondents were asked, "How would you describe the law or policy situation in your country?" The analysis of the challenges shows that the transgender

community is fighting a war on two fronts: against the state and against society.

A substantial majority of respondents (51%) indicated that their country lacks specific legislation addressing transgender issues, while simultaneously enforcing ambiguous statutes that criminalize transgender individuals and impede their access to rights. This situation underscores the widespread implementation of de facto criminalization through “public morality” or “debauchery” laws, thereby engendering an environment marked by legal uncertainty and ongoing threats to individual rights (see Figure 5).

## How would you describe the law and policy situation for transgender people in your country?

The country lacks laws or policies regulating transgender-related issues. However, it does enforce laws that criminalize transgender individuals and hinder access to legal gender recognition and gender-affirming healthcare.

**51%**

The country has some laws or policies regulating transgender-related issues. However, these are not comprehensive and their application is arbitrary and inconsistent.

**21%**

The country does not have laws or policies regulating transgender-related issues. However, it does not implement any laws that would criminalize transgender people or limit their access to gender-affirming healthcare and legal gender recognition.

**16%**

I am unaware of legislation or policy affecting transgender people in my country.

**12%**

Figure 5: Answers to the question “How would you describe the law and policy situation for transgender people in your country?”

Evidently, legal frameworks vary significantly across countries. As explored in the published Country Profiles, some nations explicitly criminalize transgender identities and expressions de jure through clear legal texts, while others effectuate similar criminalization de facto through legislation intended to regulate other areas of social conduct, online behavior, or otherwise. Among the 22 respondents from countries that explicitly criminalize transgender identities and expressions, 8 reported that their country “does not have laws or policies regulating transgender-related issues” and “does not enforce any laws that would criminalize transgender individuals or restrict their access to gender-affirming healthcare and legal gender recognition.” This lack of awareness regarding the legal risks faced by transgender individuals is less pronounced in countries that criminalize transgender individuals de facto, yet remains equally hazardous, as individuals are unlikely to possess the knowledge necessary to protect themselves legally if they are unaware of the risks of criminalization from the outset. This heightened risk likely impacts the 28% of respondents who either hold the misconception that there are no laws criminalizing transgender individuals or who report being uninformed about the laws and policies that affect transgender individuals in their country.

In the absence of legal protections for transgender individuals, they consistently encounter obstacles

in their daily lives. For example, a mismatch between one's identification documents and gender identity results in discrimination in employment, healthcare, and housing sectors, which can have detrimental effects on their lives. The majority of focus groups and interviews underscored how participants felt marginalized in society following their transition and in the context of gender nonconformity. This legal hostility is paralleled by pervasive social stigma. A substantial majority (63%) of respondents indicate that being transgender is perceived as a "taboo and a sin," resulting in social attacks, familial rejection, and marginalization in education, housing, and employment. Moreover, 24% of individuals report that being transgender is regarded as a "mental illness" necessitating "conversion therapy." Collectively, these statistics reveal that 87% of respondents perceive their social environment as either profoundly hostile or pathologizing. This perception is further evidenced by the challenges they encounter, with "social/familial stigma and violence" identified as the most frequently reported issue (11%) (See figure 6).

## How would you describe the social situation for trans people in your country?

Being transgender is considered taboo and a sin, and transgender people face the risk of social attacks, family rejection, and societal marginalization. This often hinders their ability to pursue education, secure housing, or find employment.

**63%**

Being transgender is still considered taboo and often viewed as a mental illness. Thus, certain social groups call for sympathy for transgender individuals, characterizing them as mentally ill. However, these groups only advocate for conversion therapy.

**24%**

Being transgender is considered controversial, but there have been some active discussions in the media and among some social groups, with some calling for greater acceptance of transgender people and their human rights.

**12%**

I am not sure of the situation for transgender people in my country.

**1%**

Figure 6: Answers to the question "how would you describe the social situation for trans people in your country?"

The realities articulated by participants indicate that existing literature accurately reflects how multilayered, intersecting anti-transgender conditions collectively render life increasingly untenable for transgender individuals. The survey further elucidated the sources of information that respondents utilize to navigate their socio-legal realities. The data reveals that the transgender community in the MENA region exhibits a high degree of self-reliance, prioritizing internal knowledge and direct experience over information sourced from external institutions (See figure 7).

# What resources did you use as a reference when responding to the previous questions?

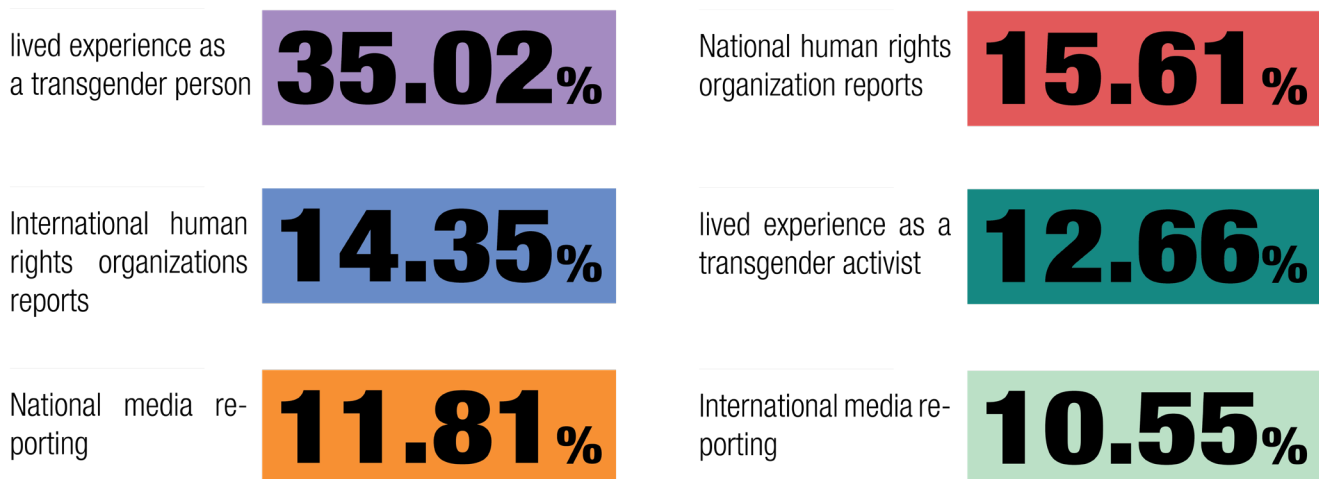


Figure 7: Answers to the multi-choice question “What resources did you use as a reference when responding to the previous questions?”

A particularly noteworthy finding is that the primary source of information is one’s own “lived experience as a transgender person,” which constitutes 35% of all responses. When combined with the 13% who reference their “lived experience as a transgender activist,” it becomes evident that nearly half of the community’s understanding is derived from within its own ranks. This substantial reliance on personal and peer-to-peer knowledge suggests that formal sources are perceived as either less trustworthy, less accessible, or less pertinent to the community’s immediate needs. Reports from national (16%) and international (14%) human rights organizations emerge as the next most consulted sources, indicating that advocacy-focused materials are deemed more valuable than mainstream media. In contrast, media reporting, both national (12%) and international (11%), is the least relied-upon source among the options presented. This may reflect a perception that media coverage is often inaccurate, sensationalist, or insufficiently representative of the nuances of their lived experiences. Overall, the data suggests a community that actively validates and disseminates knowledge internally, constructing understanding from the ground up through shared experience.

## III. The Interconnected Challenges Facing Transgender Individuals in the MENA Region

The foremost challenge confronting transgender individuals in the MENA region is the pervasive social and familial stigma, which 85% of participants identified as a primary issue. This overarching social hostility engenders a cascade of interconnected legal, economic, and institutional hardships. The prevalence of “hate speech in traditional and social media” emerged as one of the most frequently cited concerns, accounting for 9% of all challenges mentioned. Barriers to social integration, including the absence of gender-affirming healthcare and widespread discrimination, were prioritized as more immediate concerns than the general lack of services or poverty (See Figure 8).

# What are the most significant challenges confronting transgender individuals in your country?

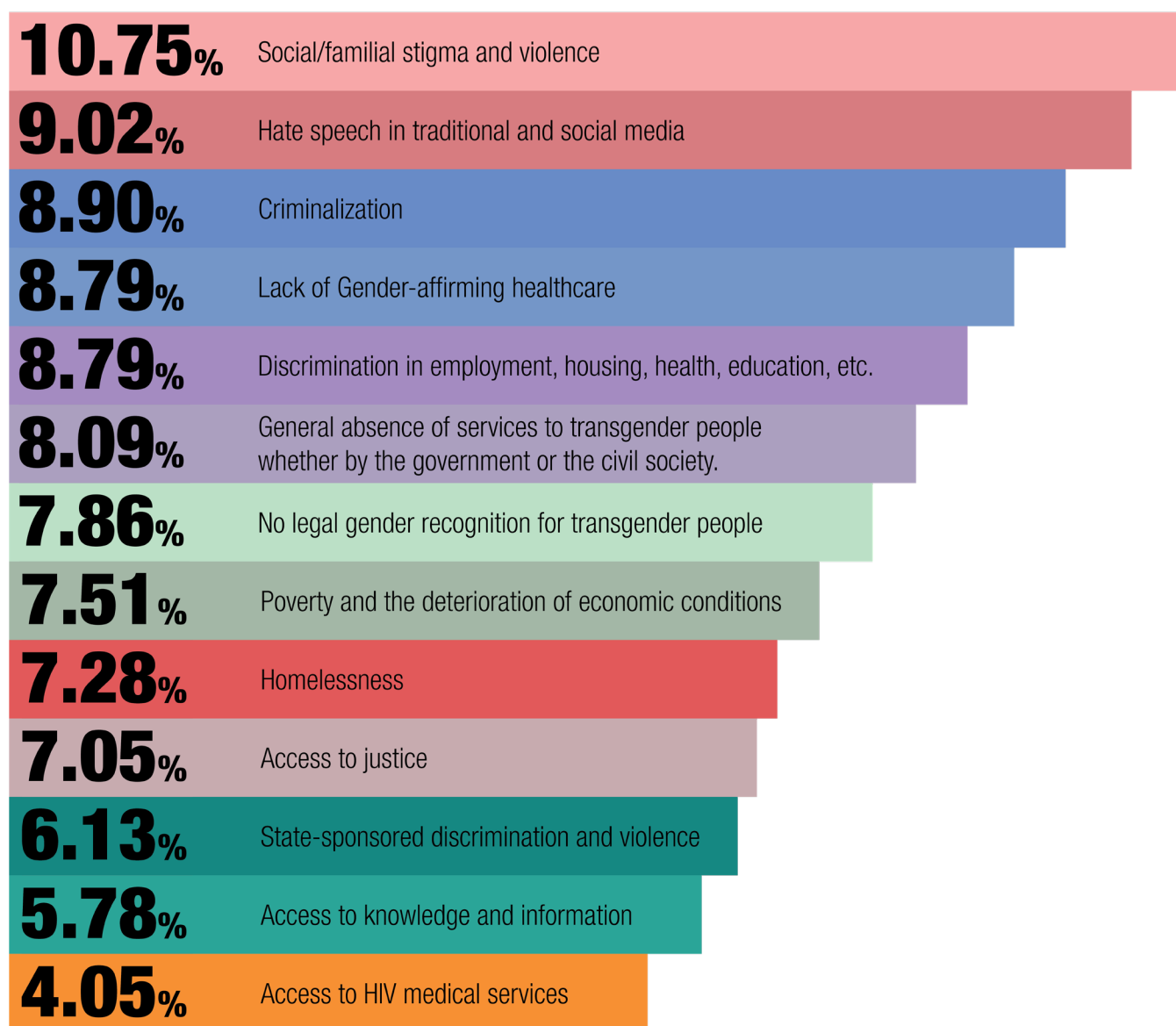


Figure 8: Responses to the multiple-choice question “What are the most significant challenges confronting transgender individuals in your country?”

This discrimination engenders profound economic precarity, with “discrimination in employment, housing, and health” (9%), “poverty and the deterioration of economic conditions” (8%), and “homelessness” (7%) identified as significant challenges. Participants reported being denied housing and employment due to their gender identity, thereby relegating them to unstable living conditions. As articulated by a 26-year-old transgender man from Lebanon, the struggle is existential: “A lot of transgender people are struggling with homelessness—even access to employment—just because they’re being vilified for their transness... There’s no protection for us whatsoever.” To mitigate these risks, some individuals resort to remote work. A 25-year-old transgender man from Tunisia described this strategy as a necessity for survival: “For my job, for example, I work from home; I freelance, because anything else would put me in danger... I’d be rejected immediately, if not worse.”

This social exclusion is exacerbated by significant legal vulnerability, with 69% of respondents citing criminalization, 62% identifying the lack of legal gender recognition, and 54% highlighting the absence of access to justice as central challenges. The absence of legal protection heightens the risk associated with state interactions, particularly with law enforcement, as evidenced by the concern regarding “state-sponsored discrimination and violence.” An 18-year-old transgender man from Egypt

articulated this powerlessness: “As someone who has encountered trouble with the police before for no reason... they could legally accuse me of anything they want to just because I have no legal backing to my existence.” This lack of recourse extends to the workplace, where even formal complaint systems prove ineffective. A 27-year-old gender-fluid individual from Lebanon recounted being threatened by a department head, concluding, “I knew I couldn’t report him—I needed to work... It’s easier that way.”

The hostile environment extends to the healthcare system, with the “lack of gender-affirming health-care” cited as a significant challenge, accounting for 9% of all issues mentioned. Transgender individuals frequently experience abuse and malpractice with virtually no consequences for perpetrators. The fear of mistreatment is so pervasive that even ostensibly affirming providers are approached with suspicion, as noted by a 22-year-old transgender woman from the UAE: “You cannot fully trust them... the law won’t protect you.” This distrust is often rooted in traumatic experiences, such as the one described by a 21-year-old transgender woman from Lebanon, whose psychiatrist violated her privacy and dismissed her identity through unfounded psychoanalysis.

## IV. Challenges to Transgender Human Rights

### Organizing

Ultimately, these overlapping crises create a vicious cycle wherein the substantial energy required for daily survival stifles the capacity to organize for systemic change. An overwhelming 98% of respondents identified social barriers as the most significant obstacle to activism, followed by government and religious restrictions. This exhausting reality was succinctly articulated by a 26-year-old participant from Lebanon: “How can you politically organize if you’re barely surviving on a day-to-day basis with limited resources?”

The primary obstacles encountered by activists are predominantly external, characterized by a formidable coalition of state, social, and religious opposition. The most significant challenge identified is “**government restrictions**,” which accounts for 21.38% of all responses. This finding indicates that organizers operate within a context marked by direct legal threats, facing crackdowns and experiencing difficulties in formally registering or working safely. This state-level hostility is further exacerbated by societal factors, including “**social barriers**,” such as public threats against activists (17.93%), and “**religious barriers**,” exemplified by denunciations from religious leaders (16.32%). Collectively, these three factors represent over half of all challenges, illustrating a movement that is under continuous siege. This relentless external pressure directly contributes to a crisis of capacity and sustainability within the activist community. Organizers are significantly hindered by “**limited resources**,” such as funding and training, which constitutes 13.10% of the challenges faced. The profound personal toll of this work is evident, with “burnout and mental health challenges” identified as a major issue (11.26%), alongside a “lack of skilled professionals” (11.03%). Internal dynamics, such as “gatekeeping” of scarce available resources by established groups or individuals, further complicate the landscape (8.97%) (see Figure 9).

# Challenges Facing Transgender Activism and Organizing in MENA

Government restrictions (no possible avenues to registrations, the government crackdown on transgender organizing, etc.)

**21.38%**

Social barriers (social actors publicly threaten any type of transgender organizing and target transgender activists)

**17.93%**

Religious barriers (religious leaders publicly denounce transgender organizing and incite violence against it)

**16.32%**

Limited resources (funding, training, capacity building, etc.)

**13.10%**

Burnout and mental health challenges

**11.26%**

Lack of skilled professionals

**11.03%**

Gatekeeping (few NGOs or individuals' dominant resources are available, and others can't access them because of that)

**8.97%**

Figure 9: Responses to the multiple-choice question, "What are the most significant challenges confronting transgender rights advocacy in your country?"

The data ultimately illustrates a debilitating cycle: the external siege imposed by state and societal forces actively engenders conditions conducive to internal struggles. It constrains resources, induces burnout, and obstructs the development of a broad and sustainable movement. Consequently, the very capacity to resist is continually undermined by the pressures that the movement seeks to overcome.

## V. Echoing Community Demands: Priorities for Future Advocacy Strategies and Grass-roots Services

This analysis, based on survey data, examines the strategic priorities of the transgender community

in the MENA region, emphasizing their preferred areas for advocacy and grassroots services. Participants were asked to identify their top two priorities in each category. The findings reveal a distinct and nuanced two-track approach: a demand for long-term, systemic changes in legislation and policy, alongside an urgent need for immediate, life-saving services to navigate the current hostile environment.

## A. Advocacy Priorities: Emphasis on Structural Change

When queried about priorities for legal and policy advocacy over the next five years, the community articulated a clear preference for foundational, structural rights over broader social campaigns. The foremost priority is “**Access to legal gender recognition,**” selected by **24.91%** of respondents. This is closely followed by “**Access to gender-affirming healthcare,**” at **22.74%**. The prominence of these issues suggests that the community perceives legal identity and the capacity for medical transition as essential tools for safety and survival. Legal recognition serves as a gateway to employment, housing, and education, while also mitigating the risk of harassment and arrest.

The subsequent tier of priorities includes “**Decriminalization**” (**18.05%**) and “**Enforcement of anti-discrimination clauses**” (**17.33%**). These objectives are logically connected to the primary priorities; decriminalization addresses the immediate threat of state violence, while anti-discrimination laws render legal recognition meaningful in practice. Notably, “**Social awareness**” campaigns were ranked as the lowest priority at **16.97%**. This does not imply that social acceptance is unimportant; rather, it reflects a strategic emphasis on securing tangible legal and medical rights necessary for safe existence in the public sphere before undertaking the longer-term project of shifting societal attitudes (See figure 10).

### Priorities for Law and Policy Advocacy

Access to legal gender recognition (affirming the right to be recognized by the state through a simple process)

**24.91%**

Access to gender-affirming healthcare (affirming the right to health for transgender people).

**22.74%**

Decriminalization (removing legal articles that explicitly criminalize transgender people and stopping the use of de facto ones to arrest transgender people).

**18.05%**

Enforcing anti-discrimination clause (ensuring that transgender people have equal access to employment, housing, health, and education).

**17.33%**

Social awareness (enacting policies that would lead to a change of negative social and religious narratives around transgender people).

**16.97%**

Figure 10: Responses to the Question (Multiple Choice with Two Options) Regarding the Advocacy on Legal and Policy Areas that Respondents Desire International Funders, NGOs, and Their National Partners to Prioritize in Order to Advance Transgender Rights in Their Country Over the Next Five Years.

## B. Grassroots Needs: A Call for Immediate Survival Services

The community's priorities for grassroots services directly correspond to their advocacy goals and underscore a state of acute crisis. The most urgently needed service is "Health services," identified as a top priority by 26.44% of respondents. This encompasses not only gender-affirming care but also essential psychotherapy and access to competent, non-discriminatory healthcare providers. The second and third most needed services highlight the immediate dangers faced by the community: "Legal aid services" (22.61%) and "Emergency and security services," including shelters and relocation support (20.69%).

The high demand for legal aid and emergency shelters is a direct consequence of the criminalization and "social/familial stigma and violence" identified as primary challenges in other segments of the survey. This indicates that numerous individuals confront immediate threats of arrest, familial expulsion, and homelessness, rendering survival services a top priority. "Economic empowerment services" (17.62%) and "Capacity building services" (12.64%) were also deemed important but were ranked lower, reflecting a hierarchy of needs where immediate safety and health take precedence over longer-term professional development (See figure 11).

### Priorities for Grassroots Services

Health services (such as health insurance for transgender people to access gender-affirming healthcare, psychotherapy support, and access to capable physicians to support them throughout the transition process, etc.)

**26.44%**

Legal aid services (such as pro bono legal representation in courts, legal counseling, legal assistance for legal gender recognition, etc.)

**22.61%**

Emergency and security services (such as shelters for transgender people in need, relocation support, technical support, etc.)

**20.69%**

Economic empowerment services (such as train-to-hire programs, informal education programs to prepare for the job market, small funds for transgender entrepreneurs, etc.)

**17.62%**

Capacity building services (training for transgender people to advocate for their rights, security and legal training to avoid arrest and prosecution, etc.)

**12.64%**

*Figure 11: Responses to the Multiple-Choice Question Regarding "In the next five years, which grassroots services do you wish international funders, non-governmental organizations, and their national partners to implement in your country for transgender individuals?"*

In summary, the data derived from these two questions provides a clear roadmap. The transgender community in the MENA region is strategically advocating for a dual approach: long-term advocacy focused on the structural foundations of legal recognition and healthcare, complemented by immediate, on-the-ground services that ensure the legal, medical, and physical safety necessary for survival during this ongoing struggle.

# **Recommendations and Call for Action**

The findings of this report elucidate the challenges faced by a young and resilient transgender community in the MENA region, which is enduring a multifaceted crisis exacerbated by systemic legal hostility and widespread social stigma. The data indicates a sophisticated, dual-track set of priorities: a demand for long-term, structural changes in law and policy, alongside an urgent need for immediate, life-saving services. The following recommendations are derived directly from the report's data and provide an actionable roadmap for various stakeholders to uphold the safety, dignity, and rights of transgender individuals in the region.

## To Funders and International Donors

Funders occupy a pivotal role in facilitating change by adopting a nuanced, community-led approach. The data reflects a community that draws on its lived experiences and has established clear, strategic priorities.

- **Adopt a Dual-Track Funding Strategy:** Simultaneously allocate resources to both long-term advocacy and immediate survival needs. Direct funds toward strategic litigation aimed at achieving legal gender recognition (the community's foremost advocacy priority at 24.91%) and decriminalization (18.05%), while also supporting grassroots health (26.44%), legal aid (22.61%), and emergency services (20.69%) that are essential for survival.
- **Prioritize Context-Specific and Low-Visibility Projects:** Respond to the community's call for safety by avoiding Western frameworks that may not be applicable. Support projects that are community-vetted and minimize public visibility, such as raising pride flags, which can endanger transgender individuals rather than empower them in this context.
- **Support Informal and Underground Networks:** Given that gender-affirming healthcare is frequently criminalized and trust in formal systems is minimal, fund informal healthcare networks, including mental health support and access to hormones, to mitigate the risks associated with the unregulated underground market.

## To Policymakers and Legislative Bodies

This report illustrates that state-level action is the primary driver of both direct and indirect harm. Policymakers must undertake concrete measures to dismantle discriminatory structures.

- **Decriminalize Transgender Identity and Expression:** Repeal all laws that explicitly criminalize transgender individuals, including those targeting "cross-dressing" or "imitating the opposite sex." It is imperative to amend vague morality, vice, and cybercrime laws that serve to de facto criminalize transgender individuals, which 51% of survey respondents identified as the principal legal threat in their country.
- **Establish Clear and Accessible Pathways for Legal Gender Recognition (LGR):** The absence of LGR is a central challenge identified by 62% of participants and is the top advocacy priority. Governments must implement a straightforward administrative process for altering names and gender markers on official documents that is not contingent upon coercive medical procedures or arbitrary judicial approval.
- **Regulate and Ensure Access to Gender-Affirming Healthcare:** End the criminalization of gender-affirming care. Develop national health policies that recognize gender-affirming healthcare as a medical necessity, moving away from the discriminatory distinction between permissible "sex correction" for intersex individuals and prohibited "sex change" for transgender individuals.

## To INGOs, NGOs, and Civil Society (Implementers)

As frontline service providers, local and international organizations must align their programs with the articulated needs of the community.

- **Provide Direct Legal and Emergency Support:** Establish and fund 24/7 legal aid hotlines and emergency funds to assist with arrest, detention, and homelessness, which are direct conse-

quences of the legal and social hostility faced by the community.

- **Create and Fund Safe Community Spaces:** Given the community’s reliance on peer networks for information and support, the establishment of safe, low-visibility physical or virtual spaces for community building is essential.
- **Implement “Know-Your-Rights” Training:** Equip the community with legal literacy to navigate interactions with law enforcement and comprehend the risks of criminalization, addressing the fact that 28% of respondents were unaware of or misinformed about the laws affecting them.

## To Corporate and Private Sector Actors

The private sector has a crucial role in alleviating the economic precarity faced by transgender individuals, which arises from pervasive discrimination in employment and housing.

- **Enforce Inclusive Workplace Policies:** Adopt and implement clear anti-discrimination policies that explicitly protect employees based on gender identity and expression. Ensure that hiring practices are inclusive and that internal complaint mechanisms are safe and effective for transgender employees.
- **Provide Sensitivity Training:** Conduct mandatory sensitivity and awareness training for all staff, particularly for management and HR departments, to cultivate a safe and respectful work environment.
- **Support Community-Led Economic Empowerment:** Collaborate with and fund local NGOs that offer skill development, training, and entrepreneurship opportunities for transgender individuals, addressing a need identified by 17.62% of respondents.

## To be effective allies, broader human rights movements must center the specific and unique challenges confronting the transgender community.

- **Disaggregate Data and Research:** Acknowledge that the needs of transgender individuals are distinct from those of the broader LGBTQ+ community. Commission and conduct specific research that focuses on the unique legal, medical, and social challenges they encounter, such as the weaponization of medical liability laws and the nuances of LGR cases.
- **Amplify Transgender Voices and Leadership:** Adhere to the principle of “nothing for us without us.” Ensure that transgender activists occupy leadership positions and that their lived experiences—the community’s most trusted source of information—guide all advocacy strategies and program designs.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, this report elucidates the predicament of transgender individuals in the Middle East and North Africa, who are ensnared in a vicious cycle of state-sponsored criminalization, systemic legal disenfranchisement, and pervasive social hostility. The absence of legal gender recognition frameworks, compounded by the active prohibition of gender-affirming healthcare, engenders a state of legal limbo that exacerbates discrimination in employment, housing, and education. This legal vulnerability is weaponized through both explicit and de facto criminalization laws, resulting in arbitrary arrests, digital entrapment, and violence perpetrated by both state and non-state actors. This hostile environment is further reinforced by powerful social and religious narratives that pathologize transgender identities, culminating in severe psychological distress and, in extreme cases, lethal outcomes or «transicide.»

Despite this daunting reality, the data reveals a community with a clear and strategic vision for its own liberation. The primary advocacy goals are not abstract but foundational: facilitating access to legal gender recognition and gender-affirming healthcare are regarded as the most critical tools for survival and safety. Concurrently, the urgent call for grassroots services, namely health, legal aid, and emergency shelters—underscores an immediate survival crisis that must be addressed while the pursuit for long-term structural change is undertaken.

Thus, the recommendations articulated in this report are not merely suggestions but a direct reflection of the community's articulated needs. They present a clear roadmap for funders, policymakers, and civil society to provide effective, contextually aware, and life-saving support that honors the resilience and strategic priorities of transgender individuals in the MENA region.



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**Between Stigma and Survival:**  
A Data-Driven Mixed Methods Analysis of Transgender  
Experiences, Rights and Priorities in the MENA Region

