The mission of « M-Coalition » is to coordinate on local, regional and international levels in order to facilitate the access of MSM in the Arab world to services of prevention, care, treatment and quality support through advocacy, creation of a favorable environment, capacity building and follow-up, research, exchange of good practices and, by collaborating with other structures of health and human rights.

The vision of M-Coalition is an Arab world where right to health and all other human rights of men who have sex with men (MSM) are recognized, realized and protected.

Values

- No discrimination, only equality
- Respect
- Transparency and accountability
- Evidence based approach with no ideological, political or religious considerations
- Rights based approach on health
- Openness to collaborations with key stakeholders
- Social justice
Communities that work together achieve more. Our mission at M-Coalition is for health rights and all human rights of Men who have Sex with Men to be recognized, realized and protected. Recognizing rights require being visible and sometimes subject to risk. Realizing rights require determination and advocacy. Protection means that we defend what we believe in and make it last for generations to come.

In just three years M-Coalition made it possible to dream of a better tomorrow, work on a brighter future and empower individuals across the Middle East and North Africa region. Who would have thought that there would be a network for Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) catering for their specific needs, advocating for their rights and discussing sexual health, not only on a national level but a regional and international one. Yet, here we are!

The HIV epidemic, though of low prevalence in the MENA Region, is quite high prevalence among MSM of the region. Men living in restricted environments and unable to express their love openly has its great impacts on depriving these men from a happy life full of freedom and love. We only aim to be a beacon of hope, a lighthouse for safe grounds and an opportunity to spread love and health to all.

At M-Coalition we think differently, we work passionately and we love to have a good time. It is humanity that brings us together, kindness that conducts our communication and support that makes each of us stronger. One day we will eradicate HIV and M-Coalition will be proud to have helped made that day possible.
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While the common understanding is that Arab countries are considered to have a low prevalence of HIV, available epidemiological data show that men who have sex with men (MSM) bear a disproportionate burden of HIV infection. MSM in Arab countries are 50 to 130 times more likely to be exposed to HIV than the general population. During the past decade, few Arab countries have started implementing activities targeting key affected populations at higher risk of HIV infection, including MSM. However, the coverage and the impact of such activities remain insufficient to meet existing needs.

Hosted by the Arab Foundation of Freedom and Equality (AFE) with technical support from the Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF), 13 civil society advocates and service providers from five Arab countries Algeria, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia – gathered in Broumana, Lebanon on 27 – 29 January to discuss the future of the HIV response among MSM in the region. Organized by the participants themselves, the meeting led to the creation of the first regional coalition of advocates and service providers working on HIV among MSM in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region.

At this key moment where the end of the HIV epidemic is potentially within reach, members of this new initiative under the name of “M-Coalition”, have committed to increase their efforts and to unite with key stakeholders from national governments, international institutions, civil society organizations, and the MSM community to improve the coverage and quality of HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support interventions targeting MSM in Arab countries.

The M-Coalition is currently funded by the Robert Carr Network Fund (RCNF), operates in most Arabic speaking countries of the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region and advocates to making this region a safer and healthier region for MSM, PLHIV and promoting rights for the LGBT community and HIV Key Affected Populations.
Dany Hanna

Project Coordinator - d.hanna@afemena.org

An activist for the LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon since 2010 and for HIV advocacy and prevention since 2013. My position at M-Coalition allows me to extend my activism to the Middle East and North Africa region. I dream of the time where in Arabic countries homosexuality is decriminalized and everyone can live freely regardless of their race, religion, gender or sexuality; that is my drive to what I do. I have attended workshops and trainings on Gender Equality, HIV prevention and treatment and Sexually Transmitted Infections. I love my job because it allows me to develop my passion and raise my voice on issues that matter to me. I consider M-Coalition as a platform to advocate for my community towards a better society that respects everyone.

Aïda Khemiri

Media Officer - aida@afemena.org

Tunisian human rights defender and LGBTQI+ activist. I co-founded Chouf in 2013, a Tunisian LBT NGO and I became in 2014 a board member in Mawjoudin (We exist), a Tunisian LGBTQI NGO. I attended the Social Change Program with the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality and participated in and gave many workshops about advocacy, lobbying, sexual health, digital security, and capacity building. I love the Internet and social media and I believe it is one of the best tools to advocate about freedoms and equality. I fight for equal rights and against all forms of discrimination against targeted communities and social stigma. I love my job at M-Coalition because it allows me to do what I believe in full-time.
Health Assessment for Men who have sex with Men in the MENA Region

Available data on the global level suggest that men who have sex with men (MSM) live with a higher burden of health disparities. Growing up in conservative settings, individuals with nonconforming behaviors are keener to adopt unhealthy behaviors, specifically around sexual health, due to high levels of stigma and discrimination. With a culture of silence prevailing around sexual health issues in Middle East and North Africa, these men not only face barriers to health knowledge and services, but are also inhibited in expressing their sexual identity and exploring social networks. Despite the great diversity, we explored the socio-demographics among a sample of MSM from the MENA region. And assessed their mental, physical and sexual health, as well as the support system they use in the face of sexual minority stress, and its syndemic outcomes.

With the support of the Robert Carr Network Fund (RCNF) a 40 minute online based questionnaire was used to recruit 128 participants in 2015. Simple layout of our data was used to describe socio-demographic information, health care utilization with HIV and STI testing, mental health and sexual abuse, social networking and peer support as Healthcare and HIV prevention efforts for MSM in the MENA region are yet to be effective, and they need to account for the influence of all socio-demographic determinants of health disparities, more specifically sexual abuse and mental health issues.

In 2016, the Health Assessment was published on the M-Coalition website and throughout the year segments of the results were published on our Facebook page raising important questions and sharing information with service providers and advocates on HIV and Human Rights. We do believe that such assessments are crucial to be updated in a systematic method in order to reflect on the MSM MENA Region needs, these needs allow better targeting of activities, services and create important data for HIV advocacy. You can find this study on our official website in English, Arabic and French.
Mental Health Assessment for Men who have Sex with Men in the MENA Region

Although gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) are as diverse as the general population in their experiences of mental health and well-being, they face higher risks for some mental health issues due to the effects of discrimination and the social determinants of health.

These individuals suffer serious mental health disparities relative to their heterosexual peers, and researchers have linked these disparities to difficult social experiences (e.g., antigay victimization) and internalized biases (e.g., internalized homophobia) that arouse stress. Even if these men are not visible or not open about the nature of their sexual behavior, the general societal attitudes and messaging (within households, education, neighborhoods and media), to which these members are exposed to, are bound to induce the negative effect described above and by that, have its toll on mental health without proper – and much needed – support systems.

Living in a region where same sex behaviors are punishable by law (in some instances with a death penalty), and with the rising of religious and social extremism, we can only assume that gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men suffer even greatly than their global peers, yet not enough data is available to understand the national or regional trends in the Middle East and North Africa.

With the support of HIVOS a 40 questions survey was used to recruit 250 participants. Simple layout of our data was used to describe socio-demographic information, mental health and sexual abuse. The study was published in January 2016 and circulated with M-Coalition partners. In 2017 M-Coalition will be posting extracts on our official Facebook page from the study and shedding light on specific results obtained. You can download the study from the M-Coalition official website in English, Arabic and French.
In April, the M-Coalition and the Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality published a guide titled “DAL – The Activist Security Guide”. With the support of the Robert Carr Fund (RCNF) and Dignity above all, the guide assists in understanding the work environment, analysis of risks and dangers and how to build secure plans to protect ourselves and our work especially in hostile environments for LGBT communities. By going through the guide, we expect a full security plan to projects, organizations and networks, something we should share with those we work with and abide by them as security and protection are not an individual work but a collaborative one.

Bodily rights in the MENA region remain unprotected or unavailable, and we work hard to advocate for these rights by different means such as awareness campaigns, advocacy campaigns and pressure, to an extent where we are driven by our faith in our causes that we do not calculate the risks we might face thus threatening an ideology a society has lived upon for ages. In the midst of the political and security events raging through the Middle East and North Africa it is crucial that we shed light on the increasing risks especially those related to Gender and Sexuality. We as activists are sometimes target to the public as they turn a blind eye to the important issues tearing up some of our societies.

On the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, the United Nations asked people around the world to help create a video that captures the strength and spirit that lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) advocates and allies bring to their work, and the sheer diversity of causes that help make up the movement globally. Hundreds of people in more than 20 countries responded to the UN’s call - submitting footage of themselves with colleagues, friends and family members displaying signs that spell out the changes they’re fighting for in their respective countries. Singer-songwriter Rachel Platten joined in lending her hit “Fight Song” as the soundtrack. The result is an uplifting video that celebrates activism in all its diversity, and serves as a timely reminder of why the fight must go on for LGBT communities around the world. M-Coalition took part in this international campaign and the photo used on the Huffington Post’s coverage of the story was none other than that of the LGBT flag over Jounieh Bay in Lebanon taken by the M-Coalition team.
I have been diagnosed HIV+ now what? It is always shocking for someone to find out that they are HIV+ whether a person’s lifestyle poses a risk to be infected or not. Many, if not most, are saddened and frustrated. What come after are usually feelings of guilt, self-loathing or sometimes depression and despondence but after a period of time a person starts accepting. For some it could be days, months or even more when a person finally accepts the facts, builds up the courage and picks up the pieces.

M-Coalition produced this short film as a video tool to help activists, social workers and support group facilitators begin their discussion or aid in giving hope for newly diagnosed individuals. The video was released at the International AIDS Conference in Durban in July and was promoted copyright-free for everyone present. Being a silent short film it provides more space for international use without the need of dubbing or translation. This symbolic gift which the M-Coalition has given away hopes to pave the way for further collaboration with many partners worldwide. The video is available on the M-Coalition website and can be downloaded for free and used by anyone. We only hope to be able to produce more content and help share it with networks, organizations and individuals who would benefit of such tools but do not have the capacity to produce their own.
This year’s AIDS conference took place in Durban, South Africa as the 21st international AIDS conference. With 18,000 delegates including 1000 media representatives and 800 volunteers, it was a premiere gathering to highlight the community’s unique partnership of science, community and leadership. The theme of AIDS2016 was Access Equity Rights Now. It was a call to action to work together, to strengthen commitment, a shout to stakeholders to unite and overcome injustice, a call to action to repeal infringement laws and a reminder to push forward.

The first two days the M-Coalition was present at the Global Forum on MSM and HIV (MSMGF) pre-conference “Action + Access” and the GNP+ (Global Network of People living with HIV) “Positive Leadership Summit”. At the GNP+, the M-Coalition had a contribution in one of the workshops under ‘Overcoming the Barriers of Invisibility and Harmful Laws and Policies’ where director Elie Ballan presented on the laws criminalizing same sex relationships through an in-depth example of the MENA laws and their practices. This round of the AIDS conference as the one before, the M-Coalition hosted with collaboration of the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition MENA (ITPC MENA) and The Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE) the Middle East and North Africa Networking zone. Elegantly representing the region with delightful arabesque theme and oriental music, this zone acted as a hub for all MENA region networks to present their work in a series of lectures, workshops, calls for action and many brochures and handouts.

The M-Coalition presented by its executive director Elie Ballan also co-presented a workshop with Safir Soeparna of the Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health (APCOM) and Kenechukwu Chimobi D Esom of the African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMSHeR) titled “Let’s Lead our Own Campaign: a Key Population-Led Knowledge Sharing”. The workshop discussed how these networks used social media, marketing and branding to shape their campaigns and to reach a further audience, whether it was on expanding exposure or working under the table in hostile environments.
On the same day, the M-Coalition had a special screening of “Picking Up the Pieces” a short video produced by the M-Coalition speaking of the time after contracting HIV and how it can be frustrating for many. The turnout was modest and the audience was very pleased, especially after the M-Coalition announced that this short film is a tool to be given to anyone who would wish to use it, copyright free and without language or subtitle barriers. The short film is one of many the M-Coalition is launching, where by the films are given online for anyone who needs to use them as a tool for a discussion, for opening up to individuals or even as a communication tool with newly diagnosed individuals. The conference was a great deal of success in increasing the exposure of the M-Coalition, showcasing the progress our Coalition has undergone since its birth during the previous AIDS conference in Melbourne 2014. The conference also brought new opportunities for networking and knowledge sharing as the Robert Carr Network Fund (RCNF) Consortium convened in person for the first time with the facilitation of the MSMGF, opening ways of collaboration, new initiatives and coming together of soldiers of our community.

The Social Change program (SCP) of the Arab Foundation For Freedoms and Equality (AFE) organized the Gender and Sexuality Regional Conference, where many activists and graduates of the SCP program met for three days in Bikfaya, Lebanon. The conference was a series of workshops on different topics related to gender and sexuality, sexual health and capacity building as well as assessments of the MENA regional needs.

The conference also provided a space for networking for over 70 activists who came from all over the region (Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Egypt, Iraq, Bahrain and Lebanon). M-Coalition participated and gave a short presentation on current and future projects of the Coalition inviting representatives of organizations to connect and collaborate.
Speak Up

The Speak Up initiative sheds light on the different parts of the lives of people living with HIV (PLHIV), from healthcare settings to their different rights, their family and friends, community, workplace and governmental settings. People living with HIV have been experiencing violations to their basic human rights within diverse settings. So this project consisted of a monitoring system to convey the findings of a qualitative research study exploring the different types of violations and to disseminate the measures taken by a coalition of 16 NGOs (SIDC, Vivre Positif, M-coalition, Lebanese Association for Family Health (LAFH), Marsa – sexual health center, Arab foundation for Freedom and Equality (AFE), Mosaic, Skoun – Lebanese addictions center, LebMASH, Lebanese AIDS Society (LAS), Civil Council Against Addiction (CCAA), Islamic Health Society (IHS), Oui Pour la Vie (OPV), Dar El Amal, Jeunesse contre la Drogue (JCD), Association of Justice ad Mercy (AJEM)) to address the reported violation and highlighting some advocacy, legal and media strategies.

Documented violations included: healthcare settings, friends and family, community, the workplace and the state. Different kinds of issues and difficulties were faced before we emerged with the identification of three areas of interest we should face and work on:

- Remove HIV testing from pre-employment requirements.
- Address unethical medical practices.
- Remove HIV from insurance companies’ exclusion criteria.

In the process of cooking the advocacy strategy, other kinds of meetings were held with relevant stakeholders and decision makers in Lebanon. The final outcomes for year 1 of Speak Up concluded: regulation and sanction breach of confidentiality and unethical practices at health premises, a drafted legal strategy targeting all violation patterns and a media strategy as a tool to implement advocacy. You can find the complete report as well as the M-Coalition Report on Speak Up on our website.
Regional Coalition on HIV and Harm Reduction

The Coalition aims at limiting the spread of HIV/AIDS, Harm Reduction, and reduce stigma and discrimination in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

On the 10th of December 2016, On the International Day of Human Rights, the MENA Regional Coalition was launched with representatives from HIV/AIDS and Harm Reduction civil society organizations and regional networks. The coalition was launched during a workshop in Beirut, Lebanon.

The MENA Regional Coalition was launched to contribute to reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and to reducing stigma and discrimination while creating a conducive environment for key populations and people living with HIV. The Regional/Arab Network Against AIDS (RANAA), in collaboration with the Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association (MENAHRA), launched the coalition which comprised of the following networks: The Coalition of Women living with or affected by HIV in MENA (MENAROSA), M-Coalition, Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFEMENA), International Treatment Preparedness Coalition in MENA (ITPC-MENA), MENA Network of People Who Use Drugs (MENANPUD), Young People Living with HIV Network (Y+), MENA Harm Reduction Association (MENAHRA), and Regional Arab Network Against AIDS (RANAA). The regional coalition focuses on building firm foundations that contribute to the creation of a conducive environment, safety, justice, and dignity and free of new HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections among key populations in the region. Members believe that the Coalition should focus on strategic communication, developing studies and research on HIV/AIDS related topics, increase the skills and capacities of stakeholders to ensure quality services, reduce stigma and discrimination, and to integrate HIV/AIDS and Harm Reduction programs within the comprehensive services package.
WAD Campaign 2016

On December 1st M-Coalition sent out messages on social media for World AIDS Day. The visual campaign played on the languages of the MENA region and which M-Coalition works with, Arabic, English and French. Though some were direct and simple, others used mixing of languages which reflects on the region’s countries (Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia) and some played on words of popular Arabic songs famous among the gay community. The campaign was well received and showed an aspect of M-Coalition welcomed broadly of being bold, young, funny and witty.

Meaningful engagement of KP in Global Fund, Marrakech 2016

“MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF KEY POPULATIONS WITHIN GLOBAL FUND PROCESSES IN THE MENA REGION"

Workshop organized by M-Coalition and ITPC MENA with the facilitation of MSMGF

M-Coalition, with the support of the Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund, held a two-day workshop in cooperation with the Global Fund Communications and Coordination Platform in MENA (hosted by ITPC MENA) and with the support of the MSMGF. The goal of the workshop, which was held in Marrakesh on December 19-20, 2016, was to build knowledge among Key Populations (KP) networks in the region about Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria. The participants discussed the role of civil society on Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCM) and how to access funding to support key and vulnerable populations. The workshop was a follow up to a training conducted by the ITPC MENA Platform in April 2016.
Thirteen representatives from Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and Lebanon attended the meeting. All the participants are leaders in their countries in HIV organizations working with Key Populations and as civil society representatives on CCMs. The workshop included: country specific updates provided by participants and group-work exploring challenges and concerns to be addressed. Participants were introduced to the recent changes in the procedures to apply for funding from the Global Fund. They left the workshop with the knowledge and skills needed to lead their civil society colleagues in the upcoming processes to access funding for programming targeting the needs of key populations.
A member of the M-Coalition is any individual who shares our vision, that health rights and other rights for MSM are recognized, realized and protected. We at M-Coalition believe in collaboration among all our friends and workers in HIV/AIDS. M-Coalition is not a standing organization, we are as our name indicates a coalition. We are a coalition to whomever believes that we can eradicate HIV, provide better treatment services, decrease AIDS related deaths as well as provide support and opportunities for everyone. As you all know Key Populations face the greatest threat as they are not only the most affected populations but they are marginalized, discriminated and stigmatized more than the rest of the population. Although M-Coalition works mainly with Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) we believe that if we do not work together we will not accomplish anything. The M-Coalition would grow with its members, as your experiences and your first hand encounters with our community needs are vital for a cohesive and better delivery of services.

There are numerous opportunities for collaboration, and our information and efforts are at your service so that our voices reach to every individual in our Middle East and North Africa region. We also believe that with your efforts and our voice we can and will achieve more. We do not want to plant false hopes or promise you things we cannot deliver. We simply trust that we can accomplish more if we are united. Activists, health professionals, nurses, doctors, media individuals, translators, counselors, social workers, scientists, psychologists, researchers, professors, students, and others are all welcome to be members of the M-Coalition, given they work in or for HIV/AIDS, MSM rights, gender rights, health rights and/or human rights. The membership of the M-Coalition is applied to by filling out the membership form on the official website (www.m-coalition.org) or by sending us an email to our official emails, in which you are sent the form to fill out and return.

The membership is evaluated by the Secretariat, Staff and Steering Committee. The evaluation process will go over the person’s work and expertise as per the application. The steering committee might be asked to identify a certain application; this would help ensure and maintain confidentiality. This process confirms that all members who have access to the forum are active workers in the field and avoid breach of Coalition information. An official email is sent to all new members followed by an email with their log in details to the M-Coalition website and its Members Forum.

The M-Coalition entitles its members to:
- Username and Password log in to the M-Coalition website;
- Receive M-Coalition Newsletter;
- Inclusion in the M-Coalition directory for HIV and Gender activists;
- Submit documents and other materials or announcements for inclusion on the M-Coalition website, Facebook and twitter, upon review by the members committee;
- Participation in the M-Coalition events;
- Representation of the M-Coalition when asked to;
- Posting of research, documents, events and announcements in the member’s area on the website
- Priority in participating and carrying out of M-Coalition projects in their respective country

The M-Coalition believes:
- You are a vital member of our Coalition
- You deserve support in your own work
- You have the choice and freedom to express your thoughts
Mapping for sexual health:
Supported by Viiv Healthcare, M-Coalition will be conducting assessments and evaluations for sexual health centers and HIV testing facilities. The outcome of this mapping would be to produce and advocacy guide for activists as well as release a mobile phone app for sexual health services, it would be like TripAdvisor for sexual health in the MENA region.

Speak Up 2:
Collaborating again with organizations concerned with HIV in Lebanon, part two of this initiative is to implement the media strategic plan and advocacy campaigns at law reform as we continue to document violations against PLHIV. We did it last year, now we are coming back fiercer and more empowered.

Living With HIV:
Creating an online guide to PLHIV specifically MSM on how to take care of their health, live better, mental health care, nutrition, sports, hard reduction, hot Sex, dating, coming out and more information available in Arabic, English and French. M-Coalition has made a promise to MSM living with HIV and not M-Coalition will deliver.

Directory of Sexually Transmitted Infections:
While many men look online for questions on STIs or get lost with all the information crowding the web, to even linking simple symptoms with severe infections; we will provide a simple and easy to read guide on STIs. The purpose is to educate but not scare and provide simple solutions where possible. The directory will be reviewed by a medical team of our members. Everything you need to know about having fulfilled hot sex!
IDAHOT2017:
This year on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, May 17th, M-Coalition will be releasing a one of a kind video for LGBT rights celebration with its own unique oriental flavor and Arabic spice. Could you spell sexy, bold campaign!

Support Groups trainings:
With the increased demand for support groups for MSM living with HIV, we will be conducting an intensive training on conducting a stigma free and healthy support group. Not only so but we will also release a guiding tool for others who will not be able to join the training complete with video recordings. We believe in giving resources to everyone in the region.

HIV Awareness Campaign:
Did you know that there are still individuals who fear diving into the same pool with someone living with HIV? There are men who would refuse to shake hands with someone with HIV. We are here to help change that. M-Coalition will conduct an awareness campaign and hope to eliminate wrong myths about HIV.

Insurance for PLHIV:
M-Coalition will launch an investigation to better understand the criteria on why PLHIV cannot receive medical insurance. Upon this assessment, we will launch an advocacy campaign to raise voices to insurance companies to better understand and serve PLHIV.

Hepatitis B/C:
With new treatments now available for Hepatitis B/C our region remains holding one of the highest Hepatitis B/C infections, M-Coalition aims at providing adequate information on prevention, co-infection and better health care for individuals affected by Hepatitis.
M-Coalition today and tomorrow

Trans Project
The Transgender community in our region as in many regions around the world needs a lot of support. M-Coalition would like to provide that support and guide the community in acquiring better services and raise their voices in advocacy. Unfortunately, there are not enough data to know where to start. M-Coalition would want to take the initiative into conducting a transgender needs assessment conducted by the community themselves. We would offer the expertise and the support, but the project will be by the community and for the community. We see it as our duty to support the Transgender community, and hope we can help create the region’s first transgender network.

Growing With HIV
M-Coalition will be producing a guide on living with HIV specific to MSM individuals who have been living with HIV for many years: What to eat? How to maintain a good health? Pleasurable and healthy sex and treatment and its long term effects. The guide will also tackle information on disclosing status, dating, travel and more. M-Coalition caters to younger thriving individuals as well as the older fabulous ones.

World AIDS Day 2017
This year we aim at having a campaign by the M-Coalition present nationally at WAD2017 events. With the coordination of our members across the region, M-Coalition will actually be present not only online but physically to bring our work and vision closer to our community.