

MENA DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT

THE CHANGE MANTRA

Toward an Effective Engagement of
MENA Diaspora's Activists and
CSOs



HUMENA
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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هيومينا لحقوق الإنسان والمشاركة المدنية

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The contents are the responsibility of Humena and do not necessarily reflect the views of partners and donors.

ABOUT HUMENA

The long running conflicts in Middle East and North Africa have destroyed countries 'assets including infrastructures and engulfed many lives while displacements still to continue due to the periodically sliding conflicts and the rapidly political changes in the region. These changes caused mass destruction of public and private sectors, and weakness in administrations. As a result, violations of human rights are increasing on a daily basis in MENA region, and unfortunately, the law which is supposed to protect us, is becoming a burden to exercise our basic rights, or worse, even a threat.

In response to that, *Humena for Human Rights and Civic Engagement* was founded in April 2018 by a group of human rights experts and civil society actors and academicians from Middle East and North Africa.

Humena aims to advocate the adoption of human rights-based approach (RBA) through applying change to power relations, strengthening accountability, promoting non-discrimination, and encouraging partnerships among NGOs in the region.

Humena also supports Democracy and democratic transitions in Middle East and North Africa and advocates the rights protection for all individuals and groups especially the most vulnerable ones, in order to create a positive environment for civil activism and civic engagement throughout Middle East.

Our vision

MENA region where all citizens and non-citizens enjoy a democratic, just, and equitable environment that values and protects human rights

Our mission

Working on protecting all individuals and groups rights in Middle East and North Africa, especially the most vulnerable ones and promoting human rights, civil liberties, freedom of expression, and participation, which are essential for social stabilization, durable peace, and active citizenship.

ABOUT ACTIVISM IN EXILE

"Activism in Exile" is a project that seeks to achieve a greater involvement of MENA Diaspora in the international policy making process aiming to improve human rights situation and to achieve stability in the MENA region, through empowering MENA Diaspora activists and organizations with knowledge and skills, advocating for engaging Diaspora in legitimate policies in fragile societies, and providing input to support collective international responses to conflict and migration in the MENA.

This project consists of 3 main activities

1-Bringing diaspora activists and HRDs back to the table: Brainstorming WITH, CO-generating ideas, and crafting tools With&For Diaspora activists and human rights defenders

2-The Diaspora CAN: Based on the developed materials, we will the capacities of Diaspora activists and HRDs in selected key areas, in accordance with their needs, long-term plans, and areas of interest.

3-the Diaspora ACTS: during the capacity building program, diaspora activists and HRDs will plan initiatives. In this phase we will turn these plans into real actions.

ACRONYMS

CSOs: Civil Society Organizations

(NGO): Non-Government Organization

EU: European Union

USA: United State of America

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

HRDs: Human Rights Defenders

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. ***“Diaspora Engagement is the Change Mantra”***. To achieve a political change in the MENA region and to promote democracy and stability, MENA activists and CSOS should engage in the policy making and political change, not avoid it. Diaspora advocacy has become at once more immediate and more abundant in the era of electronic communications, as the ease of organizing diaspora members across distances and national boundaries has removed old constraints.
2. The overall purpose of this study is to gain knowledge about MENA diaspora activists and CSOs and understand how to better engage in advocacy and lobbying efforts to promote peace and stability in their countries of origin.
3. The overall methodology and approach have been guided by a ‘Conceptual Framework’ developed by Humena during the inception phase. **The research comprised** a review of relevant literature on the situation of MENA CSOs and activists working from the outside, selected donors policy and its implementation, relevant INGOs, academic and expert publications, press statements, public communications and media reports, Surveys completed by 104 activists, out of 178 that were invited to take part, online Interviews with 12 CSOs from the MENA region, based in the countries referred in the study as “exile or host countries”, and relevant desk research by Humena.
4. MENA diaspora activists in exile are facing obstacles that hinder their full participation. Most of these obstacles are related to the lack of communications between diaspora CSOs and activists, the difficulty to reach decision makers, the need of activists for advanced knowledge and skills, and the inability to access adequate funds.
5. To better engage MENA diaspora activists and CSOs, and build their capacity and resilience, it is therefore necessary to continue to raise the general level of understanding of transnational advocacy and secure an enabling environment for mobilization. Activists in exile are empowered when closely tied to networks for quick response, long-term support, and information sharing.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. EXILE OR DIASPORA?

Diaspora can be defined as “People who have left their countries of origin but maintain identity and ties with those countries and with their counterparts around the world¹.”

By Exile, this study means the forced immigration of many MENA communities as a result of political conflict and oppression guided by home regimes against opponents.

While the study acknowledges diverse experiences of respondents, and differentiates between forced and voluntary immigration, it also takes into consideration the current settings of migrant’s groups in host communities. By considering the fact that “exile” was the phase that preceded the establishment of many diasporas in modern history, and since the “exile” experience of many groups who left the MENA region after 2011, is no more perceived as temporary, and since these groups have integrated in host communities, and contribute to economic development, sustain social relationship, influence and got influenced by host society cultures, the study is then, using diaspora to describe exiled, immigrants, refugees from the MENA region who left their countries after 2011, and formed new communities in host countries, and maintain a collective cultural or national identity across borders based on ties with the homeland.

2. BACKGROUND

Following the popular uprising in many MENA countries, a mass migration from these countries has taken place. Among those who fled their countries to escape the lack of freedom and violations to their rights at home, there are civil activists and human rights defenders who have fallen victim for political frustration since their roles in home countries have become very limited and have no impact on the political context. It is then believed that post-conflict trauma may have trans-generational effects, involving diaspora activists in reshaping the future of MENA region requires co-creation of transnational advocacy and mobilization networks that push toward new policymaking process on international levels, and influence power relations, in order to promote human rights protection in the region. Thus, Diaspora activists and organizations are powerful engine of change and promotion of a new social contract because they often advocate for human rights, and better-quality democracy.

Therefore, “*Diaspora Engagement is the Change Mantra*”. In order to achieve a political change in the MENA region and to promote democracy and stability, MENA activists and CSOS should engage in the policy making and political change, not avoid it. This can be achieved through elaborating on the available experiences both regionally and globally, drawing lessons from country experiences in involving diaspora in building domestic institutional

¹ <http://diasporaaction.org.au/about-us/>

capacity, democratization, and peacebuilding; and encouraging international organizations and government to court the support of diaspora.

In this sense, "Activism in Exile" is a project that seeks a greater involvement of MENA Diaspora activists and organizations in the international policy making process aiming to improve human rights situation in the MENA regions, through empowering MENA diaspora activists and organizations with knowledge and skills, advocating for their engagement in legitimate policies in fragile societies, and providing input to support collective international responses to conflict and migration in the MENA world.

3. TIME TO RETHINK “DIASPORA’S ADVOCACY”

Diaspora advocacy² has become at once more immediate and more abundant in the era of electronic communications, as the ease of organizing diaspora members across distances and national boundaries has removed old constraints. Web sites, discussion groups, and social networks of diaspora members have proliferated, resulting in a multiplication of the organizational potential of groups and even individuals.

The lobbying and advocacy activities of the MENA diaspora have largely been the result of the transnational advocacy networks supporting people of the MENA region. These movements are driven by both individuals and groups, inspired by different causes and motivated to do something in the interest of their countries of origin, their exiled communities, and political aspirations. MENA diaspora lobbyists and advocacy groups are promoting the needs of MENA countries on democracy, stability, justice, and peace.

While some diaspora groups, especially in USA and Western European countries are involved in such efforts, the majority are not. Nonetheless, effective lobbying requires the participation of a larger segment of MENA diaspora, in particular individuals who were active in their home countries, before relocating in their current host countries.

Therefore, involving prominent, high profile MENA individuals in advocacy efforts regarding peace and stability in the region should be an ongoing mission for governments of host countries, especially on the level of transnational policymaking. The scant attention paid to advocacy is also reflected in the fact that this is the area least studied with regard to the roles that diasporas play in peacebuilding, democratization, and stability.

4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In keeping with its mandate, Humena conducted a study among a group of diaspora activists and organizations from MENA countries that witnessed popular between 2011-2020, also referred to as MENA Spring first wave (2011) and second wave (2018-2020) uprising. The principal aim of this study was to determine the location, interest, skills, and level of engagement of those who comprise the “Active” diaspora, as well as advocating for the need

² Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009

to engage the diaspora activists, and to improve the communication and cooperation between diaspora activists and organizations and encouraging international organizations and government to court the support of diaspora. It discusses the findings of a unique outreach exercise to the MENA diaspora CSOs and activists and highlights the linkages between the diaspora activists and organizations as well as their relations with donors, based on interviews conducted with diaspora CSOs, the literature and concrete examples. Finally, the paper and concludes with policy recommendations.

The overall purpose of this study is to gain knowledge about MENA diaspora activists and CSOs and understand how to better engage in advocacy and lobbying efforts to promote peace and stability in their countries of origin. This involves a focus on:

- How diaspora CSOs engage in advocacy efforts and the relevance and effectiveness of their strategies
- The barriers to CSOs and activists' engagement in host countries
- How donors support strategies may influence CSOs' ability to involve activists and engage in advocating for their country of origin.

Therefore, the study surveys a range of advocacy efforts conducted by MENA diaspora CSOs and initiatives based in North America and EU countries, and the forms and strategies of their advocacy, by presenting examples from each diaspora in an attempt to answer the following:

- What do we know about these CSOs so far?
- What are the issues on which they focus?
- Are the diaspora activists involved in these efforts?
- What means and methods of advocacy do they use?
- Is there coordination between the different MENA Diasporas CSOs?
- Who supports their efforts?
- How effective are they?

CHAPTER 2-METHODOLOGY

***Disclaimer:** This document has been prepared in good faith on the basis of information acquired by the researchers from in-depth interviews. Given the sensitive nature of the study, a number of activists and CSOs representatives wish to remain anonymous. Sources of our information are considered, by Humena and consulted partners, reliable. Humena prioritizes the security and safety of interviewees and their families in the MENA countries, therefore, some evidence for statements had not been published. This report does not disclose the names of activists interviewed to protect their confidentiality and security. Wherever names or cases of individual activists are mentioned, this information is publicly available and/or previously published by Humena. Humena is committed to non-discrimination, and to gender-equality. To this end, Humena contacted an equal number of women and men, and representatives of different ethnic, religious and LGBTI groups.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The overall methodology and approach have been guided by a ‘Conceptual Framework’ developed by Humena during the inception phase. This framework identified the key concepts according to which, the case studies had been selected activists surveyed. It also described the range of tools to be used by the team during the data collection and analysis, and the potential sources of information (document types and key respondents/stakeholders).

As a first step, the authors and external consultant identified the activists’ countries of origins. Humena and consulted partners, agreed to consider activists and CSOs representatives from the following countries: Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Algeria, Morocco.

Then, USA, Canada, France, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Turkey, Czech Republic, Estonia, Netherland, and Ireland were chosen to be referred as “countries of residence, the outside” since they are the countries with Highest concentration of exiled activists and CSOs from the MENA region.

With the assistance of trusted networks, Humena identified 178 activists who we thought they would take part in the study. The criteria required for an activist to be considered for the study are:

- Had taken part in pro-democracy efforts since 2011, either occasionally or on a continuous basis
- Is not affiliated to any religious group
- Is not affiliated or supporting extremism
- Has never participated or been part of any violent movement and/or action

As a second step, 12 CSOs established by activists and/or HRDs from MENA countries and based in the “exile countries” have been selected and included in this study, in accordance with the following criteria:

- Type: registered NGOs, non-registered NGOs, initiatives, civil groups, networks of activists and HRDs, civil society organization, CSOs coalition.
- By whom: activists and HRDs from MENA region
- For whom: for the people of MENA region and for their right’s sake.
- Scope of work of the CSOs established by activists from MENA region, targeting countries in that region, and working in the domain of human rights, transitional justice, supporting access to justice for victims of violations, advocacy, lobbying, responding to humanitarian crisis, gender equality, women’s rights, LGBTQI rights, minorities rights, democratization, civil activism, independent media.
- Level of advocacy: advocacy is a main domain or a sub-domain for these CSOs.
- The values and mandate of the CSO: to be considered for the study, a CSO has to be independent (has no political or religious affiliation), supporting democracy in the MENA region, promoting human rights and peaceful political transitions, and had never been engaged in any violent movement or actions.
- The level at which actions take place: While all of the studied CSOs conducted actions aiming to responding to crisis and/or improving human rights in country of origin, half of them are implementing activities within the countries where they’re based either by targeting the diaspora communities, or the host communities.
- Types of funding modalities
- Level of Inclusion of diaspora activists in the actions taken by CSOs
- Effectiveness of the advocacy efforts and outcomes achieved
- Availability of documents and published information

The research comprised

- A review of relevant literature on the situation of MENA CSOs and activists working from the outside, selected donors’ policy and its implementation, relevant INGOs, academic and expert publications, press statements, public communications and media reports.
- Surveys completed by 104 activists, out of 178 that were invited to take part.
- Online Interviews with 12 CSOs from the MENA region, based in the countries referred in the study as “exile or host countries”
- Ongoing and past relevant research by Humena
- Direct observation of informal and formal engagement processes
- Desk research on USA, Canada, and EU member states actions on human rights and civil society
- Desk research on USA, Canada, and EU member states efforts to support exile/diaspora activists and CSOs
- Consultation with 2 human rights experts

2. TOOLS AND METHODS

178 activists were invited to complete the survey. Only 104 have responded. Two separate semi-structured surveys were completed by the 104 activists, one on their needs, the other on skills and level of engagement, and challenges. Closed-ended questions were analyzed using quantitative methods of data analysis in the form of frequency, cross tabulation, and chi-square statistics. Open-ended questions were post coded and analyzed thematically.

CSOs mapping was undertaken in each of the targeted countries to identify the actors involved in the advocacy efforts relevant to our study. 16 CSOs were then contacted. Yet 12 CSOs only have responded. Long distance online interviews were then conducted through a secured platform to assess the needs and effectiveness of 12 diaspora CSOs in advocating for their country of origins and mobilizing diaspora and exile activists, and the outcomes achieved. The interviews were organized around a study of the following key themes:

- What are the barriers to diaspora CSO to better engage in advocacy efforts at host countries level?
- What are the ways in which CSO advocacy efforts in host countries are most effective?
- What are the ways through which CSOs are engaging and involving diaspora activists in their efforts?
- What are the criteria respected by CSOs when selecting activists to take part in their advocacy efforts?
- How can donors most effectively support and facilitate the advocacy and engagement efforts of diaspora CSO at host countries level?

3. LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The criteria for the selection of the case study included relevance to the topic discussed. The evaluation of CSOs did not include an assessment of the funding channels supporting diaspora engagement and advocacy efforts due to resource limitation. Another limitation is that our study was limited to practical considerations only. At another level, the study was limited by selection of some host and origin countries, while other countries were excluded due to the fact that we've been only including CSOs and activists from MENA countries that witnessed pro-democracy and/or anti-government protests after 2011, and that are based currently in EU, USA, and Canada. While this provides concrete information, it may have restrained the ability to involve Diaspora HRDs from Gulf countries that have been subject to state harassment and oppression.

CHAPTER 3-FINDINGS

A. ABOUT ACTIVISTS

I. WHO ARE THEY?

1. The research captured data on the demographics of the respondents, which includes their sex, age group, country of origin, and country of residence, as well as their activism history, current situation, and future plans and expectations.

Total number of interviewees	104
Sex	Male:57% Female: 29% Rather not say: 14%
Age group	18-21: 0% 22-25:6% 26-30: 43% 30-35: 23% 35+: 29%

2. MENA activists, especially those who escaped oppression and armed conflicts, struggle to continue their activism outside their countries. In this regard, 88% of respondents to the survey said that the reason why they left their country is the government attackson activists and repression (Fig 1A); while 93% think that returning to their home countries may impose threats on their life and freedom. (Fig.1B)
3. While today more than ever before, diaspora activists from other regions around the world are becoming much more positioned to engage, MENA diaspora activists are facing obstacles that hinder their full participation. The majority of interviewees (48%) indicated that they were more active in home countries. (Fig. 2)
4. MENA diaspora activists and CSOs in Europe and North America were vocal and influential in countries of origin. In their countries of origin, they were most active in field of human rights activism (37%), and political activism (31%), with a remarkable other segments who were mostly active in providing humanitarian relief (16%). Another group of the activists have been focusing on media activism and citizen journalism (37%), in order to counter regimes ‘restrictions on traditional media, especially countries where popular protests against governments, took place after 2011. (Fig. 3)
5. In host countries, their involvement was, in most of the cases, limited to taking part in advocacy activities (15%), and in providing input to media on their home countries (15%). (Fig. 4)
6. Unlike other diasporas, MENA diaspora advocacy cannot be considered a dynamicfactor in the policy-making process of host countries governments and other international actors.

7. One of the main reasons causing this fact is that international actors prefer to engage with MENA diaspora activists and CSOs representatives who are more famous, empowered, and possess advanced communications and languages skills. While this could be of a highly importance, it also means that international actors are missing a great opportunity by not partnering with other activists who, through their affiliations and domestic engagement in countries of origin, are a high potential entry point to the cause. To our question if they are interested in contributing to efforts that supports their countries of origin, 96% responded positively. (Fig. 5)
8. On their concerns and interests related to home countries, respondents were asked to indicate these concerns. The results showed that the most common concern is political reform (82%), followed by gender equality and women rights (8%), LGBTQI+ rights (5%), and economy (5%). The political reform sub-domains that activists showed interest in are, Democracy, administrative reform, political transition, freedom of expression, transitional justice, security sector reform, stability, stop executions, illegal killing, arbitrary detention, rule of law, legal and constitutional reform. (Fig. 6)

II. THEIR SKILLS

Most studies of activism and social movements give more attention to methods and strategies than to the development of skills. Yet skills are crucially important to the success of engagement and campaigns. Research on expert performance provides insights into what is required to become highly proficient at a well-defined set of skills.

In this sense, we asked the respondents to self-evaluate their skills in several domain of activism. This will help us to develop future capacities building plans that match the needs of the activists, and empowering them with necessary skills to achieve a greater and more efficient engagement. Shared data revealed the percentage of activists with proficiency level ranging from above average to excellent (from 3/5 to 5/5) for each skill.

Throughout the surveys, it became clear that there is lack of understanding among many activists of what is needed to regain their previous ability to influence, to get organized and turn ideas into activities, to attract donor's support, and from where to start. This lack of skills and knowledge, have resulted in the case of some activists, in their becoming isolated and unable to function fully as activists.

1. 62% said their knowledge on human and activism didn't develop after resettling to host countries. However, this fact can also tell that there is a lack of understanding amongst donors about what they can require from MENA activists without endangering or marginalizing them or losing their trust. (Fig 7)
2. When it comes to engaging in public discourses and sharing information about their causes, only 22% of interviewees have the ability to speak and answer questions in a press conference. (Fig 8)
3. Conducting research that can be considered a reliable source of information to policymakers and practitioners was among the most knowledge and skills gaps for activists, despite the fact that these activists are an indispensable source of information and entry point to their domestic communities. As an average, 15 to 20%

of activists are able to conduct a methodological research, analyze, and present gathered data. (Fig 9)

4. Among the many reasons MENA diaspora activists are not effectively engaging with policymakers and international actors, is that the majority needs to build skills that allow them to do so. The results of the survey have shown that more than 90% of these activists do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to lobby with officials, governments, policymakers, and international actors. Their skills need to be improved starting from the very simplest ones like. (Fig 10)
5. A crucial segment of actions to not be ignored, since it's indispensable for peace and stability in the MENA region, is justice to victims. Although many of the diaspora activists are direct victims to atrocities and rights violations in home countries, they can't contribute to justice efforts, as their knowledge about international justice mechanisms is limited, including their knowledge on individual contribution like submitting complaints to UN relevant bodies (3%). (Fig 11)
6. When it comes to pursuing planning and pursuing an advocacy campaign, the most important problem for activists was their lack of knowledge about the right strategies and techniques, as well as managing and evaluating the campaign. (Fig 12). Moreover, most activists who took part in the survey have not been enough trained to understand what donors require of them or what a successful campaign involves.
7. Participants highlighted a knowledge gap that severely affects their ability to continue with their activism and shifting it to a sustainable level: Management skills. While many (37%) are able to manage a small group of less than 10 people, only 5% have experience related to policies and procedures. This means, that they are unable to start a long-lasting and sustainable project or organization. (Fig 13-15)
8. Unlike all the precedent, the major segment of participants has advanced skills in organizing direct actions like demonstrations and protests. (Fig 14)

As a result, despite being experts in their fields of focus, their actual professional and advanced specialized knowledge are limited, thus their impact is.

III. BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Significant factors have intensified the problems of MENA diaspora activists and reduced their abilities to play a more significant role in advocating and lobbying for their countries of origins. These factors are mainly the lack of integration with existent diaspora CSOs and networks, the lack of access to policymakers of host countries, language barriers, and marginalization.

1. 68% of our interviews attributed the cause of this limited integration to the lack of initiatives that aim to integrate them in the advocacy and mobilization efforts.
2. On the top list of those/reasons contributing to this situation, is the lack of diaspora CSOs working on mobilizing and engaging activists (20%). (Fig 13)
3. Another important factor was that activists interested in political activism, can't find a political a national or regional organization or network or initiative to get involved

with, especially because our interviewees are not affiliated with any faith-based parties (17%). (Fig 13)

4. Existent groups of activists, those who are most involved with policy makers and host governments, are, according to interviewees, isolated and closed-off to each other's (10%). (Fig 13)

B. ON CSOS

I. WHAT DO WE KNOW SO FAR?

A study conducted in 2017³ had shown that there is 206 (out of 1075) Syrian organization and civic initiative, based and functioning outside Syria Territories. Data analysis indicates that 42% of organizations currently in operation are not officially registered in the countries where they run activities. However, the survey showed that among the 1075 Syrian organizations included in the study, advocacy is among the least prominent domains, in which these NGOs are functioning, with only 58/1075 outside and inside Syria. Among these 58, two NGOs based outside Syria, have been conducting advocacy activities as a main-domain of work, and have achieved remarkable impact, Dawlaty and Syria Campaign.

While Lebanese Diaspora is believed to be very active, it was very difficult to collect concrete data since, in contrast to Egyptians and Syrians, Lebanese diaspora organizations focus more on relations with host communities, and building ties with diaspora communities, rather than mobilizing for Lebanon, yet, this diaspora comes first in the middle east and north Africa, with amount of transfer flow to their country of origin. However, the large protests that took place in Lebanon in October 2019, has changed the situation, and many diaspora activists' networks and NGOs have emerged.

Although, some resources indicate the presence of 200 Lebanese organization in France only, a desk research that examined official databases of registered NGOs in USA, Canada, and EU countries has revealed the presence of only 22 NGOs directly involved in mobilization for their country of origin, and one activists networks that emerged in October 2019, and have groups in 40 cities around the world.

On the other side, it seems that it still too early to talk about an active Egyptian civil society in exile. Our research indicates the presence of 9 independent NGOs (with no political and religious affiliations) registered and active among EU and North America, with 2 of them are directly active in advocacy as a main domain. The rest are focusing on human rights and freedom of expression and taking part in collective national and transnational advocacy activities centralized around and/or led by first generation prominent civil society leaders.

³ www.citizens4syria.org

II. WHAT ARE THE ISSUES ON WHICH THEY FOCUS?

Although the advocacy efforts of diaspora's CSOs cover a broad range of topics, our findings revealed that the main issues on which the diaspora CSOs focus are:

1. Advocating for Humanitarian relief

Diaspora CSOs and activists from the aforementioned countries have engaged in humanitarian advocacy with a wide range of objectives, from enabling and increasing humanitarian assistance, to encouraging actors to uphold international humanitarian law, to seeking broader solutions to crises.

Captured live and seen by millions globally, the explosion of tonnes of ammonium nitrate in Beirut's port on 4 August 2020 devastated Lebanon's capital city and killed over 170 people, mobilizing thousands in the vast Lebanese diaspora to rush to the aid of their homeland. Impact Lebanon, a previously little known Lebanese diaspora NGO based in London, has quickly mobilized to lead the overseas appeal for aid to Lebanon. Minutes after the blast, Impact Lebanon set up a JustGiving page which raised nearly £5 million in one day.

Diaspora CSOs can also serve as a bridge. On February 4th 2016, the UK, Norway, Germany, the United Nations and Kuwait co-hosted the 2016 Supporting Syria and the Region conference⁴ in London. This was the fourth annual pledging conference and this year it aimed to raise \$8.96 billion for UN inter-agency appeals and affected regional governments.

Dr. Rouba Mhaisen, head of Sawa for Aid and Development-a Lebanon based Syrian organization- addressed an exceptional speech at the conference, that, according to press, "it had ashamed the international community". Rouba delivered constructive criticism concerning the way in which donor countries deal with the Syrian issue as a whole and the way in which Europe and neighboring countries have dealt with the arrival of thousands of refugees.

2. Protesting corruption and advocating for political reform

It has become almost useless to recall that the Lebanese diaspora is one of the largest in the world in terms of its age and size. According to the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC), it currently ranges between five to eight million people, present on all continents. One of its peculiarities is the fact that its members are keen to maintain deep ties with their country of origin. It is well known that whatever the host country they choose, the Lebanese develop their institutions, their cultural centers, their restaurants, and their folklore there in order to maintain their awareness of identity. In October 2019, thousands of Lebanese took to the streets in Beirut protesting against corruption and government failure in responding to the economic crisis. "Leave so we can come back" was a sign carried in the week-long protests, in New York's Washington Square Park that was organized in solidarity with protesters in Beirut. On October 18th, 2019 and one day following the birth of Lebanese uprising, Lebanese expats around the world joined in from all corners of the world to support and echo the demands of the protesters in Lebanon, and launched "Meghterbin Mejtemiin (United Expats)" a network of Lebanese diaspora activists that started as a WhatsApp group

⁴ <https://humanitarianforum.org/610-2/>.

and grew to mobilize and protest in solidarity with their country in more than 40 cities among the globe.

3. Advocating for Peace, security, and Justice

In France, the Lebanese diaspora is very active. Some sources⁵ list more than two hundred associations spread across the country. In July-August 2006 while Lebanon was plunged into war, the Lebanese diaspora organized demonstrations to support the country, but in dispersed ranks. In Paris, 4,000 Lebanese gathered at the Place de l'Opéra. Since then, Collectif des citoyens libanais et amis du Liban (the Collective of Lebanese Citizens and Friends of Lebanon) has been created. The Paris-based NGO has organized conferences and film screenings followed by debates. The themes tackled above all aim to combat hate speech to campaign for civil peace

In March 2015, **some 85 non-violent** groups and Syrian CSOs and Activists, with the majority based abroad, called for global support to stop the intensifying barrel bomb attacks striking civilian areas in their country. They are also promoting inclusive peace talks as a way to stop the ongoing expansion of the Islamic State. The organizers have called the campaign “Planet Syria”⁶ highlighting their perception of abandonment by the international community.

4. Protesting restrictions on Civic space

In May 2017, the Egyptian president AbdelFattah ElSissi issued the law 70/2017 that imposes criminal penalties and gives security services strict control over the activities of non-governmental groups. Since then, many diaspora activists and CSOs launched campaigns demanding the repeal of the draconian law. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS⁷) detailed objections to the law, the ramifications for civic activity, and its economic impact on development and investment in a legal memorandum sent to the President on November 30, 2016. Overall, 22 organizations, four political parties, and several public figures demonstrating solidarity with civic associations urged the President not to ratify the law.

In January 2019, Humena with support of Civicus, launched “Unmask Them Campaign⁸”. The campaign exposed the Ministers, Generals, foreign governments and businesses who stand behind the regime of President El-Sisi, complicit in their support for the brutal, NGO-targeting Law 70, and called for the repeal of Law 70 and an end to the persecution of civil society, so that Egyptians can work together, looking to the future rather than over their shoulders. The campaign succeeded to build a network of diaspora activists from MENA region and held protests against the attacks on Egyptian civil society in 10 cities across the globe, from Washington DC to Beirut. The law was repealed on July 2019.

⁵ https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1647/Ile-de-France%252C_la_region_ou_les_associations_sont_les_plus_actives_pour_le_Liban.html

⁶ www.planetsyria.org

⁷ <https://cihrs.org/egypt-a-year-after-the-laws-approval-by-the-egyptian-parliament-rights-groups-no-alternative-but-to-repeal-new-association-law-revision-pointless/?lang=en>

⁸ <https://unmaskthem.org/>

5. Advocating for Human Rights

In 2015, The Freedom Initiative, a USA-based Egyptian NGO was established in order to bring international attention to the plight of political prisoners in the Middle East, and advocate for their release. On March 2019, the Freedom Initiative organized “Egypt Advocacy Day”,⁹ a two-day event that aimed to organize the Egyptian Diaspora in Washington DC to engage with lawmakers and officials on human rights and democratic governance issues in Egypt.

Another remarkable initiative is the Syria campaign, a UK-based non-profit established by Syrian and international human rights defenders supporting Syria’s civil society and activists in the struggle for freedom and democracy. Since its formation in 2014, the campaign has created and partnered on more than 30 online videos, several have been shown at the UN Security Council, another at the White House. The Campaign¹⁰ has raised 10 million USD, supported the development of many initiatives, and many other great achievements.

III. ARE THE DIASPORA ACTIVISTS INVOLVED IN THESE EFFORTS?

In our survey that targeted 104 MENA activists based in Europe and North America, and to our question on the reasons why diaspora activists are not mobilized for their countries of origin, the majority of respondents (20%) attributed the cause to the lack of diaspora organizations and networks working on mobilizing diaspora activists, 17% said the cause is the lack of diaspora political activism networks and organized groups that reach out to them, 10% think the reason is that the current diaspora activists’ networks are isolated and closed off on each other, 11% think that the reason is there the inability to access international and governmental actors that have impact on the situation in their country of origin. On the other hand, 11% think that the reason is their limited knowledge on advocacy and justice mechanisms.

In Total **69%** of the answers have relevant connection with the role that diaspora organizations can play, either by opening up to and building bridges with the activists, or by empowering them with knowledge and skills necessary to enhance their engagement in mobilization efforts.

IV. WHAT MEANS AND METHODS OF ADVOCACY DO THESE ORGANIZATIONS USE?

Among 12 diaspora CSOs examined, only 3 CSOs have conducted exclusively online advocacy efforts. All the rest have used mixed Online-Offline means.

On the top of the list of “most used means” is protesting and demonstrating (47%). Lobbying comes next with 22%. In this term, we defined lobbying as “*Communicating with decision makers (elected officials and staff; voters on ballot measures), about existing or potential legislation, and urging a vote for or against. All three components of this definition are required: decision makers, actual legislation, and asking for a vote.*”

⁹ <https://www.egyptday.org/>

¹⁰ www.syriacampaign.org

Fundraising for humanitarian relief in countries of origin falls third with 17%, followed by protesting countries of origin through art and media (10%), and strategic legislation comes last with only 4%.

CHAPTER 4-CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

1. ON MENA DIASPORA ACTIVISTS AND CSOS

1. Given the strength of other advocacy groups, the current MENA diaspora advocacy community (activists and CSOs) is inadequately organized and too small.
2. MENA diaspora advocacy cannot be considered strategic and successful on long term since it usually tends to focus on immediate and short-term issues in response to political developments. And this also imposes the need to synchronizing efforts of CSOs and activists and to break the ice between each other.
3. At this stage, it is beyond the current advocacy capacity of MENA diaspora to engage effectively in trying to reach the entire list of policy decision makers at the regional, national, and international levels.
4. There is insufficient analysis of power-relations, the environment and potential for alliances on how MENA diaspora CSOs can achieve greater engagement.
5. Collaboration with the media is of growing importance. New media, provides a ready-made 'advocacy opportunity' which diaspora CSOs and activists are using.
6. MENA CSOs and activists are not fully aware about the importance of evidence-based research as a requisite of effective advocacy strategy planning. There is a dearth of independent research and evidence on which to base sound advocacy strategies.
7. The success and failure of diaspora's ability to influence policies depends heavily on the country in which they are located and on the context as a whole. This low level of diaspora engagement is in direct proportion to the size and experience of the different diaspora groups in such countries

2. ON DONORS AND INGOs

1. With regard to donors, MENA diaspora lobbying, and advocacy has not received sufficient prioritization. Same goes for INGOs and networks involved in transnational advocacy efforts.
2. There is a lack in donors financial support to MENA diaspora advocacy efforts, even though advocacy does not generally require a high level of financial resources. However, certain elements of engagement such as conducting research and policies monitoring, and the forging of strategic alliances, can be costly.
3. The formation of platforms and networks of MENA diaspora CSOs, activists, INGOs, and other relevant actors can strengthen the effectiveness of advocacy and lobbying efforts as well as improving the capacities of CSOs and activists. Further, platforms provide opportunities for knowledge sharing and a reliable source for donors and governments which allow them to reshape their agenda and making it more realistic. However, it is of a high importance to support the process of networking technically and financially by activists and CSOs themselves, as well as the establishment and operation of networks.

4. Donors are not prioritizing diaspora advocacy efforts, and their funding modalities to this area remain sub-optimal. Thus, donors' policies and funding modalities are hugely limiting their effectiveness.
5. MENA diaspora CSOs and non-formal groups engaged in advocacy efforts are not the traditional form of organizations that donors can partner with. While this imposes several challenges such as these CSOs greater need for flexibility, it also requires contemporary types of partnerships. There is more perceived risk attached to working with some of these new partners. It can be concluded then, that in the era of rapid political developments and changes, donors are required to adapt their policies, and to innovate financial modalities to meet these time constraints and spontaneous changes, and support diaspora initiatives and advocacy efforts of CSOs and activists that-in this time of cruelty, atrocities, sudden events, crisis, pandemics-have no options but acting spontaneously and episodically.
6. While many MENA diaspora CSOs, are interested in making more efforts in advocating for home countries, the donors' agendas are threatening their independence, when- without consulting potential beneficiaries and partners-prioritize thematic areas for support and expel others. Diaspora advocacy seems to be one of these ignored areas. That led many CSOs to amend their plans and strategy, and focus on what donors are willing to support, rather than their core issues and values and the priorities of their constituencies or target groups. Therefore, donors who insist on only promoting their own agendas, undermine diaspora CSOs and activists who have independent agendas that respect the culture of their target groups, for change. Consulting and listening to CSOs and activists, would enable diaspora CSOs and activists to operate in a demand-drive way, rather than following donor's theme, and help transnational advocacy networks to evolve and flourish.
7. Donors, who insist to not consider unregistered diaspora CSOs, deprive these groups from opportunity to evolve and engage in efforts that may reshape the future of their countries. Civic initiative, civil movements, advocacy coalition, and transnational networks, when forced to become a formally registered organization, lose their character, which was their strength, and become an "implementing partner" rather than a change agent.
8. Evidence-based research needed for building an effective advocacy strategy that can impact policymaking, is under-resourced by donors.
9. Relevant thematic research on diaspora or on their home countries are usually commissioned by the donors themselves. By doing that, doing risk to undermine the research independence and do not allow for inclusion of diverse streams of research or alternative voices. MENA Diaspora CSOs and activists are an indispensable source of information for evidence-based research.
10. Donors play an important role in promoting relationships between host governments and diaspora, and in reducing tension between host communities and diaspora .

3. HOST COUNTRIES GOVERNMENTS, AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

1. To our knowledge, no government in host countries has identified and assessed the current range of the advocacy and lobbying capacity of the MENA diaspora. This can negatively impact the ability of MENA diaspora to lobby and advocate for human rights, democracy, and stability in their home countries.
2. In many host countries, MENA activists have expressed concerns related to appropriate legal measures that ensure citizens and non-citizens' ability to engage and act. The minimum enabling standards acknowledged widely include:
 - Freedom of association and assembly
 - Legal recognition facilitating the work of CSOs
 - The right to freedom of expression
 - Freedom of movement, mobility rights and right to travel
 - The right to operate free of unwarranted state interference
 - The right of freedom from refoulement
3. MENA diaspora needs better access to human rights and civic education. Through disseminating information on active citizenship and participatory democracy, governments contribute to better engagement of diaspora in shaping the future of their home countries.

4. LOCAL ACTORS

Civil society in home countries would also benefit from knowing the capacities of MENA diaspora activists and CSOs, and involving them in its advocacy agenda, since diplomacy advocacy abroad and transnational advocacy, if undertaken, could be of a paramount impact.

CHAPTER 5-RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this report are organized by the relevant stakeholder group and will evolve through further consultations and dialogue with and between relevant stakeholders. These recommendations have been shared, developed, extended and endorsed by a group of MENA diaspora activists and CSOs in the EU countries and North America in a series of meetings and group discussions. The expectations revealed by activists is that MENA diaspora CSOs, INGOs working on promoting human rights in MENA, and relevant donors, will take therecommendations forward as they see fit.

A. MENA DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS ARE RECOMMENDED TO:

1. Dedicate further efforts to involve diaspora activists in their strategic planning and decision-making process, and to avoid building long strategies on information provided by biased or limited sources.
2. Conduct high-quality research and evidence-based policy analysis relevant to the situation of diaspora in hos countries
3. Collaborate with local and regional organizations whose goals align with yours
4. Adopt a human rights-based approach in their research making and programming.
5. Upsurge efforts to promote the diasporas ‘needs to donors.
6. Be open in the search for potential advocacy partners.
7. Improve their advocacy and lobbying capacities, and include new advocacy means and methods.
8. Build their capacity to improve the quality of research, and the evidence cases gathering. This will in turn, improve the advocacy effectiveness and impact.
9. Engage new activists, and build connections with newly emerged organizations, rather than avoiding them.
10. Coordinate and compile their efforts with other diaspora CSOs instead of overlapping and duplicating projects and activities.
11. Attract the second generation of post MENA Spring diaspora youth, build theircapacities, and engage them.
12. Elaborate on the experiences of African, Asian, and Latino diaspora.
13. Build national and international strategic alliances and engage in joint evidence-based research, a prerequisite for an effective advocacy plan. The range of possible alliances includes research bodies, lawyers, media, diaspora and home countries activists, as well as diversity of CSOs including unconventional partners.
14. Seek a role where they can first exchange with donors, governments and international actors on a level platform, where joint decisions can be made as to what to fund, and what levels of documentation and accountability are required.
15. Think collectively with other diaspora organizations about how to maximize your resources.
16. Facilitate the process of empowering newly emerged diaspora activists’ groups
17. Build public confidence through practicing self-regulation and sharing information with stakeholders.

18. Promote their public image and ensure that transparency and accountability are upheld.
19. Conduct public consultation to ensure that their plans are in line with their target groups priorities.
20. Remind donors and governments of their need to listen to the diverse demands of diaspora communities.
21. Publicly stand up against abuses of freedoms of speech and association

B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS, INGOS, AND GOVERNMENTS

1. Engage the MENA diaspora’s activists and CSOs

- 1.1. Provide the right psychological support to MENA activists prior to engaging them. Tensof MENA diaspora activists are committing suicide every year in EU countries, Canada, and USA. Most of them have reported many times that they’re struggling with the type of psychological support provided by host countries. These activists were in critical need for the right psychological support that should be provided by practitioners from the MENA region, who understand the context of dramatic events, and who speak Arabic. (Sarah Hegazy, a prominent political and LGBTQI activist from Egypt, who was subject to imprisonment, harassment, sexual assaults, and bullying, committed suicide in Canada in last June, after 2 years of exile, and of psychological support provided by government)
- 1.2. Involve MENA diaspora’s activists in the strategic planning and relevant decision-making process.
- 1.3. Avoid building strategy on diaspora’s engagement based on information provided by biased or limited sources.
- 1.4. Engage less well-organized and less-financed MENA diasporas CSOs and civil initiatives
- 1.5. Conduct consultations where diaspora activists and advocates can expose host countries governments, donors, international actors, and NGOs to those that have capabilities or ideas in line with international strategies to promote peace and stability in the MENA region.
- 1.6. Share information with MENA diaspora activists and CSOs on last relevant external governmental policies, so they can identify common goals and advocate with country-of-origin governments and/or civil society around those goals.
- 1.7. Evaluate specific programs of diaspora engagement so that best practices can be identified and built upon.
- 1.8. Engage MENA diaspora activists as practitioners and consultants to fill resource and knowledge gaps
- 1.9. Engage MENA diaspora activists and CSOs in international peace efforts in regard to their countries of origin
- 1.10. Adopt a trauma-sensitive approach when dealing with most vulnerable groups of MENA diaspora such as LGBTQ communities.
- 1.11. Promote the establishment of invited spaces for MENA diaspora CSO engagement as a matter of principle in all sectors.

- 1.12. Promote the establishment of consultation spaces at key strategic moments of peacebuilding programs as well as the establishment and operationalization of MENA diaspora citizen participation in statutory oversight bodies such as parliamentary standing committees, and local level planning and budget review meetings
- 1.13. Consult MENA diaspora in the policymaking process in order to understand what coincidence there is between the donor's goals and those of the diaspora.
- 1.14. MENA Diaspora activists and CSOs should never be treated in mere "tools" in political agenda, neither overlooked nor taken for granted
- 1.15. The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2250, the first ever thematic resolution on Youth, Peace and Security which recognizes that "young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security". Resolution 2419 (2018) was the second resolution by the United Nations Security Council on youth, peace and security and was unanimously adopted. It recognizes the positive role young people can play in negotiating and implementing peace agreements and conflict prevention. Governments are invited to commit to international obligations and agreements and engage MENA diaspora youth groups in peace and conflict prevention efforts.

2. Build the capacities of MENA diaspora's activists and CSOs

- 2.1. Train the MENA diaspora CSOs and newly emerged networks of activists on international and regional human rights systems and mechanisms, so that such groups may develop their capacities to advocate on this level.
- 2.2. Support diaspora CSOs and activists empowerment by providing more resources to improve their capacity to engage in advocacy efforts.
- 2.3. Adapt the capacity building approach, by working on up-scaling skills and knowledge of MENA diaspora activists and CSOs, rather than expecting them to already have the resources necessary for effective engagement. Based on the results of diaspora activists' skills, we recommend capacity building programs to include:
 - Strategic planning
 - Evidence-based research
 - Lobbying and advocacy
 - Evidence-based policy advocacy
 - Transnational advocacy strategies
 - Advocacy at the UN, and at the regional human rights mechanisms
 - Strategic litigation
 - Negotiation and communication skills
 - Legal and human rights education
 - Public speaking
 - Writing and language skills

Innovate civic and human rights education non-traditional tools, by making best use of art and culture activism methods, and engaging MENA diaspora artists and media professional. The Underground music makers, filmmakers, writers, media journalists, and so many others, MENA diaspora includes hundreds of female and male talented people that can promote engagement and advocate for peace in home countries.

3. Rethink the funding strategies and modalities

- 3.1. Give priority to the new generation of MENA diaspora civil society leaders and CSOs, rather than keeping the support and work focused on same old partners.
- 3.2. Support emerging MENA diaspora CSOs with new ideas: It is further recommended that support is provided not only to effective CSOs (i.e. those which have a track record) but also to those promoting alternative ideas, playing watchdog roles and raising critical voices.
- 3.3. Make resources available for contemporary platforms for engagement of MENA diaspora activists and CSOs.
- 3.4. Identify new funding instruments and modalities that truly respond to the needs of many types of MENA diaspora CSOs, including those which are currently excluded from financial assistance and that consider diaspora advocacy and engagement, as a main scope of work, rather than a sub-domain.
- 3.5. Provide support to well-orchestrated action around a single legislative objective.
- 3.6. Provide support to advocacy efforts and initiatives that cannot (or prefer not to be) registered, but can largely contribute to transnational advocacy efforts that promote peace and stability in home countries. The civic initiatives, civil movements, advocacy coalition, and transnational networks, when forced to become a formally registered organization, lose their character, which was their strength, and become an “implementing partner” rather than a change agent.
- 3.7. Advocacy efforts, when aiming to make a change in a conflict or post-conflict environment, need time to make an impact. Donors are invited to support these efforts on long-term, and don't expect rapid results.
- 3.8. Design funding modalities that respond to sensitive and unpredictable events by supporting spontaneous actions to raise issues in the public domain or influence decision makers and these are rarely predictable. In this case, it is recommended to tailor process and outcome-led budgets (as opposed to activity-driven) to enable the flexibility required for opportunistic, effective and ‘behind the scenes’ engagement.

4. Improve the enabling environment

- 4.1. Support the right to freedom of association and freedom of expression in host countries through advocating the regularization of diaspora policies, promoting the protection of non-citizens' rights, and enhancing peaceful contacts between diaspora and state.
- 4.2. Advocate for a human rights-based approach at all parts of governments dealing with immigration issues, especially foreign policy and national security.
- 4.3. Advocate for an end of harassments conducted by governments in country of origins against exiled activists, through intimidations and attacking their families at home countries. Diaspora activism can be impactful. But transnational repression can deter, silence, and punish those who engage in the fight for rights from afar.
- 4.4. Advocate for a leverage of international commitments to encourage host, transit, and source countries to address ongoing protection problems facing refugees and

immigrants, using a combination of humanitarian diplomacy, financial resources, and technical assistance

- 4.5. Undertake (by independent 3rd party organizations) a contextual and political analysis at host country and regional levels, to analyze the impact of adopted policies on immigrants and refugees.
- 4.6. Governments should protect rights of immigrants and refugees and respect the right of protection from refoulement. Governments are also in charge of criminalizing acts of xenophobia, racism, and sexism, or any other form of discrimination, with special attention to the most vulnerable groups like ethnic and religious minorities, women survivors of GBV, LGBTQAI+, older persons, persons with disabilities, marginalized communities, and adhere to their rights including the right to access information.
- 4.7. Improve governments and donor's staff engagement experience, especially those working in the MENA region offices, and promote their understanding of the complex environment where they are operating.

C. SPECIAL RECOMMENDATION TO GOVERNMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

Engage MENA diaspora's activists in countering extremism and radicalization indiaspora communities

MENA activists, who amazed the world with their peaceful revolutions in 2011 against dictatorships in the region, became later victims of both, continuous atrocities of regimes, and extremism. Alongside economic crisis, these are the main reasons why these activists, fled their countries to USA, Canada, and Europe. Therefore they are called today "Exile".

The current political trajectory of the diaspora activists can be described as the one that rejects the current situation in MENA countries, yet it doesn't fit with the ideological socially conservative nature of Islamic political parties in the region. And since they're deeply influenced by revolutionary attitudes in the aftermath of the MENA Spring, many among them became frustrated and politically confused.

However, by treating them as collateral damage to extremism, host countries governments are dehumanizing the MENA diaspora activists. These activists are not "320 in Paris", "150 in New York", "400 in Berlin" ...those are people with faces, names, stories to tell, and role to play. But most importantly, they are not disturbing witnesses, nor a worrying reminder of the threat to host communities. Nevertheless, they're the first frontliners who dare to stand for democracy, freedom, human rights, and liberal values. Dehumanizing these activists to numbers, and aid receivers, or potential threat, is a reinforcement of the polarizing extremist message delivered by violent people, where society is divided between "them and us". Therefore, Re-humanizing these activists, means recognizing the crucial role they can play in the fight against violent radicalization, and considering them as "credible voices" in terms of preventing violent extremism (PVE).

While diaspora activists can be key partners for host countries governments to counter extremism, radicalization, and polarization among diaspora communities by telling their very own stories, they can also help government to draft policies that are sensitive to minorities 'perception, and that take into consideration the balance of power relations between diasporas and host communities. Thus, involving MENA diaspora activists and CSOs in host countries plans to counter terrorism can take many forms, ranging from consultation processes during the formulation of policies and programs, to the provision of financial and other support to the projects initiated by diaspora organizations to reduce tension, to the inclusion of diaspora in existing projects, as well as to the recruitment of diaspora individuals on behalf of mainstream.

MENA diaspora activists usually own a deep knowledge on cultural practices, demands and current developments, which means that individuals they can participate more effectively than other actors in peacebuilding processes. In these, cases «people in the homeland are more accepting and willing to listen to advice from members of the diaspora rather than other foreigners» (Bercovitch 2007: 35). An important reason why to include diaspora activists in governments' plans to fight radicalization is that diaspora can think "out of the box" and advance new and creative ideas on how to promote peace, since they have a deep understanding of culture and social aspects of the problem.

This doesn't mean by anyway that every diaspora activists should be considered as an expert. It rather means that, in addition the engagement of diaspora individuals who already have experience and skills in peace and conflict, involving less experienced individuals and listening to them, helps governments and policymakers to ensure that the information extracted from experts, is not biased, and is credible. Collaborating in this way allows both parties to strengthen each other's weaknesses, thereby resulting in a meaningful collaboration.

On the other hand, diaspora MENA CSOs, in most of the cases, have an extensive knowledge of the local dynamics, trends and drivers of violent extremism either on home countries or on diaspora communities. Therefore, they present an "early warning" mechanism for emerging threats. When governments impose a response based on security priorities only, they overlook factors that enhance the tendency to extremism and violence. And when government responses ignore the balance of power between minorities (diasporas) and authorities, and overlook cultural, social, and economic dynamics, it usually leads to more tension and radicalization. Diaspora civil society is then, the key actor with the legitimacy, and the capabilities to foster community resilience in front of the violent extremist message. Since it plays an indispensable role in promoting political participation and raising awareness on human rights and democracy among most marginalized groups, diaspora civil society can diffuse tension between host governments and diaspora communities and challenge radicalization and extremism narratives.

Diasporas, migrants, refugees, are NOT a single unit, and they are very diverse. If there is one extremist among them, there is on the other side thousands who uphold progressive and liberal values, and fight for human rights and freedoms. Treating them as one unit,

stigmatizing every one of them, and imposing restrictions on all of them, can be simply described as discrimination over race and religion. Racism, hate speech, ultra-nationalism, and extreme-right ideologies, will only offer momentum to extremism and radicalization, never end it. MENA diaspora activists are the key to bridge this gap and build sustainable peace in the host communities.

ANNEX 1-DATA PRESENTATION

Figure 1A

Did you leave your home country due to security attacks/repression?

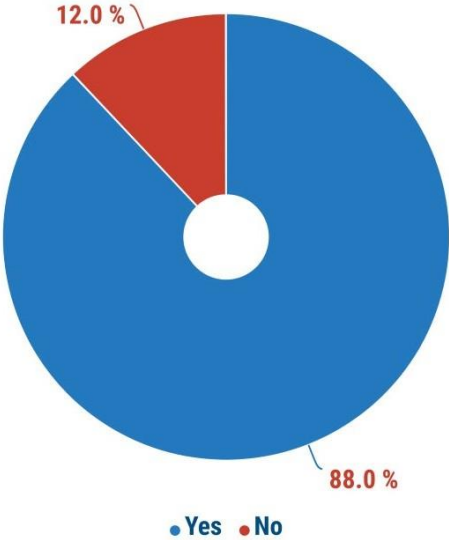


Figure 1B

Do you think that returning to your home country imposes threats on your life and freedom?

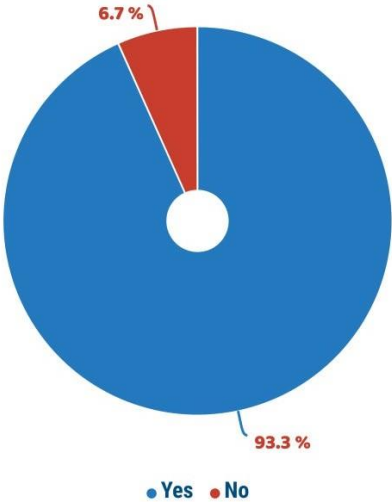


Figure 2

Are you still as active in the country of residence as you were in your home country?

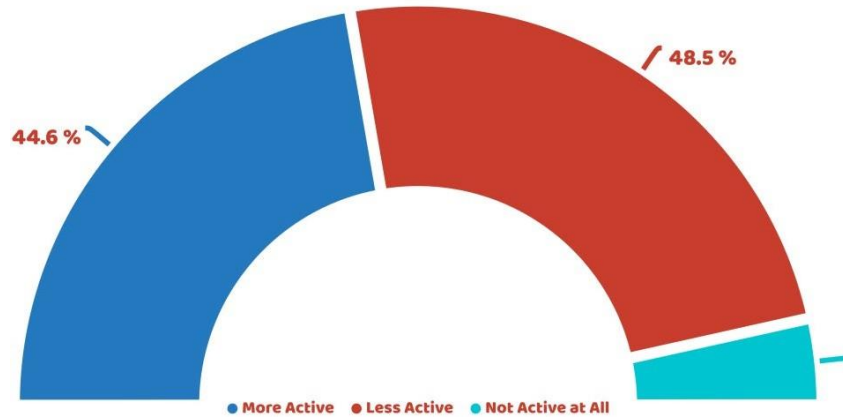


Figure 3

Past activism in home country

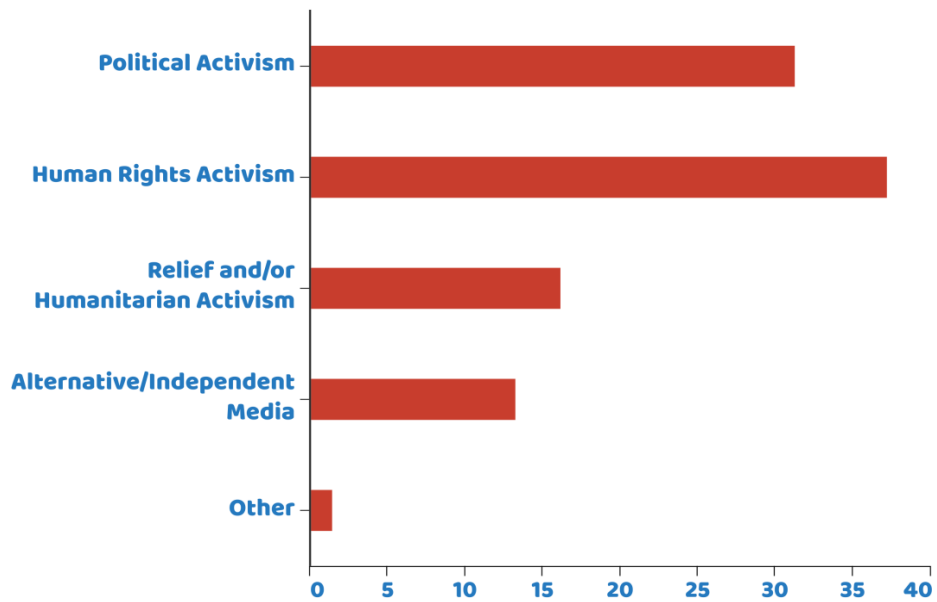


Figure 4

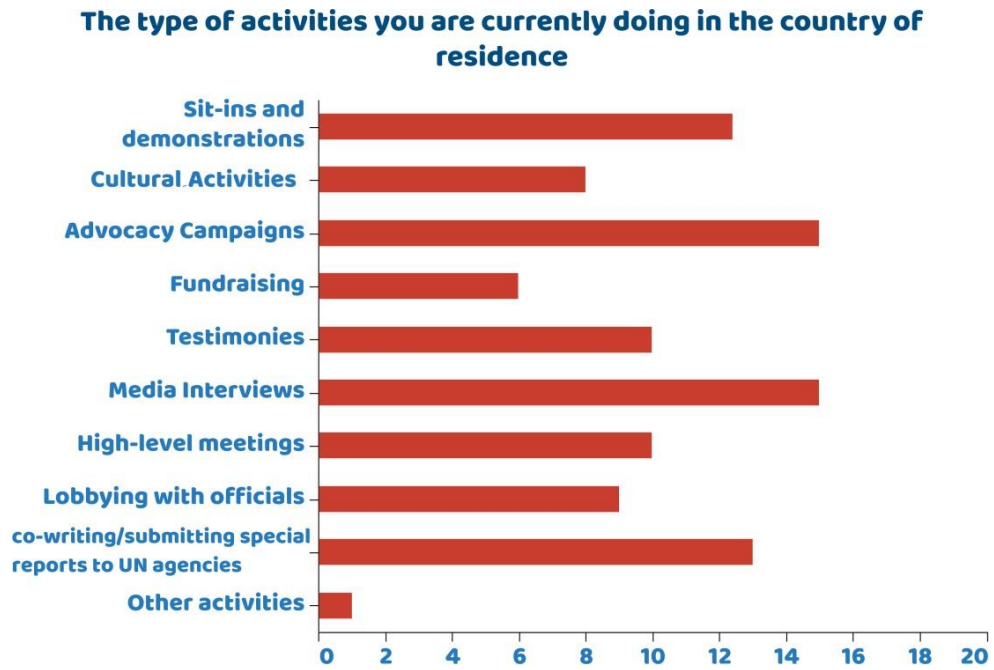


Figure 5

Are you interested in contributing to efforts and actions aiming to improve human rights situation in your country of origin?

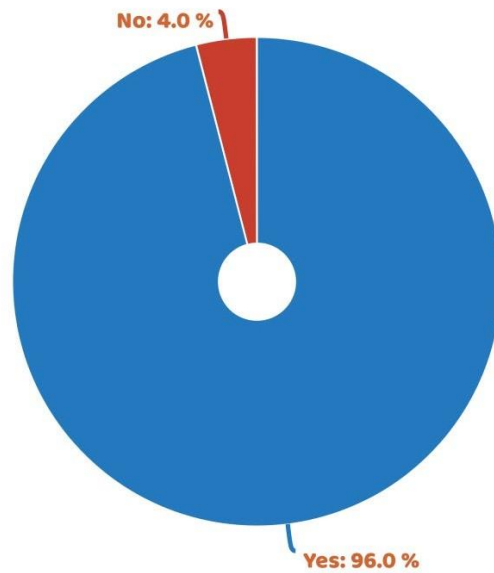


Figure 6

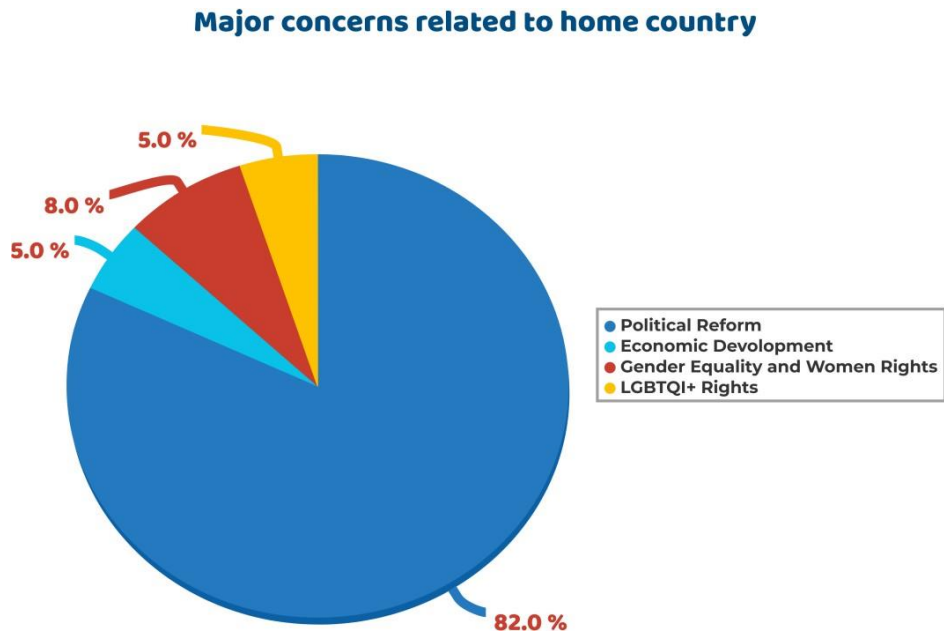


Figure 7

Do you think that your human rights and political knowledge has developed positively since your arrival in your current country of residence?

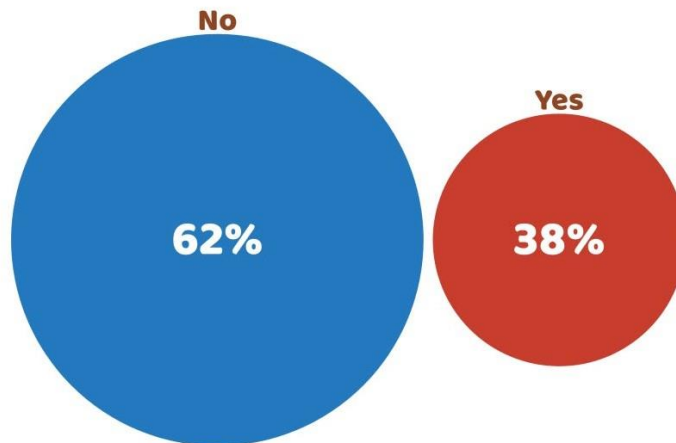


Figure 8



Figure 9

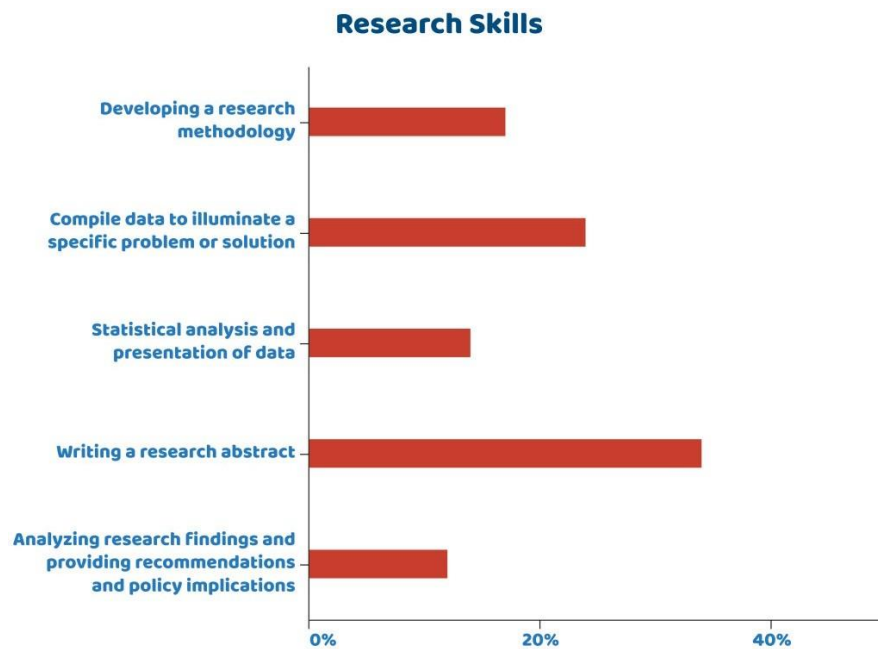


Figure 10

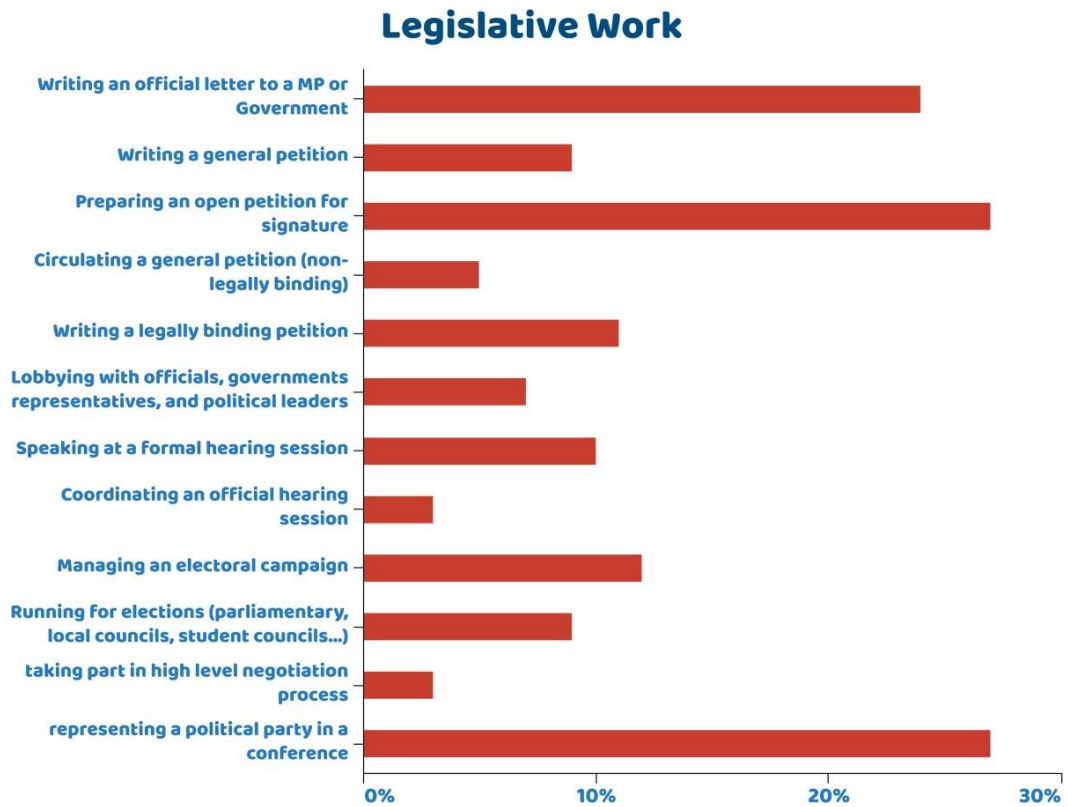


Figure 11

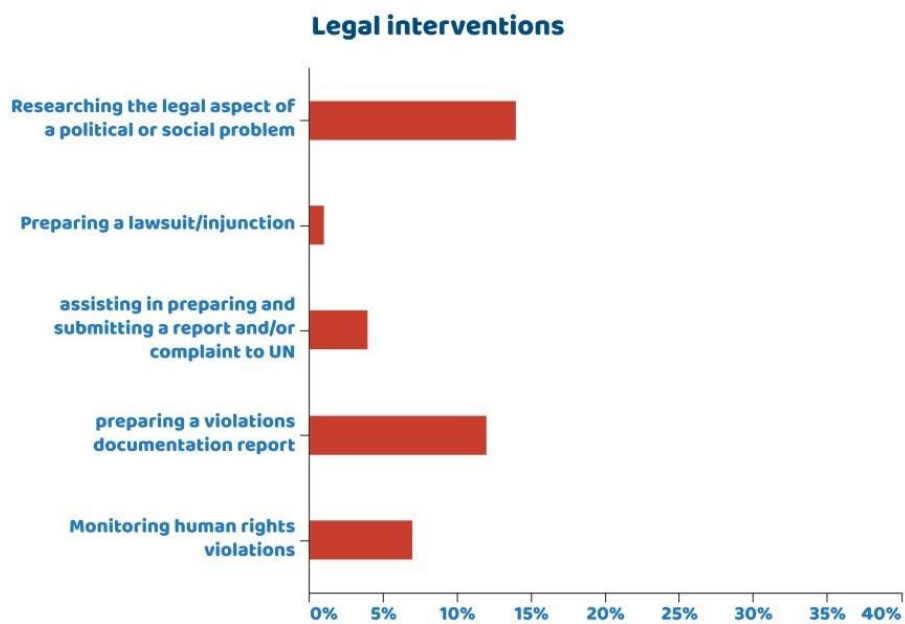


Figure 12

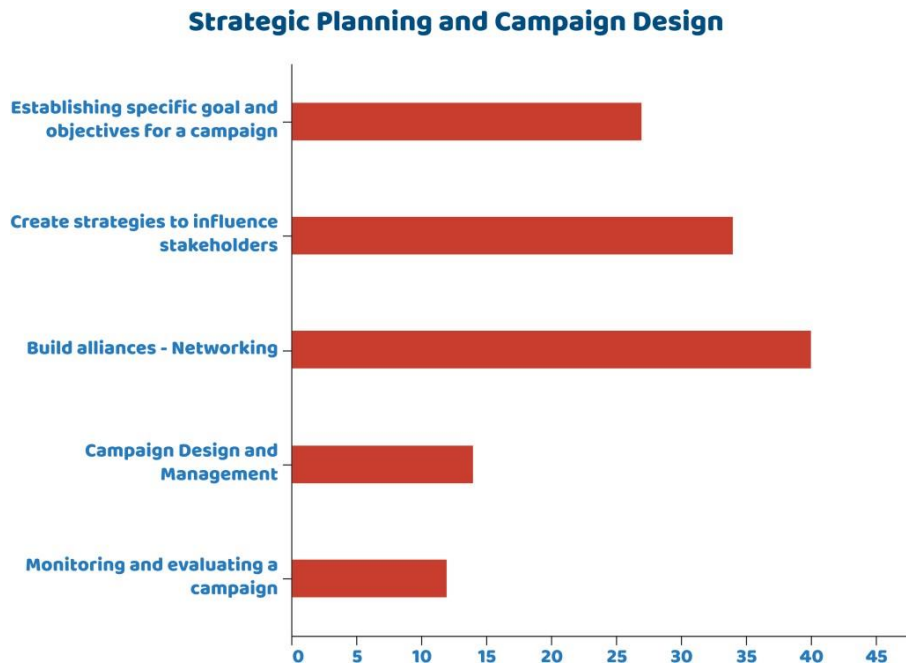


Figure 13

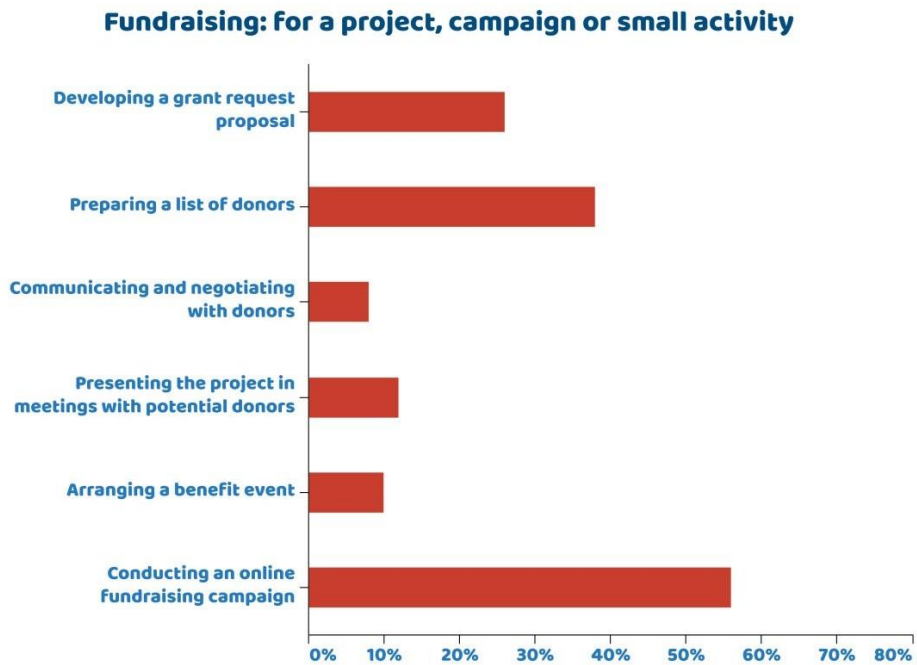


Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16

Do you think that the Internet is an effective tool for to raise citizens' awareness on human rights and political issues?

