

alQaws' Impact in 2018

2018 Visible & Persistent

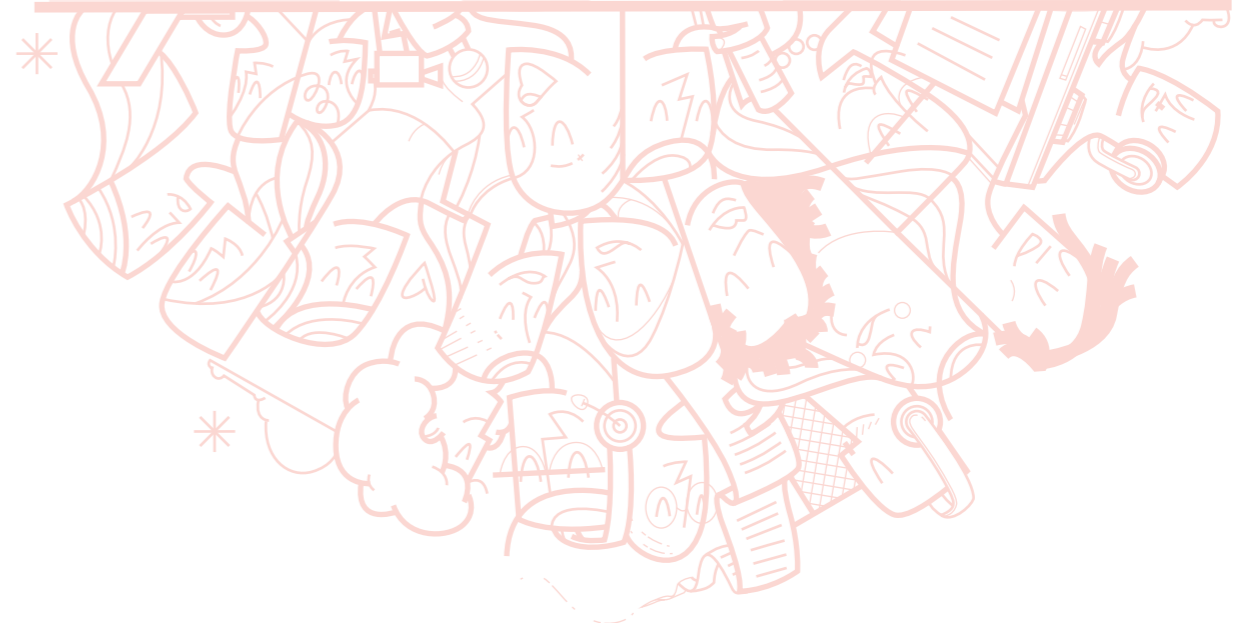


alQaws for Sexual & Gender
Diversity in Palestinian Society

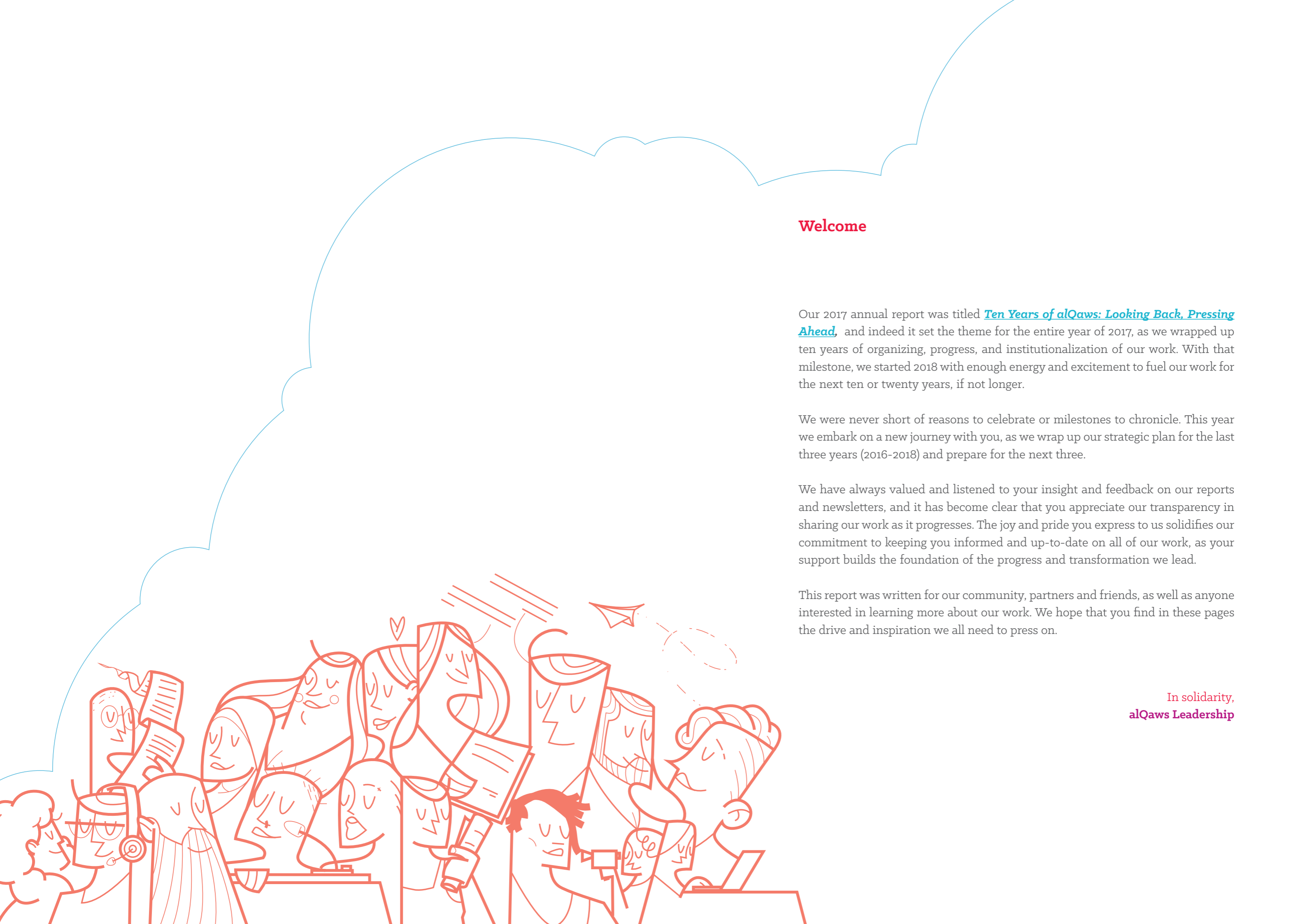


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alQaws for Sexual & Gender
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Welcome

Our 2017 annual report was titled [*Ten Years of alQaws: Looking Back, Pressing Ahead*](#), and indeed it set the theme for the entire year of 2017, as we wrapped up ten years of organizing, progress, and institutionalization of our work. With that milestone, we started 2018 with enough energy and excitement to fuel our work for the next ten or twenty years, if not longer.

We were never short of reasons to celebrate or milestones to chronicle. This year we embark on a new journey with you, as we wrap up our strategic plan for the last three years (2016-2018) and prepare for the next three.

We have always valued and listened to your insight and feedback on our reports and newsletters, and it has become clear that you appreciate our transparency in sharing our work as it progresses. The joy and pride you express to us solidifies our commitment to keeping you informed and up-to-date on all of our work, as your support builds the foundation of the progress and transformation we lead.

This report was written for our community, partners and friends, as well as anyone interested in learning more about our work. We hope that you find in these pages the drive and inspiration we all need to press on.

In solidarity,
alQaws Leadership

Summary |

We present to you in this report our perception of the impact led by alQaws in recent years. This reflection is significant, since our deep involvement in our work can prevent us from taking a moment to recognize our influence. In **alQaws' Impact in 2018: Visible & Persistent** we highlight the major transformations we have witnessed in recent years, whether it was the growing visibility and legitimacy of sexual and gender diversity issues in public spaces, or through individuals openly living these experiences in Palestinian urban centers. We chart the milestones we have seen in alQaws' work, like the giant leaps we are making in the education field and working with schools, as well as working with media, cultural, or human rights and civil society organizations.

We also share with you the cornerstones of **Future Plans** for the coming three years and the process behind it. We gladly present our new strategic goals: increasing the visibility of sexual and gender diversity issues, alQaws' work, and the experiences of our activists; providing diverse spaces for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, questioning, and queer people (LGBTQ/queer), other folks living diverse sexual and gendered experiences, as well as their families, in addition to various professional communities and society at large; and developing our discourse by expanding the lens of our political analysis in a way that links, rather than separates, the multiple axes of oppression.

The bulk of this report highlights our most significant **Projects & Accomplishments** of 2018. We made progress in **Building Local Leadership and Public Visibility**,

with several public events in Ramallah, as well as a new LGBTQ/queer group in Nablus. We also managed to establish a legal coalition with human rights organizations to address sexual and gender diversity issues, in addition to making several appearances in local media.

Our **Support and Counseling Projects** are still going strong, with [alKhat - Listening & Information Hotline](#) closing its eighth year with growing numbers of volunteers on our team as well as people reached by these services. Following the new [volunteer training](#), we built our team to 17 volunteers. Our TransFocus project is also making progress by reaching 7 volunteers supporting 15 individuals from different places. As for our youth groups, we conducted two in 2018 in Nazareth and Yaffa, both unique in their diversely gendered experiences. We also responded to people in crisis or facing emergencies.

alQaws Trainings also had a big year. We provided 100 hours of training to 200 people from different backgrounds. Our largest was a 10-session high school training course in I'billin in the Galilee.

In 2018, we published our **Mental Health Guidebook** during a study day in Ramallah attended by over 70 mental health professionals, followed by multiple discussion events throughout the year held in Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Shefa-'Amr.

Last but not least, 2018 was a great year for alQaws' **Cultural Productions**. Most notably, we relaunched our music production project [Singing Sexuality](#) with 3 brand new song releases. We also launched our new art project, "[Tarwiha](#)" comic series, tackling the experiences of teenagers; the comic release was supplemented by 2 discussion events in Haifa and Jerusalem. Finally, we cannot forget our Third Academic School for Sexual and Gender Diversity, which was a space for vibrant dialogue, contemplation, and analysis.

alQaws' Impact: Visible & Persistent

Over the last three years, as we brought our 2016-2018 strategic plan to life, we were able to more clearly see the internal and external impact of our work. This was highlighted by measurable achievements in alQaws' [projects and programs](#). The past few years marked a massive milestone in alQaws' journey. We wrapped up ten years of institutionalized work, employing programs and strategies developed through our field experience and implemented all over Palestine. Studying our work over the past decade of queer organizing in Palestine allowed us to feel the extent of transformation in alQaws' activists and leadership, as well as in our society at large. This strengthened our belief in the work we do and strategies we choose.

At the end of 2015, we sat down to create a strategic plan for the three years ahead. With a lot of excitement and determination, as well as some anticipation and eagerness, we set clear goals for ourselves: expanding community organizing to new places in Palestine; enriching alQaws as a renewable source of knowledge; bolstering our media and cultural work; and broadening our community outreach to include people with societal influence like teachers, lawyers, and mental health professionals, among others.

These goals were the main driver of our work for the past three years. We were determined to achieve them in all levels of our work, from building entire projects to the minute details and complexities of our day-to-day. We kept aiming for them, growing ever more determined to reach them on the path to achieve our larger goal – changing how society in Palestine navigates sexual and gender diversity issues.

We are ever cognizant of the fact that change and making an impact are not achieved through a magic formula, nor can they be calculated, assessed, or observed through a report or an article. Change is a holistic, complex, and long-term process that cannot simply be achieved in three or even ten years. It will also not be brought on solely by alQaws, especially in the pursuit of radical and indivisible change, as we imagine it at alQaws.

Yet, today we are able to see the fruits of our labor over all these years. We can confidently say: Yes, we have made giant strides in sexual and gender diversity issues in Palestine, and we are celebrating our accomplishments.

We witness this shift in addressing sexual and gender diversity issues on a community level, as well as on the structural levels of civil society. A transformation in attitudes within organizations and individuals has ended the era of avoiding these topics. We also see this shift in the wider social discourse as it starts to tackle the normalization of violence against LGBTQ/queer people. We sense this change in local organizations who can no longer ignore alQaws as a major player in Palestinian civil society that has been working in the field for years.

The most significant impact of our work in recent years is the growing ability of LGBTQ/queer individuals and communities to be fully present and more visible in public spaces in big cities like Haifa, Yaffa, and Ramallah. This was echoed by alQaws' activists directly bringing their queer experiences to our cultural productions. For example, the second iteration of our music production project [Singing Sexuality](#) markedly differed from the first. In this new round of production and releases, queer artists were at the forefront, especially women, as well as artists from Jerusalem and the West Bank. This made it possible for Singing Sexuality 2 to focus on the lived and personal queer experiences of individuals and communities.

We also noticed the proliferation of sexual and gender diversity topics in public discourse no longer framed as a marginal concern, but as societal issues in their own right. The most significant milestone in this regard came with the launch of our social media campaign [Difference Never Justifies Violence](#), which addressed violence against LGBTQ/queer individuals in Palestine. In this project, alQaws shifted from simply reacting to violence to directly speaking to society, calling for

the delegitimization of physical, verbal, and institutional violence against LGBTQ/queer people. This message reached more than 400,000 viewers on social media, and advanced alQaws' position in the social media field. alQaws' efforts in recent years also pressured local media to further address sexual and gender diversity issues. We believe that this shift in alQaws' media presence is only the first step in building our local media program. We will continue to develop new long-term strategies to sustain this work in the coming years.

In recent years, we witnessed a growing attitude of legitimacy towards sexual and gender diversity issues, as evidenced by the interest and involvement of influential organizations and individuals in our work. Not only has the number of people and organizations engaging directly with our work greatly increased, but more importantly they have become more deeply committed to constructively contributing to public dialogue. Some of the most significant examples include: partnering with [zameh – The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media](#) on our project [Different Never Justifies Violence](#); partnering with [Jadaliyya](#) to publish the [articles](#) from alQaws' second academic school; and engaging influential mental health professionals in a committee that worked on publishing the first Arabic-language guidebook for mental health professionals in the region that addresses sexual and gender diversity issues. The biggest challenge in the coming years will be to sustain these relationships and transform them into strategic long-term partnerships by working to continuously engage additional individuals and organizations in our work.

Additionally, in the last few years we were able to work more extensively with schools and to develop alQaws' educational approach. The school system has always been one of the most difficult institutions for alQaws to access and engage in sexual and gender diversity discussions, due to its traditional status in society and its connection to family and other social institutions. But after extensive strategic work, alQaws developed its relationship with the teachers and educational staff at different schools. This allowed alQaws to bring its trainings to many schools, and to build mutual trust by offering trainings that meet the needs of schools, teachers, and counselors and encourage them to address sexual and gender diversity in schools in a more healthy and professional way.

Looking back at the last three years, starting with the 2015 strategic planning process and until today, we discover the progress we made and the accomplishments we celebrated, the challenges and hardships, the questions and uncertainty, and even the disappointments and missteps. All of these experiences lead us to say that alQaws' impact is now visible, and we are determined to keep it persistent.

Future Plans: Greater Visibility, More Spaces

The strategic plan for the next three years 2019-2021 has undergone a rich and exciting process, starting with the core ideas that began to form from our daily work during the last few years and up until we had in front of us a fully comprehensive plan mapping out our work in the years ahead.

The process started—as usual—with our first and greatest resource: alQaws' activists. By conducting activist focus groups in Haifa, Yaffa, and Ramallah, we collaboratively drew the outlines of this plan.

alQaws' board and staff then absorbed this raw excitement and passion and took on the task of turning it into strategy. The months-long process of meetings and long hours of discussion involved analyzing our impact since 2016, especially with: the growing visibility of sexual and gender diversity issues in public discourse; the deeper engagement of mental health professionals, civil society organization, and schools in discussion; the significance of developing activist leadership spaces; and the outreach to more youth through cultural productions and social media.

After the first draft of the plan was prepared, we held another round of activist focus groups to make sure that it aligned with their needs and aspirations for the coming years.

In this new strategic plan, alQaws views itself as a *grassroots community-based organization*. Therefore, alQaws is committed to restructuring its work and priorities by positioning activists at the center of the work, and reconstructing

its organizational structures, value and strategies in order to serve this purpose. To achieve this vision, we set three new strategic goals that, we believe, perfectly intersect to breathe life into a community-based grassroots movement in resonance with the change we want to create.

In the next three years, alQaws aims to grow the visibility of sexual and gender diversity issues, alQaws' work, and the experiences of our activists on all levels, as well as strive to increase the **visibility of allies** and partner organizations addressing sexual and gender diversity issues. alQaws also aim to provide diverse spaces for LGBTQ/queer people and their families, various professional communities, and society at large in order to **foster direct and constructive dialogue, individual and collective self-development, and sustainable social change**. Additionally, alQaws aims to develop its discourse by expanding the lens of our political analysis in a way that does not separate the multiple axes of oppression, particularly the connection between colonial and social/patriarchal violence, and **make this analysis accessible** to different parts of society, especially among LGBTQ/queer groups by **embedding** it in our work for social change.

When we mention our commitment to growing visibility, we mean our commitment to sustaining our long-term work to systematically and directly bring sexual and gender diversity issues into public space, such as traditional and social media, civil society organizations, and the discourse of professional institutions, such as mental health institutions, among others. Yet, we believe that this type of visibility remains limited. So, in this plan we also hope to support allies and movements standing in solidarity with us, as well as LGBTQ/queer people, in openly sharing their experiences with the struggle against sexual and gender-based oppression.

The second goal commits us to building and providing diverse spaces (for support, dialogue, community-building, etc.) This is our response to the exclusion and marginalization of LGBTQ/queer experiences in public and private space. Through our work, we noticed that providing spaces allows individuals and communities to share their experiences, and allows them the opportunity to deconstruct and understand those experiences in a holistic way that allows individuals —queer and nonqueer alike—to be actively contribute to their communities. These spaces allow people to express a part of themselves they were made to believe they should

silence and ignore. We strive to provide spaces to have external dialogue, not only within alQaws. These spaces foster a mutual responsibility, familiarity, dialogue, and solidarity among different parts of society. These spaces serve as a platform to share diverse models and experiences of LGBTQ/queer life in Palestinian society. alQaws also views these spaces as a preventative measure in combating the widespread legitimacy of social violence against LGBTQ/queer people.

The third goal speaks to alQaws' political alignment as an *anti-colonial grassroots community-based organization*. alQaws stands against colonial strategies that work to emotionally, mentally, and physically exile Palestinians as a whole from their society and land. The integration of this dialectic of colonial and community violence needs to be reflected in all alQaws programs, organizational structures, and discourse. We will make this discourse accessible by connecting it to people's lived experiences embodying this dialectic. Sustainable change towards the freedom of our bodies and lives is impossible without the direct resistance of colonial and patriarchal-sexual oppression in Palestine.

In terms of the groups we work with, our main target group remains LGBTQ/queer people from all over Palestine. However, in this plan, we wish to expand this to also include the families of LGBTQ/queer people, professionals such as mental health professionals, journalists, and artists, and last but not least schools, counselors, and teachers.

Our plan to work with families comes from our understanding of the central role of family in Palestinian society, and its massive impact on individuals. As for schools, counselors, and teachers, we believe it is critical to bring change to one of the most influential institutions in a person's life and upbringing. School fills a central space and time in most Palestinian people's lives.

We have a lot of work ahead of us, and this is definitely no easy task. Yet we carry with us our activists' and friends' ceaseless willpower and energy, confidently marching on towards the social change that will create the possibility of a better life for people in Palestine.

2018 Highlights: Projects & Accomplishments

Building Local Leadership and Public Visibility

Tearing Down the Walls in Ramallah

Inside the walls of alQaws' community space in Ramallah there is a flurry of different activities, whether intellectual discussions, planning meetings, drag shows, social events, or fun competitions. In the past year, we managed to tear down the physical limitations of this community space and expand our work outwards in quantity and quality.

The exponential growth of our organizing work in Ramallah, reaching a larger number of activists and participants, pushed us to expand our spaces to engage friends, allies, and others in discussions or activities about sexual and gender diversity. In 2018 we started holding open, public discussion activities in Ramallah, reaching four events by the end of the year. People from different academic, professional, and geographical backgrounds joined the conversation to discuss our roles, responsibilities, relationships, and influence regarding sexual and gender diversity and building a holistic discourse on sexuality.

In addition to the ally meetups, we also organized three rounds of our intellectual forum *Hawamesh (Margins)*, which aims to center and solidify sexual and gender diversity issues in public discussion. In 2018, Hawamesh

discussions in Ramallah covered: the economics of desire, how medical and psychological institutions navigate sexual and gender diversity, and gay tourism as a colonial enterprise.

Our ally meetups and Hawamesh discussions drew interest from a large number of people who enthusiastically participated in the dialogue. No less than 20 people attended each event, some even reached 40 in attendance. This strong and growing interest highlights the need to nurture these spaces in coming years.

Community Organizing in Nablus

We learned over the last few years that each area in Palestine has its own social and political context that requires different approaches. Since we operate nationally in contextually different and colonially divided areas, we have always worked hard to empower our local activists and leadership to build the strategies that make sense for their local circumstances.

Following this strategy, in 2018 we started to form a core group of LGBTQ/queer activists in Nablus—a completely new venture for us. Palestinians refer to the city as *the mountain of fire*, and this new group truly lit that fire under us. The significance of this group comes from what it offers in mutual support, collective thinking, and tools to influence its members' realities. The Nablus group is unique in the way it has grown almost solely due to the effort of the activists and participants attracting and inviting new people to join, some of them university students and others from surrounding areas, reaching 12 group members. The group met every two weeks on average for the entire duration of the year, bringing intellectual, personal, and organizing issues and discussions to the table.

alQaws' national leadership, which comprises leading activists from different areas in Palestine, also expanded to include some of the core activists from the Nablus group. This diversity in our national leadership brings new energy to the work we are constantly developing, creating a vibrant mosaic of experiences that enrich our work across Palestine.

Working with Human Rights Organizations

The complex political context in Palestine establishes an equally complex and ambiguous legal system, which creates a difficult environment to navigate. Aside from that, alQaws has always questioned the efficacy of working within a legal or human rights framework, due to our belief that these systems potentially legitimize the same oppressive state-structures we seek to challenge.

However, as the cases of human rights violations started to pile up, which are of course connected to the larger political situation in Palestine, we realized that we cannot escape this interaction with human rights frameworks tackling sexual and gender diversity. So, in 2017 we started working with Palestinian and international human rights organizations by holding an intensive workshop in Ramallah with Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Independent Commission for Human Rights, and Al-Haq, among others.

In 2018, we organized another workshop in Ramallah to build on the last. A large number of organizations gathered again to discuss the legal reality of sexual and gender diversity issues in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They also discussed the major challenges facing human rights organizations and their staff when addressing these topics in the field.

This ongoing work culminated in the establishment of a coalition of 6 organizations, including alQaws, which takes it upon itself to provide legal protection for LGBTQ/queer people who experience such violations. This joint effort not only covers violations by the state and its agencies, but also addresses social violence, and works in parallel with alQaws' ongoing advocacy to influence the internal policies of human rights organizations regarding these issues.

alQaws on Screen

In this day and age, digital and virtual spaces have become an essential part of public space. Reaching these spaces with discourse and content has become a requirement of any social change movement that aims to influence people's attitudes and therefore their behaviors. In the last two years, we strived to bolster alQaws' presence in digital spaces, boosting our on-screen time on people's computers, mobile phones, social media, and even traditional televisions.

The campaign [Difference Never Justifies Violence](#) that we launched in 2017 marked a significant milestone in our social media journey. We built on that achievement and worked systematically and deliberately to grow our audience and elevate the discourse on our social media pages. We end 2018 with 12K followers on [Facebook](#) who interacted with our posts, whether our own original content like our comic series and released singles, or what we share from other Arabic-language platforms and websites about sexual and gender diversity.

Although Facebook remains the most popular social media platform with the biggest reach, we recently revived our [Instagram](#) page, which was the main platform to share our comic series [Tarwiha](#) targeting a younger audience. We also started posting on [Twitter](#) more frequently.

In addition to our own media, we had a greater presence on different Palestinian media outlets. Despite the difficulty of reaching popular Palestinian media platforms, in 2018 we witnessed significant progress in this area. While many may not have published pieces on sexual and gender diversity, they still reached out to us and had an open and preliminary dialogue about covering these topics.

For example, in 2018 we invested in opening a discussion among young Palestinian queer communities about pinkwashing through written [material](#) that resonated with many audiences, and through TV [appearances](#) where we spoke about this topic. A local radio station in Bethlehem also [interviewed](#) us in an episode discussing homosexuality. But perhaps the

most significant development is that local news outlets are covering our events and [activities](#), which is what we want to further promote in the coming years as it constitutes a shift in alQaws' visibility and exposure in public space.

Support and Counseling Projects

In this midst of our large-scale community and political work—from cultural productions and social change to fighting pinkwashing policies—we make sure not to forget about the basic services that Palestinian LGBTQ/queer individuals need. The personal experiences of alQaws' activists form the solid foundation on which our support and counseling projects stand, as these services adopt a peer support approach combined with ongoing proper professional supervision.

On the Line

We launched [alKhat—Listening and Information Hotline](#) in 2010, which received 56 callers in its first year. In 2018, 8 years after its initial launch, the service provided support for 311 callers. alKhat lends a listening ear to LGBTQ/queer people and provides them with information relevant to their diverse experiences. In recent years, the hotline also started to serve as a hub for people interested in getting involved with alQaws' projects and activities, as well as a resource for callers who need referrals to mental health professionals that we have networked with.

Every Sunday and Wednesday from 5pm to 9pm, two volunteers from our activist base sit down prepared to support people on the phone and through the chat service alKhat offers. Prior to joining the team, volunteers go through a training course, and then receive periodic individual and group supervision to provide them with the chance to reflect and assess their own experience in providing this service.



By the end of 2018, following the most recent volunteer [training course](#) held between September and November, six new volunteers, mostly from Yaffa, joined the team that now comprises 17 volunteers in total.

At the start of each shift, we always make sure to promote alKhat on alQaws' social media pages. In 2018, we noticed that the nature of calls we receive tends to match the type of messaging in the promotion. When the promotional post mentions relationships, family, or freedom for example, callers tend to talk mostly about that topic. This encourages us to constantly find creative ways to promote alKhat. It is worth noting that the most common concern for callers is the challenges in their relationship with their family and society, which further burdens them in the process of exploring and navigating their sexual identity.

Next year, we look forward to heavily advertising the service through two mini-campaigns at the start and middle of 2019, in addition to launching our new and more secure website and improved chat system. On a less technical level, we are planning to develop the service's supervision and evaluation approach, including an annual workshop to build the volunteer's leadership and professional capacities.

TransFocus

Out of our hotline service, another project was born two years ago. TransFocus is an individual support service specifically for people of trans experience, providing moral support, information about transitioning, and physically escorting people during their visits to medical and mental health institutions, among other resources.

These services are provided by a team of alQaws' activists from Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nazareth and Akka, which grew to 7 volunteers in 2018. Volunteers support trans individuals as their capacities and resources allow. In 2018 the team was able to support 15 individuals, 8 of whom received ongoing and intensive yearlong support.

Most of the individuals receiving this service live far from big cities, and

therefore have little access to the growing urban trans communities. These more remote and marginalized locations can amplify the feelings of isolation and confusion for a trans person.

The service, as well as the volunteer supervision, takes an individual approach. This challenges us to think about how we can build more collective approaches to trans support in the coming years in order to provide a supportive learning environment for everyone involved.

Youth Groups

Alongside the usual individual approach to support and counseling services, we are also conscious about the value of collectively analyzing our experiences and employing them in the path towards a better future. From this perspective comes the significance of alQaws' youth groups. *Myself, My Sexuality, and Society: Exploring, Knowledge, and Impact* is the name we use to refer to our youth groups, as they contribute to building and mobilizing active and impactful LGBTQ/queer communities, while at the same time providing support to the participants.

2018 started as we were concluding our first-ever youth [group](#) in Nazareth, with another group held in [Yaffa](#) at the end of the year. Each group is a new and rich experience for us, yet the groups in 2018 were more diverse in gender identity than ever before—something we constantly strive to achieve in all of alQaws' spaces.

Both of the groups, ranging between 8 and 10 members, met weekly for 12 sessions conducted by specialized group facilitators. It is no secret that each group's context, including geographical location, age range, and sexual identity development, influences its own process and the discussions brought to the table.

Our youth groups will continue in 2019, as we plan to hold three new groups in different areas, and hope to expand the professional team in the coming years.

In times of need

In addition to alQaws' *official* projects, our activists never falter to provide any service or support to LGBTQ/queer people in need or crisis. Activists have put their hearts and souls into helping every case of emergency that has reached them, whether anticipated or urgent and unexpected.

It is difficult to categorize this type of work under a specific project, yet it represents the spirit of giving and volunteering that alQaws' activists carry with them. Our crisis intervention cases were extremely varied, from financial support and providing shelter due to confrontation with family, or legal intervention in cases of arrests or violations by state agents, as well as helping in cases of threats and blackmail.

It is extremely challenging to continue working on these cases, as they arise at random and are unpredictable, which makes it difficult to clearly strategize or build an intervention mechanism. However, we will continue to strengthen the role of our activist groups doing this type of community support, such that they themselves become a resource for people in crisis to count on.

alQaws Educational Trainings

One of the unique aspects of alQaws' trainings is the massive geographical, professional, and academic diversity of their target groups, which in turn determines the type and length of each training course. Geographically, our trainings covered areas from the occupied Syrian Golan in the north down to Jerusalem. Professionally, we provided training courses for teachers, counselors, hotline volunteers in feminist organizations, and even college students.

Participants ranged from those knowledgeable about sexual and gender diversity to people exposed to these topics for the first time. About 200 participants joined our different trainings and courses in 2018.

As much as this diversity in participants can be challenging for the activists providing the training, it also excites those trainers and enriches the education

process. In 2018, we provided over 100 hours of training, comprising 33 sessions, from educational one-time workshops (2 workshops), to our basic training courses (6 courses), as well as workshops for schools, and even an extended [course](#) of 30 hours held at a middle school in Ibillin in the north.

alQaw's training courses provide essential information about sexual and gender diversity issues, such as sexual identity, and frame these issues as part of the political and social context in Palestine. They also serve to analyze personal experiences in their own contexts. In 2018, we held two training courses in Jerusalem, two in Haifa, as well as in Nazareth, and at Birzeit University.

Back to School

Despite the complexities of working with schools, we have always made sure to keep the lines of communication open to this institution by offering training courses that target how schools navigate sexual and gender diversity. At the start of the school year we mailed out over 300 invitations to schools around Palestine, successfully starting a direct conversation with 20 different schools who have shared their challenges in addressing these topics.

Alongside the short training workshops we conducted for two schools in Haifa and Jerusalem, the milestone we reached in the education field came with the extensive [10-session training course in Mar Elias Middle School in Ibillin](#). More than 20 teachers and counselors attended the course, which provided vital knowledge but more importantly a space for teachers to share their questions and challenges related to the topic. Sessions covered sexual identity, gender-based violence, and the teachers' role in addressing violence targeting sexual and gender diversity, among others.



A discussion at Birzeit University

Mental Health Guidebook

The guidebook [Introduction to Sexual and Gender Diversity for Mental Health Professionals](#) was written mainly, as the title suggests, for mental health professionals. However, from its initial launch it attracted all types of people from different social and professional backgrounds. The guidebook was launched in February 2018, but the discussion in professional circles lasted all year long. This opened our eyes to the thirst for this type of responsible and conscientious discussion in the mental health field.

In 2014 alQaws started conducting supervision and advocacy groups for Palestinian psychologists, aiming to expand their knowledge base on sexual and gender diversity. These groups have so far been based in Haifa and Ramallah, and originally responded to the need expressed for years by both mental health professionals and LGBTQ/queer individuals seeking their services. The aforementioned guidebook was one of the recommendations of the first therapist advocacy group in Ramallah, which was held for a full year with activists from alQaws and conducted by an external educational consultant.

The 90-page guidebook consists of 8 chapters, in addition to a letter from the guidebook committee and an introduction explaining the outline of the book. The chapters tackle basic concepts and more advanced theory, as well as applied knowledge and practical recommendations that can assist mental health workers in more professionally addressing these issues.

Supervising the writing process was a professional committee of 4 psychologists from several areas in Palestine and with different academic and clinical backgrounds. In addition to activist and writer Muhammad Abu-Rmeileh, the committee consisted of: Yoad Ghanadry-Hakim, psychologist and head of the [Arab Psychological Association](#); Fathy Flefel, therapist and Head of the Psychosocial Resource Center at the Palestine Red Crescent Society; Mustafa Qossoqsi, clinical and educational psychologist; and Mustafa Shalata, psychological and educational consultant.

Launch in Ramallah

After the release of the the guidebook online, alQaws organized a study day on [Sexual and Gender Diversity Issues in Psychological Intervention](#)

attended by over 70 people in the mental health field or interested in alQaws' work. The panels discussed several topics, and attendees talked about their professional experiences with sexual and gender diversity issues. The guidebook was extremely well received and the boxes full of tens of copies were empty by the end of the day.

The study day was organized as the advocacy activity required of the first therapist advocacy group in Ramallah. The event included lectures and panels addressing essential concepts related to sexual and gender diversity, as well as the individual, familial, and societal dimensions influencing queer experiences, particularly the experiences of same-sex attracted people and people of trans experiences, and how all of these factors manifest in counseling or therapy.



The study day in Ramallah

More Discussion Circles

The study day was the first—but far from the last—space to discuss the guidebook. Picture a Birzeit University classroom filled to the brim with students from different majors coming to discuss the history of sexual and gender diversity in psychology—a speaking opportunity we were thrilled to accept: to an event independently organized by the university's Social and Behavioral Science Club.



in Jerusalem

in Shefa-'Amr

We organized three additional discussions in [Jerusalem](#), [Shefa-'Amr](#), and [Ramallah](#) again. These events brought up some excellent questions and issues facing mental health professionals, and indeed society at large, when navigating sexual and gender diversity.

At the end of the year, we combined these questions and points in an article published on the gender and sexuality online resource [Jeem](#). We have also started planning the next steps to build on this learning process and to create more professional local knowledge.

The topics covered in each discussion varied. In Ramallah, head of the Psychosocial Resource Center at the Palestine Red Crescent Society Fathy Flefel and counselor Fida' Elayan led the conversation. In Jerusalem, clinical psychologist and head of the Arab Psychological Association Yoad Ghanadry-Hakim opened the evening with an introduction about the therapist's role in navigating sexual and gender diversity issues. In Shefa-'Amr, developmental psychologist Hanan Khamees-Zo'abi and psychologists Tony Haddad and Mustafa Qossoqsi engaged participants in a productive dialogue. The last two events were organized with the [Arab Psychological Association](#).

Media and Cultural Productions

After years of working on queer cultural productions here and there, we started to solidify our approach to these projects and turn them into a fixed and essential part of alQaws' work. The significance of cultural projects is their ability to translate alQaws' ideology into creative and artistic messages, which in a way liberates them from the common traps of discourse-heavy content, whether educational, social, or political. In our experience, these aesthetically accessible productions tend to garner an impressively wider reach and resonance beyond our usual audience.

The first step in this new approach was our investment in a new staff member to coordinate these projects and organize the activists interested in implementing this

type of work. In 2018 we carried on with some of our existing projects, such as the academic school and Singing Sexuality, as well as explored new types of media with the comic series [Tarwiha](#).

Still, we sing

In the music production field, the [Singing Sexuality](#) album released in 2013 has reached tens of thousands of listeners on different platforms. The legacy of this project as one of the most popular and widespread projects we have ever done has followed us since, compelling us to revive it.

We turned our microphones on once again in 2018. This time the singles tackled different sexual, emotional, and gendered experiences. Singer-songwriter Yusor from Ramallah wrote and recorded the single [el-Ossa Hiyyi Hiyyi](#) (Same Old Story) as a candid account of how many LGBTQ/queer relationships are constantly scrutinized and challenged by society, leaving the people involved in a constant state of uncertainty.

Starting our summer with Yusor's single, we ended the warm season with a



el-Ossa Hiyyi Hiyyi (Same Old Story)



Ma Betghayyerni (You Won't Change Me)



Khali Hobbak Yekhtar (Let Your Love Decide)

second single titled [Ma Betghayyerni](#) (You Won't Change Me) recorded by the Jerusalem-based artist Bashar Murad. The lyrics call the audience to confront and challenge the violence targeting LGBTQ/queer people. A few months later, we ended 2018 with [Khali Hobbak Yekhtar](#) (Let Your Love Decide), featuring a different voice and musical style recorded by Darbet Shams, a group based in Haifa.

Today, Singing Sexuality still sings its lyrics loud and clear, and we still feel excited when we hear the songs playing at a restaurant, on the bus, or even on our activists' and friends' phones.

Comically Poignant

If music is a more familiar art form—both to alQaws and Palestinian/Arab audiences—we were definitely more adventurously experimental with the launch of our new comic series. [Tarwiha](#) tells the stories of four queer kids at school, whose their lives differ yet intersect.

From years of working in schools with teachers and counselors, as well as with LGBTQ/queer students, it became clear that their experiences needed to be amplified through an attractive and accessible format. We released eight episodes of Tarwiha addressing different themes: family relationships, bullying in school, and violence through social media, and other issues that closely resonate with LGBTQ/queer teenagers and youth.

The original idea for the comic series came two years ago during one of our national leadership meetups. The first step in this ambitious process was to meet with LGBTQ/queer youth in that age range, to make sure that the experiences highlighted would be sincere and realistic. Following that, we embarked on a fun but challenging journey to translate



those stories, situations, and experiences into a written format. Turning the text into drawings, we collaborated with alQaws activist and artist [Haitham Haddad](#), whose unique and incredible touch gave this project its special quality.

After all 8 episodes were released between May and November on the comic series' website and alQaws' social media pages, we created a printed comic book for physical distribution. We organized two launch events in [Haifa](#) and [Jerusalem](#) for the Tarwiha comic book, which included panels and discussions presented by activists about the the process of creating the series and the challenges we faced, including the issues of representation, language, and realistic depiction of lived experiences. We also hosted professionals from the education field to speak about the themes featured in Tarwiha, and from the visual arts field to provide artistic critiques.



The comic book discussion in Haifa

Academia, Grounded in Reality

In August, we held our [Third Academic School](#) for Sexual and Gender Diversity, which took up the theme of “violence” as a topic to analyze through the lens of sexual politics under colonialism. The academic school is extremely valuable to our work, as it gives us the space to reflect and analyze our context, building a strong ideological foundation for our political and social change strategies.

A total of 35 participants attended the Academic School, in addition to several lecturers and members of alQaws' organizing committee. Attendees from different academic and professional backgrounds joined the three-day event, which included theoretical concepts, personal testimonies, discussion groups, as well as analysis of visual and written media related to these topics.

Speakers included researchers and academics from Palestinian universities and abroad, as well as activists involved in different social and political movements and groups in Palestine. More importantly, the conversation does not stop there, as we continue to work with some of the participants to write papers delving into the themes discussed at the academic school. We are planning to publish those papers next year in collaboration with Palestinian or Arabic platforms.



The second day of the academic school

Conclusion

Our dear audience, friends, and allies,

Whether you examined every line of this report, simply skimmed the headlines, or even just read these last few words, we are glad to share this celebratory moment with you as we end 2018 and start yet another year of hard work. It was not easy to summarize everything that happened in the last year in these pages. We unfortunately cannot share some of the day-to-day work, events, and developments in alQaws, but we tried to present a comprehensive picture of our exciting year.

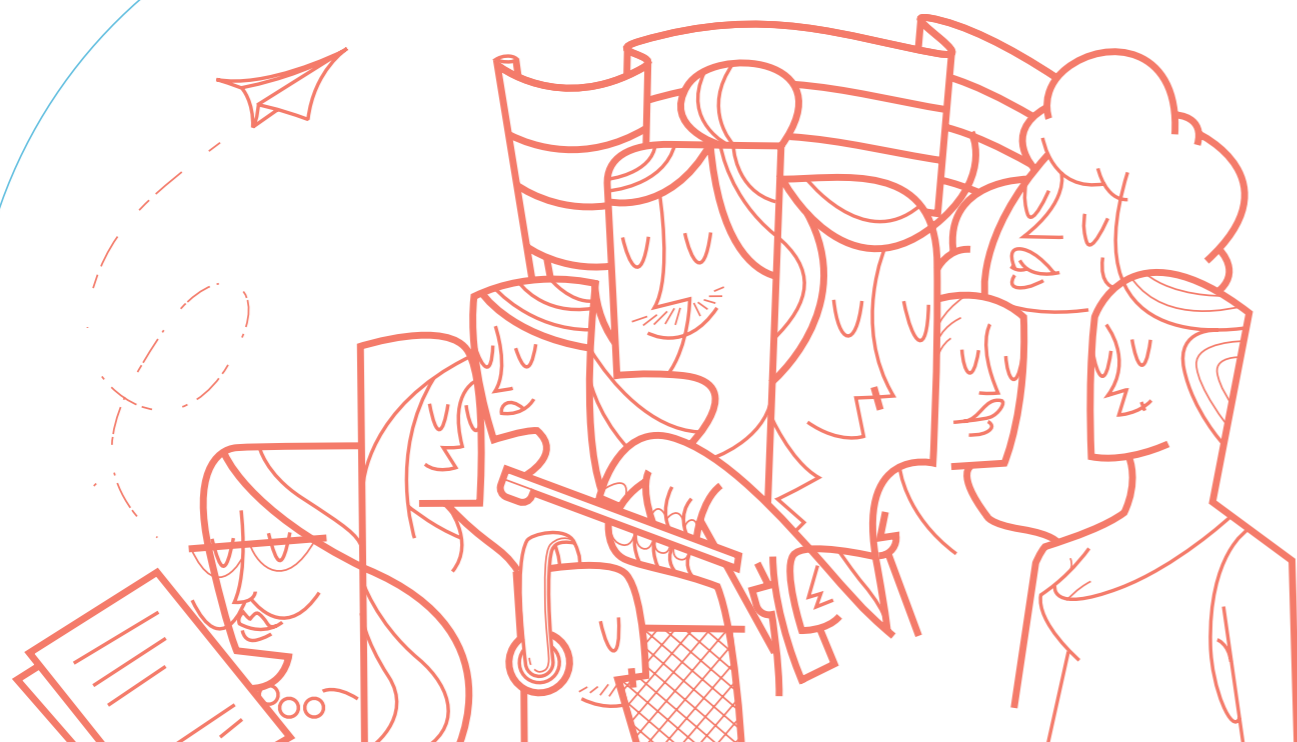
If these pages left you with any questions or ideas regarding our work, we urge you to reach out to us directly and ask via [email](#) or [social media](#), and perhaps to enrich our work with your perspective.

We say goodbye to 2018 as we open a new page for the new year, that will definitely be no less inspiring or hectic, and with a lot of ideas and high hopes. We will start working with families of LGBTQ/queer individuals, continue to produce queer educational comics for teenagers and youth, and prepare for another massive campaign, among other ventures.

In 2018, we launched an online crowdfunding [campaign](#) to help us press ahead towards an exciting future. Thanks to your online and offline donations, we reached our goal of \$10,000. The invitation is still open for you to extend your support, generosity, and trust through [our website](#).

Financial support is not the way to help. We extremely value having you with us in our journey by sharing your ideas, being present, and connecting to our message. Simply put, we want you here with us as we transform our reality on the path towards embracing sexual and gender diversity, and developing a holistic and progressive discourse on sexuality.

We hope that you will raise your voice, echo our message, and march hand in hand with us on this journey. And we hope that we can honor both the responsibility we took upon ourselves, and the trust you have in us.





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