

# Annex II: Letter to Grindr

## HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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Jack Harrison-Quintana  
Director  
Grindr for Equality  
February 3, 2023

Dear Mr. Harrison-Quintana,

I am writing to you on behalf of Human Rights Watch to notify you of research we have conducted on a range of online abuses faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, including on Grindr, and to ask you to solicit Grindr's perspective. In addition, I would like to invite your response to several specific questions that have stemmed from the research.

In February, we will publish our research documenting the use of digital targeting by security forces and its far-reaching offline consequences — including arbitrary detention and torture—in five countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. It also exposes how security forces employ digital targeting as a means of gathering or creating digital evidence to support prosecutions against LGBT people. It is based on 120 interviews, including 90 with LGBT people affected by digital targeting and 30 with expert representatives, such as lawyers and digital rights professionals. As you may know, authorities in the MENA region systematically target LGBT people, including by weaponizing laws that criminalize same-sex conduct and discriminate against LGBT people.<sup>1</sup>

Human Rights Watch found that security forces have entrapped LGBT people, including on Grindr, subjected them to online extortion, online harassment, and outing, and relied on illegitimately obtained digital photos, chats, and similar information in prosecutions, in violation of the right to privacy and other human rights.

Human Rights Watch found that security forces create fake profiles to impersonate LGBT people and entrap them on social media platforms, including Grindr, and unlawfully search LGBT people's personal devices to collect private information to enable their prosecution. Across the five countries covered, security forces searched LGBT people's phones by forcing them to unlock their devices under duress — by beating them or threatening them with violence. Security forces and prosecutors used photos, chats, and dating applications, such as Grindr, on LGBT people's phones as a basis for their prosecution and abuses against them. They targeted and persecuted people based on their presumed or actual sexual orientation or gender identity.

<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch, *"The Love that Dare Not Speak Its Name,"* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2019), [http://internmap.hrw.org/features/features/lgbt\\_laws/](http://internmap.hrw.org/features/features/lgbt_laws/).



[www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)

Human Rights Watch documented 20 cases of online entrapment, including on Grindr, by security forces in Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan. Sixteen of those entrapped were arrested by security forces and subsequently detained. The immediate offline consequences of entrapment range from arbitrary arrest to torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual assault, in detention.

Human Rights Watch documented 17 cases of online extortion by private individuals, including on Grindr, in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. Extortionists often pretended to be LGBT people in order to gain their victim's trust, along with details about their personal lives—particularly digital information relating to their sexual orientation or gender identity—that can be used as blackmail. In most cases, the alleged extortionist used that online information to extort people offline. Organized gangs in Egypt and armed groups in Iraq are among the perpetrators of extortion.

In order for our report to be as complete as possible, we would greatly appreciate your responses to the following questions:

- 1) What steps, if any, has Grindr undertaken or does Grindr plan to undertake to effectively moderate content on public platforms for hate speech, incitement to violence, discrimination, or hostility, against LGBT people in the MENA region, including by proactively removing abusive content that violates platform guidelines?

In terms of Grindr's content moderation, we request the following information:

- a. Please provide the number of content moderators at Grindr currently moderating content originating from the MENA region. What number of these content moderators are proficient in Arabic, including the dialects of the countries they work on?
  - b. We recognize that Grindr does provide training on human rights in general, and LGBT rights in particular, to content moderators working to moderate content originating from the MENA region. Please provide details on Grindr's current training program. In addition, please indicate if content moderators are trained on the adverse impacts of digital targeting, particularly against vulnerable groups, such as LGBT people in the MENA region.
- 2) What steps, if any, has Grindr undertaken or does Grindr plan to undertake to ensure a more effective, survivor-centered response to account reporting?

In terms of Grindr's reporting mechanisms, we request the following information:

- a. Please indicate if Grindr is taking any measures to offer people the ability to track and manage their reports, and provide details of such measures.
- b. Please indicate if Grindr is taking any measures to present people who flag content with a log of content they have reported and the outcomes of moderation processes, and provide details of such measures.

- c. Please indicate if Grindr is taking any measures to create an avenue for people to provide anonymous feedback about the reporting experience and outcomes, and provide details of such measures.
  - d. Please indicate if Grindr is taking any measures to provide opportunities for people to provide additional context when reporting accounts or content, and provide details of such measures.
  - e. Please indicate if Grindr is taking any measures to allow people to flag if they are reporting in the same language as the abuse, and if they are not, to offer robust translation options, and provide details of such measures.
- 3) We recognize that Grindr published a “Holistic Security Guide” that encompasses multiple areas of user safety, including guidance on entrapment. Please indicate additional measures that Grindr has undertaken or that Grindr plans to undertake to protect LGBT people in MENA from being targeted by law enforcement impersonating LGBT people on its platform.
  - 4) What procedures does Grindr have in place so that people who are victims of extortion and subsequent human rights violations can quickly and expeditiously notify the company and seek a remedy?
  - 5) What steps, if any, has Grindr undertaken or does Grindr plan to undertake to ensure meaningful engagement with organizations defending LGBT and digital rights in the MENA region on the development of policies and features, from design to implementation and enforcement?
  - 6) What steps, if any, has Grindr undertaken or does Grindr plan to undertake to establish direct lines of communication between users and local or regional advocacy and support groups for rapid response to digital targeting threats?
  - 7) Does Grindr plan to conduct human rights due diligence, including periodical human rights impact assessments, that fully capture the adverse human rights impacts of digital targeting, and that include identifying, preventing, ceasing, mitigating, remediating, and accounting for potential and actual adverse impacts on human rights, including the rights of LGBT people in the MENA region? If so, please provide a concrete timeline for these reports.
  - 8) Does Grindr plan to scope human rights impact assessments to a particular country or regional context, and dedicate adequate time and resources into engaging rightsholders who are adversely impacted, including LGBT people? If so, please provide details of assessments Grindr has conducted, and a concrete timeline for future assessments.

We respectfully request that you provide us with a written response to these questions and any other information that you wish to provide by **February 20** so that we may have the opportunity to review and reflect it as appropriate in our reporting. We will post on our website relevant parts of any response received after that date.

Thank you in advance for considering our request. Should you have any clarificatory questions or comments, please feel free to reach out to my colleague Rasha Younes at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



Graeme Reid  
Director, LGBT Rights Program  
Human Rights Watch