

A Guide to

BALIK PANGKAL JALAN

A campaign toolkit for ending
conversion practices in Malaysia



Introduction

LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people in Malaysia continue to be subjected to the harmful practice of ‘rehabilitation’ or ‘conversion practices’, despite its discrediting by international medical, human rights, and other institutions for decades. The phrase ‘Balik Pangkal Jalan’, which translates to ‘returning to the “right” path’, is frequently employed to manipulate and guilt-trip LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people in Malaysia. Those who have undergone conversion practice endure a multitude of adverse consequences, including psychological distress, isolation, and the weight of societal expectations. It is high time that we raise our voices and take decisive action to put an end to this injustice.

Therefore, we are reclaiming the phrase ‘Balik Pangkal Jalan’ with the intention of guiding people back towards the path of acceptance and inclusion, as well as ensuring protection for LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people from harmful conversion practices. We invite you to join us in this important effort!

This toolkit is designed to empower you with the guidance and support needed, shedding light on the harms of conversion practices directed at LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people. You can utilise it in various settings — whether at your school, workplace, or simply for sharing with your family and friends. Together, let’s contribute to building a more compassionate and inclusive Malaysia and what requires change are the archaic, discriminatory, and harmful laws, not the LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people!

With pride and solidarity,
JUSTICE FOR SISTERS

Who are we?

We are **Justice for Sisters** — a human rights group working towards meaningful protection, promotion, and fulfilment of human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (LGBTIQ+), and gender-diverse people in Malaysia.

Contact us

Have questions regarding the campaign? Email us at:

info@justiceforsisters.org

The logo for Justice for Sisters, featuring the word "justice" in a white, cursive script font, and "FOR SISTERS" in a white, bold, sans-serif font below it.

What is in this toolkit?

- Conversion Practices in Malaysia
- How to take action?
- Key Dates
- Campaign Materials
- Samples of Key Messages
- Support



**“No pride for some of us
without liberation for all of us.”**

— Marsha P. Johnson

Conversion Practices in Malaysia

Conversion practices are harmful and discredited methods that aim to suppress a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (SOGIE). They are often disguised as 'corrective efforts' intended to steer individuals who identify as LGBTIQ+ or gender diverse back to what is deemed 'the right path'. In Malaysia, it is referred to as:

- **'rawatan dan pemulihan kecelaruan gender'** (treatment and rehabilitation of gender disorders)
- **'pemulihan, bimbingan, dan sokongan'** (rehabilitation, guidance, and support)
- **'kembali ke pangkal jalan' or 'kembali ke fitrah'** (return to 'the right path' or the 'natural' state)
- **hijrah** (ex-LGBTIQ+ and gender diverse people or a process of transitioning into something so-called 'better')

Globally, 'conversion practices' are implemented through three methods: psychotherapy, medical, and faith-based. In Malaysia, these practices are conducted by governmental agencies, state actors, and the general public. The objective of these practices is to 'rehabilitate' LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse individuals by coercing them to conform to a binary notion of SOGIE.

Previously, these practices were referred to as ‘conversion therapy.’ We have moved away from using the term ‘therapy’ because it falsely suggests that these practices are medically proven ‘treatments’ for LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse individuals, an idea that has been discredited for decades.

What requires change are the archaic, discriminatory, and harmful laws, not the LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people themselves!

Factoid: The term ‘therapy,’ originating from Greek roots, signifies ‘healing’. However, practices of “conversion therapy” are the very opposite: they are deeply harmful interventions founded on the medically incorrect notion that LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse individuals are unwell. These practices inflict severe pain and suffering, leading to enduring psychological and physical damage.

— Oxford English Dictionary¹

¹ Oxford English Dictionary, (2023). *Therapy*. Retrieved on 2nd December 2023 at: www.oed.com/dictionary/therapy_n?tab=factsheet#18826518

Take Action!



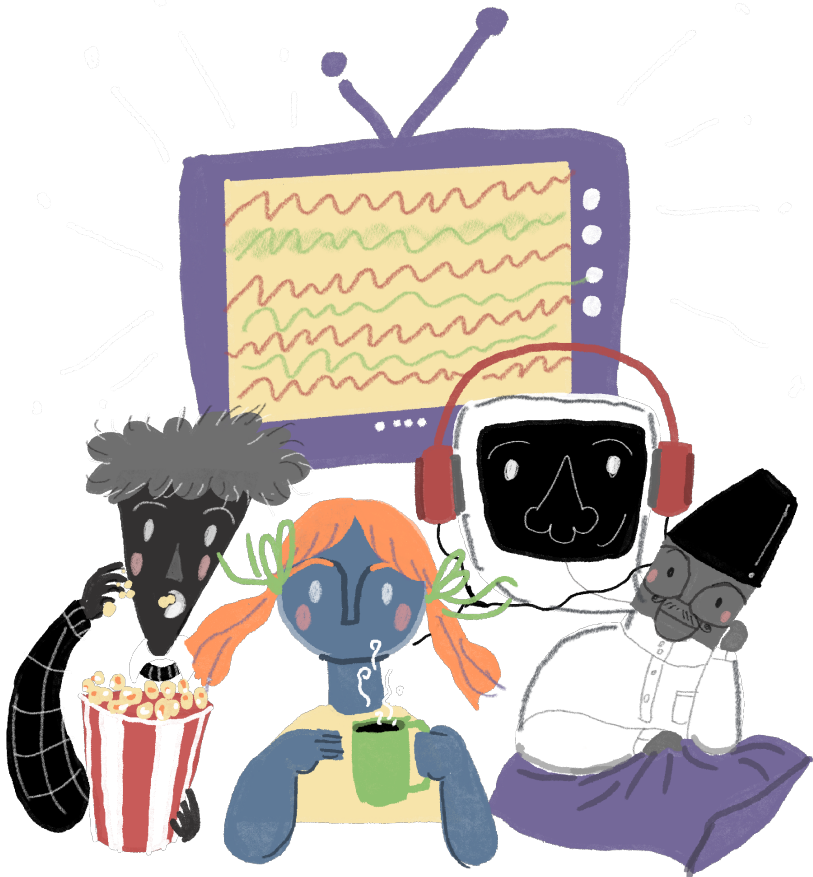
We believe in the **power of community** and are thrilled that you are here to be **part of the change you wish to see.**

Within this toolkit, we provide ideas and actions for raising awareness on this issue.

Here are some of the ways you can take action!

1. Host a WATCH PARTY!

ONLINE & OFFLINE



1. Host a WATCH PARTY!

Use this checklist and some questions that can help you plan a successful watch party!

Budget

Do you need to rent any equipment/venue to host this watch party?

Venue (online/offline)

Where is the location of your event? Is it online or offline?

Audience

How would you like to gather your audience? Would you like to prepare a form for people to register & get a reminder for your event? (We recommend this step to ensure safety & security of you and your audience)

Date & Time

Check suitable time & date that fits you and your audience.

We have prepared **4 videos** to offer context on conversion practices in Malaysia. You can utilise these videos to host a screening either at home, in your workplace, or within educational spaces! *(Please consider the safety and privacy of participants, including yourself as the organiser!)*

After watching these videos, we encourage you to ask the questions outlined below to prompt further discussions with your audience and dive deeper into conversion practices. *(We provide an information sheet on PAGE 16 to help you answer the questions and facilitate the discussion)*

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe your feelings after watching this video in one word
OR Share your feelings/thoughts after watching this story
2. What did you see in the video or story?

EXPLAINER: CONVERSION PRACTICES IN MALAYSIA

1. How would you define conversion practices, and what are the different types of conversion practices?
2. Why is there a belief that a person's sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE) should or can be changed through these practices?
3. What measures can individuals adopt to enhance awareness and resist harmful conversion practices in Malaysia?

STORY 1

The Boy from the Fishing Village

1. How did legal and religious institutions contribute to the individual's struggles in expressing their true identity?
2. What support mechanisms should be established to aid individuals who have endured traumatic experiences, particularly those linked to conversion practices and societal rejection?
3. How can access to mental health services and community support help individuals in the process of healing and self-acceptance?
4. Does one's history of sexual violence or childhood trauma cause them to 'become' LGBTIQ+ or gender-diverse?

STORY 2

Finding Acceptance

1. What are some common challenges faced by individuals who come out or express their sexual orientation or gender identity to their families in Malaysia?
2. How can mental health professionals better support LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people who have experienced trauma due to societal or familial rejection, conversion practices, or internal conflicts about their identities?
3. How can allies and supporters contribute to fostering a more inclusive and understanding society for LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people in Malaysia?

STORY 3

Naluri Wanita

1. What is Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Sexual Orientation, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC)?
2. What are the common stereotypes, myths, and misconceptions that you have heard in regard to trans women in Malaysia?
3. How might starting conversations with friends and family contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people in Malaysia and globally?

ADDITIONAL NOTE

If you want to make your watch party more engaging, you can start off your event by doing a quiz that we have prepared [here!](#) This can help gauge the level of understanding of your audience regarding the topic before introducing the videos. You can do the quiz through:

1. Kahoot! — This is an interactive learning platform that can be used physically and virtually. Access it at kahoot.it.
2. Zoom poll



2. Queer Reading Circle

ONLINE & OFFLINE



You can plan a reading circle by using the resources that are available on our [website](#)!

Here are some of the resources that you can use for your reading materials:

- a. **‘Hidden Behind the Right Path: Untangling Malaysia’s “soft approach” to LGBTQ rehabilitation’**
<https://justiceforsisters.org/en/balik-pangkal-jalan/reports>
- b. **‘Conversion practices or efforts to change LGBTIQ+ people in Malaysia’**
<https://justiceforsisters.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Conversion-Practice-Survey-Findings.pdf>
- c. **Balik ke Pangkal Jalan — Stories**
<https://justiceforsisters.org/en/balik-pangkal-jalan/stories>

Aside from our own resources, you can access these trusted documents for your Queer Reading Circle materials!

- a. **“I Don’t Want to Change Myself” — Anti-LGBT Conversion Practices, Discrimination, and Violence in Malaysia**
www.hrw.org/report/2022/08/10/i-dont-want-change-myself/anti-lgbt-conversion-practices-discrimination-and
- b. **Report on ‘Conversion Therapy’ — United Nations Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (IE SOGI)**
www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/SexualOrientation/ConversionTherapyReport.pdf

3. Open Mic

OFFLINE

Open mic events are an enjoyable avenue to bring together like-minded individuals, fostering connections through poetry, storytelling, music, or art. Consider hosting your own open mic session and incorporating stories shared by LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse individuals in Malaysia on our [website!](#)

BE CREATIVE! You can share your own personal story on 'conversion practices' through the medium of your choice.





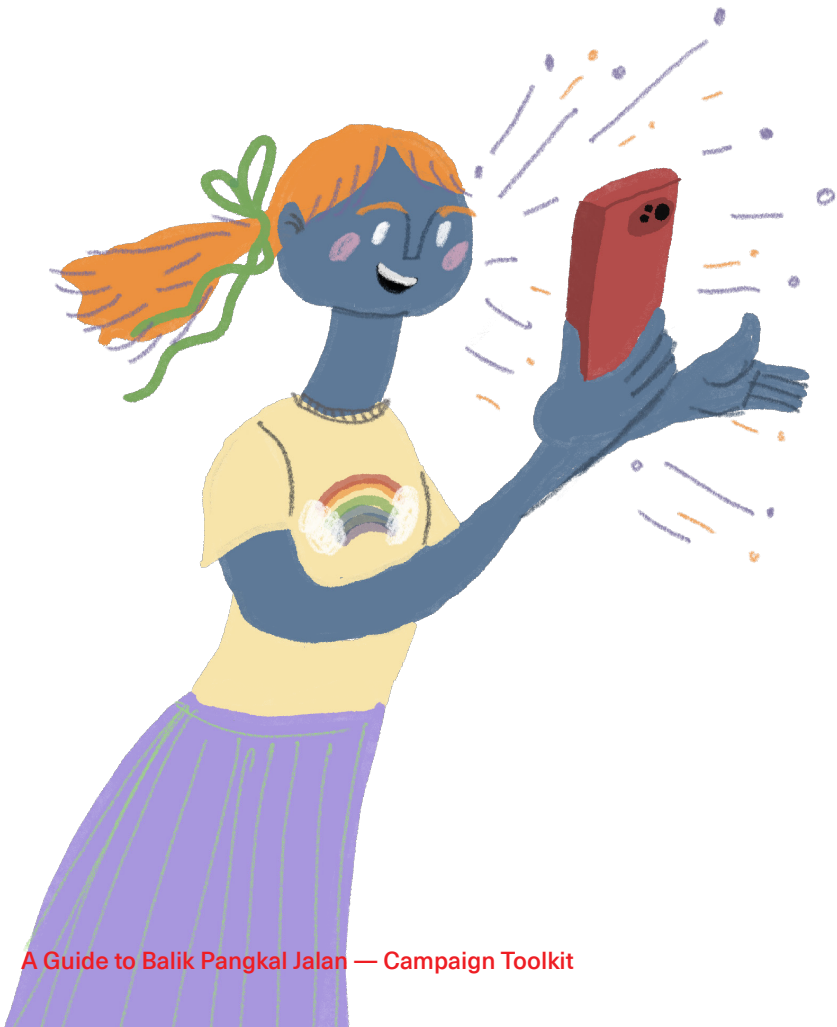
Social Media Actions!

ONLINE

Engaging in digital actions is one of the methods to raise awareness and show your support in ending conversion practices in Malaysia.

You can use the key messages that we provide on PAGE 24 and download the social media assets for 'conversion therapy' and share on your social media platforms.

Information sheet



CONVERSION PRACTICE EXPLAINER

i. What are the different types of conversion practices?

Typically, there are three types of conversion practices in Malaysia:

1. Psychotherapy
2. Medical
3. Faith-based

Read more about ‘conversion practices’ on our [website](#).

ii. Why is there a belief that a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE) should or can be changed through these practices?

The belief in changing SOGIE through conversion practices often arises from, among others,

- a. the pathologisation of SOGIESC or categorising LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people as having mental illnesses. On the contrary, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) no longer classify sexual orientation and gender identity as mental illnesses.
- b. The notion that there is only heterosexual and cisgender man and woman. This restrictive view neglects the diverse spectrum of gender identities and sexual orientations that exist beyond the binary concepts of man and woman, ultimately shaping societal norms and cultural perceptions.
- c. Patriarchal religious interpretation that LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people are sinners.

iii. What measures can individuals adopt to enhance awareness and resist harmful conversion practices in Malaysia?

1. Share the videos and other related materials.
2. Start a conversation about the issue with friends and family.
3. Call for legal protection of LGBTIQ and gender-diverse people from conversion practices.

STORY 1: FISHING VILLAGE

i How did legal and religious institutions contribute to the individual's struggles in expressing their true identity?

LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people face criminalisation under various laws

- Inherited from the British colonial era, Sections 377A and 377B in Malaysia forbid 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature,' carrying a penalty of up to twenty years imprisonment and whipping.
- Across all 14 states in Malaysia, Syariah criminal offences criminalise LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people, ranging from crossdressing to same-sex relationships.

Due to criminalisation on two fronts, LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people experience

- Shrinking of spaces for expression,
- Arbitrary arrests and raids conducted by state Islamic Departments and even the police, which are covered negatively in the media. These actions have had a chilling effect on other LGBTQ+ and gender-diverse people, leading to increased self-censorship.

Furthermore, the lack of opportunities and protection against discrimination (e.g., employment discrimination) is a significant factor, especially for economically marginalised individuals. They often face pressure to conform or alter themselves in order to access opportunities or simply to survive.

Religious exclusions and demonisation further compound the feelings of shame and guilt, impacting many religious LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse individuals who seek acceptance from their faith. This internal conflict results in diminished self-acceptance, and in extreme cases, individuals may resort to harmful measures. Moreover, it renders them more vulnerable to the risks associated with conversion practices.

ii What support mechanisms should be established to aid individuals who have endured traumatic experiences, particularly those linked to conversion practices and societal rejection?

Currently, there is an expanding support network that provides LGBTIQ-affirming support services. You can reach out to groups in the directory for support in our [microsite](#).

iii How can access to mental health services and community support help individuals in the process of healing and self-acceptance?

Access to mental health services and community support can aid individuals in their journey of healing and self-acceptance, countering the impact of conversion practices by offering crucial emotional and psychological assistance. These services provide a secure environment for individuals to process their experiences, manage complex emotions, and develop coping strategies.

Furthermore, community support nurtures a sense of belonging and comprehension, mitigating the isolation that individuals may experience. By addressing mental health needs and promoting self-acceptance, these resources significantly contribute to the overall well-being of those affected by conversion practices.

iv. Does one's history of sexual violence or childhood trauma cause them to 'become' LGBTIQ+?

The common misconception that a person 'becomes' LGBTIQ+ or gender-diverse due to sexual violence or traumatic events during childhood is highly inaccurate and harmful. This assumption discourages individuals from seeking necessary services and support if they experience such events, while also reinforcing the misguided belief that all LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people need fixing.

LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse individuals, particularly children, are more susceptible to sexual violence due to potential isolation and the absence of a support system compared to non-LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse children.

LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse individuals exist within diverse bodies, identities and experiences! Each person's journey is unique, and it cannot be defined solely within a single context.

STORY 2: FINDING ACCEPTANCE

i. What are some common challenges faced by individuals who come out or express their sexual orientation or gender identity to their families in Malaysia?

Our research has found the following challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people within unaccepting families

- Negative comments or expressions of disappointment, shame, or sadness, along with the projection of guilt.
- Pressure to marry a cisgender heterosexual or 'straight' person or to start a family.
- Pressure or coercion to meet mental health or healthcare providers, religious figures, or others in an attempt to be healed, cured, or corrected. Often, these individuals are not LGBTIQ-affirming.
- LGBTIQ+ and gender diverse people have reported experiencing multiple types of actions aimed at changing their Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE), resulting in varying levels of impact.
- Threats of violence, emotional or financial withdrawal, or reporting to state agencies.

Parents and family members may succumb to misinformation and pressure, potentially causing harm to their children instead of making informed decisions in their best interests.

ii. How can mental health professionals better support LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people who have experienced trauma due to societal or familial rejection, conversion practices, or internal conflicts about their identities?

These are some recommendations for mental health professionals

- **Continual Training and Self-Reflection:** Engaging in continual training and self-reflection to improve understanding, sensitivity, and support for the diverse needs of LGBTIQ+ and gender diverse people.
- **Creating Safe and Affirming Spaces:** Establishing a safe and affirming environment where individuals feel accepted, respected, and validated in their identities and experiences.
- **Holistic Approach:** Employing a holistic approach to address mental health concerns while considering the intersectionality of identities, understanding how different aspects of identity can impact mental well-being.
- **Advocacy and Resources:** Offering information on community resources, support groups, and advocating for legal and social support systems to help individuals access broader support networks.

iii. How can allies and supporters contribute to fostering a more inclusive and understanding society for LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people in Malaysia?

Allies and supporters can

- **Educate Themselves:** Allies can proactively educate themselves about SOGIESC and the issues surrounding it — the diverse experiences, challenges, and needs of LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse individuals in Malaysia. This includes understanding terminology, the impact of discrimination, and the struggles faced by these communities.
- **Challenge Discrimination & Stereotypes:** Speak up against discrimination, prejudices, and stereotypes whenever they witness or encounter them, promoting a culture of respect and acceptance
- **Amplify Voices of LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people:** Use their platforms to amplify the voices and share the lived realities that LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people face daily.
- **Create Safe Spaces:** Foster safe and inclusive environments in workplaces, schools, and communities by actively promoting acceptance and respect for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

We have compiled [two reports](#), which outline the struggles LGBTIQ and gender-diverse people face, especially for individuals who have experienced traumas of conversion practices.

STORY 3: NALURI WANITA

i. **What is Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Sexual Orientation, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC)?**

Gender identity is an individual's profound experiences regarding their gender, which may or may not match the identity assigned at birth. This includes their feelings about the body (which, if freely chosen, could involve modifying the appearance or function of the body through medical processes, surgery, or other methods) as well as the expression of their gender identity through dress, speech, and body actions or movements.

Gender expression denotes how individuals manifest their gender through actions and characteristics, such as dress, speech, and behavior. An individual's gender expression may not necessarily 'align' with their biological sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Sex characteristics refer to a combination of genitals and other reproductive anatomy, chromosomes, hormones, and other physical characteristics that may be present due to puberty.

Sexual orientation refers to attraction toward the opposite gender, same gender, or both. All of these exist on a spectrum, illustrated through the [Gender Bear](#). You could also check out our [glossary](#) for more definitions.

ii. Common stereotypes, myths, and misconceptions that you have heard in regard to trans women in Malaysia

Some of the common stereotypes and misconceptions include:

- Trans women are sex workers or sexual objects
- Trans women pose or pretend to be a woman
- Trans women are mentally ill
- Trans women are hypersexual or sexual addicts
- Trans women are spiritually and religiously bankrupt

These stereotypes and misconceptions increase their risks to sexual harassment and violence, pressure to change their identity, and discrimination, particularly employment discrimination. Often, trans women have to work twice as hard to access the same opportunities as cisgender people. This ultimately results in their marginalisation in society.

iii How might starting conversations with friends and family contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people in Malaysia and globally?

This is crucial because nearly two-thirds of individuals faced pressure to change their Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE), mainly from family members. Vulnerable groups, especially those under 30, transgender individuals, and those from the Muslim community, reported further challenges such as voluntary attempts to change their SOGIE due to confusion, financial withdrawal from family, and heightened thoughts of suicide resulting from forced interventions.

Starting conversations also raises awareness about the issue and provides information regarding access to justice and available support networks for them.

Key Messages

1. LGBTQ+ and gender-diverse people are #BornPerfect and do not need to be changed or cured.
#BalikPangkalJalan
2. The attempts to ‘cure,’ ‘rehabilitate,’ or ‘correct’ LGBTQ+ and gender-diverse people are not only harmful but can also constitute torture in certain instances.
#BalikPangkalJalan
3. Any form of conversion practices, rehabilitation, or pressure aiming to change LGBTQ+ and gender-diverse people, irrespective of its name, yields equally damaging consequences.
#BalikPangkalJalan
4. The exclusion and criminalisation of LGBTQ+ and gender-diverse people make them vulnerable to conversion practices — forcing them to change themselves to avoid arrest, access opportunities and seek acceptance which adversely affects their well-being.
#BalikPangkalJalan
5. Mental health professionals and counselors should participate in sensitisation training regarding matters concerning LGBTQ+ and gender-diverse individuals. They must abstain from engaging in or endorsing any form of conversion practices, recognizing their harmful nature. **#BalikPangkalJalan**
6. Healthcare professionals should receive training and education on affirming care practices for LGBTQ+ and gender-diverse people, and must not partake in or recommend any procedures aimed at changing their sexual orientation or gender identity.
#BalikPangkalJalan

When composing your messages, remember to include these hashtags in your posts!

#BalikPangkalJalan

#BornPerfect

#SempurnaSeadanya

#TetapBangga

7. Families and society should foster an environment of acceptance, love, and understanding, rejecting any pressure or attempts to change the sexual orientation or gender identity of their members.

#BalikPangkalJalan

8. Conversion practices on LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people are proven to cause psychological and emotional harm and should be prohibited in all contexts.

#BalikPangkalJalan

9. Media outlets should responsibly report on the dangers of conversion practices, amplifying voices against such harmful practices.

#BalikPangkalJalan

10. It is important for educational institutions to implement comprehensive & inclusive sexuality education that embraces diversity in sexual orientations and gender identities, rejecting the notion of changing them.

#BalikPangkalJalan



11. LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people need protection of their health and well-being, not conversion practices. At least 26 countries have measures to prohibit conversion practices and protect LGBTIQ and gender-diverse people.

#BalikPangkalJalan

12. Medical experts declare that conversion practices have no medical justification and represent a severe threat to the health and human rights of the affected persons. Offering “conversion therapy” is a form of deception, false advertising and fraud. **#BalikPangkalJalan**

Key Dates

Here is the list of international dates relevant to the ‘Balik Pangkal Jalan’ campaign, especially those pertinent to the LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse people. Additionally, please add any important dates relevant to your own community, especially within your local context.



DATE INTERNATIONAL DAY

31 March	International Transgender Day of Visibility
17 May	International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT)
1–30 June	PRIDE MONTH!
19 June	International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict
11 July	World Population Day
14 July	International Non-Binary People’s Day
12 August	International Youth Day
1–31 October	LGBTQ History Month
10 October	World Mental Health Day
26 October	Intersex Awareness Day
13–19 November	Transgender Awareness Week
20 November	Transgender Day of Remembrance
25 November	International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
1 December	World AIDS Day
3 December	International Day of Persons with Disabilities
10 December	Human Rights Day

Support

If you have experienced or currently experiencing any form of conversion practices and would like to reach out for help, do get in touch with the organisations listed below.

You can access more detailed information about these organisations [here](#).

NO.	SUPPORT ORGANISATION	CATEGORY	EMAIL
1	Good Samaritan Kuala Lumpur (GSKL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community• Mental Health• Inclusive Church	gsklmalaysia@gmail.com
2	Jejaka	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legal• Sexual• Health Community	hello@jejaka.org
3	People Like Us Hang Out (PLUHO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community• Mental Health	general@pluho.org
4	Queer Malaysian Indians	Community	qmi.org@gmail.com
5	SEED Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shelter• Trans	seed@seedfoundation.com.my



Justice
FOR SISTERS