

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	742
Land:	Libanon
Kilde:	Amnesty International
Titel:	The State of the World's Human Rights; Lebanon 2021
Udgivet:	29. marts 2022
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	22. april 2022

Document #2070277

AI – Amnesty International

Amnesty International Report 2021/22; The State of the World's Human Rights; Lebanon 2021

The authorities' response to Lebanon's deepening economic crisis failed to ensure residents' right to health and even their right to life during the most acute moments of fuel and medicine shortages, as it lifted subsidies while failing to roll out an effective social protection scheme to help mitigate the impact of these policies. Impunity continued to protect perpetrators of murder, torture and the devastating explosion in 2020 at the port in the capital, Beirut. Authorities used terrorism-related charges to prosecute protesters in Tripoli demanding socio-economic rights. Migrant workers, particularly women domestic workers, continued to have their rights abused under the discriminatory *kafala* (sponsorship) system. Women still faced discrimination in law and in practice. Authorities continued to deport Syrian refugees back to Syria, despite risks of egregious human rights abuses there. Allegations of torture of Syrian refugees documented since 2014 were still not investigated, even when raised in courts.

Background

Lebanon's economic crisis ranked in the top 10 most severe crises globally since the mid-19th century, according to the World Bank. By the end of the year, the Lebanese lira had lost 95% of its value since late 2019 and annual food inflation stood at 357.95% as of November 2021. The World Food Programme said in September that 22% of Lebanese people, 50% of Syrian refugees and 33% of refugees of other nationalities were food insecure. According to a UN study, 82% of the population were living in multidimensional poverty in September.

In January, the UN Human Rights Council reviewed Lebanon's human rights record as part of the UPR.

On 15 July, the prime minister designate, Saad Hariri, resigned and was replaced on 26 July by Najib Mikati, who successfully formed a cabinet that was endorsed by parliament on 20 September. The Mikati government operated only for 20 days then froze its cabinet meetings due to political feuds over the investigation into the Beirut port explosion of 4 August 2020.

On 11 August, the Central Bank started lifting fuel import subsidies, prompting critical shortages of petrol and diesel, exacerbated by smuggling and hoarding, which in turn led to dozens of people being killed or injured by explosions of stockpiled fuel in residential areas.

After months of delays, in December the government launched a “ration card” programme for 500,000 families, but the funding for this card remained uncertain at the end of the year.

Right to health

Throughout the year, access to health services remained severely impacted by the economic crisis. According to a September UN study, the percentage of households deprived of healthcare increased from 9% in 2019 to 33%, equivalent to approximately 400,000 households out of 1.2 million, and the number of people unable to obtain medicine more than doubled.

In July and August, acute fuel and medicine shortages endangered lives, including the ability of hospitals to ensure adequate healthcare. Authorities failed to prioritize hospitals and other critical services in their redistribution of fuel seized from smugglers and hoarders. In September, the directors of three of Lebanon's largest hospitals told Amnesty International that they had been unable to secure enough fuel to sustain operations for even one month, leaving them reliant on UN donations.¹

On 26 August, cancer patients gathered outside the UN offices in Beirut protesting against the medicine shortage, following the government's failure to pay pharmaceutical suppliers as part of a subsidy programme. The health ministry partially blamed the shortages on hoarding by traders, yet the authorities took no action to prevent or punish such hoarding.

On 9 November, the government lifted pricing subsidies on most medications, except for cancer, dialysis and mental health treatments. Throughout the year, drugs remained unavailable and unaffordable to most of the population.

By the end of the year, 35.15% of the population, both nationals and residents, had received their first Covid-19 vaccination and 28% their second. While refugees in Lebanon had access to vaccination via teams deployed by UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, the proportion of refugees vaccinated remained disproportionately low.

Impunity

Lebanese officials responsible for human rights violations continued to enjoy impunity for murder, torture and the port explosion alike. Authorities repeatedly obstructed the investigation into the Beirut port explosion, taking numerous steps to shield politicians and officials from the investigative judge’s summonses and even prosecution.²

In June, a group of 53 Lebanese and international rights groups, including Amnesty International, as well as 62 survivors and families of victims and firefighters, called on the UN Human Rights Council to create a fact-finding investigative mechanism into the explosion.³ In July, Lebanese authorities rejected the second investigative judge’s repeated requests to lift immunity for members of parliament (MPs) and to question senior members of the security forces. The MPs filed more than a dozen complaints accusing the judge of political bias and causing four suspensions of the investigation. The judiciary dismissed most of these complaints, but a complaint filed in December suspended the investigation to 2022.

The investigation into the 4 February fatal shooting of intellectual and activist Lokman Slim in his car in southern Lebanon had yielded no results by the end of the year.

Freedom of expression and assembly

Throughout the year, small protests took place across Lebanon in reaction to fuel and medication shortages, and against the rising cost of living and government inaction on the economic crisis.

The authorities for the most part allowed these protests to go ahead; however, in January, security forces used live ammunition, tear gas and water cannons against protesters in the northern city of Tripoli, after clashes with protesters who burnt municipality buildings. One protester was killed and 300 injured, while security forces said that over 40 of their members were injured. Between 25 and 31 January, 35 people were detained incommunicado in connection with the protests. After his release, one detainee bore signs of severe beatings all over his body, with significant injuries to his head, shoulders and neck, and reported that he had been tortured or otherwise ill-treated. On 19 February, the military prosecutor filed terrorism-related charges against at least 23 detainees, including two minors, in what Amnesty International considered to be an attempt to harass protesters.⁴ If convicted, those charged could face the death penalty. The detainees were released on bail after weeks of detention.⁵

On 11 August, parliamentary police as well as unidentified armed men attacked relatives of the victims of the port explosion and journalists.⁶

Security services continued to summon for interrogation activists, artists and journalists in relation to their online expression critical of the authorities. On 4 October, the General Security (GS) summoned theatre director Awad Awad for interrogation over an improvised play, accusing him of criticizing the president and failing to obtain GS censorship bureau approval to stage the play, as required under Lebanese law. He was subsequently released.

Women’s rights

Women continued to face discrimination in law and practice. Women’s rights groups continued to advocate for various personal status and political rights, including the right to equal custody of children and for women to pass on their nationality to their husband and children when married to a foreign national.

In its third examination before the UN Human Rights Council, Lebanon rejected several recommendations to lift its reservations to CEDAW, including adopting a unified personal status law, but partially accepted a recommendation to amend its discriminatory nationality law.

Migrants’ rights

Migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, 99% of them women, continued to suffer discriminatory practices under the *kafala* system. The economic crisis coupled with the pandemic meant many migrant domestic workers were dismissed without pay, their belongings or passports. By October, the International Organization for Migration said that about 400,000 mostly Asian and African migrant and domestic workers living in Lebanon were stranded without work or the means to return home.

In its UPR, Lebanon failed to commit to abolishing *kafala* and refused the recommendation to sign and ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

Refugees’ rights

Lebanon continued to host the largest number of refugees per capita globally, with an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees, including 879,529 registered with UNHCR as of September.

In March, Amnesty International released a report documenting an array of violations committed primarily by Lebanese military intelligence against 26 Syrian refugees, including four children, held on terrorism-related charges between 2014 and early 2021. Among the violations were unfair trial and torture, which included beatings with metal sticks, electric cables and plastic pipes. Authorities failed to investigate the torture claims, even when detainees or their lawyers told a judge in court that they had been tortured.²

Lebanon continued to forcibly deport refugees back to Syria, despite the risks of egregious violations upon return. On 28 August, army intelligence officers arrested six Syrian men outside the Syrian embassy in Baabda District after the men had received calls from the embassy inviting them to collect their passports. The men were accused of entering the country illegally and handed over to the GS, which issued a deportation order on 5 September. The six men were held incommunicado for 46 days. Following pressure for their release, the GS cancelled the deportation order on 8 September and released all the men on 12 October.³

In another incident in September, the GS detained three Syrian men at Beirut international airport. Following mounting pressure to stop the men's forcible deportation, the GS released them in October. The men had fled ongoing hostilities in Daraa governorate in southern Syria.

Death penalty

Courts continued to hand down death sentences; no executions were carried out. In the UPR process, Lebanon rejected recommendations to abolish the death penalty.

1. [“Lebanon: Authorities violating right to health and endangering lives by failing to provide fuel to hospitals”, 6 September](#)
2. [“Lebanon: One year on from devastating Beirut explosion, authorities shamelessly obstruct justice”, 2 August](#)
3. [“Lebanon: UN Human Rights Council must establish probe into Beirut blast”, 15 June](#)
4. [“Lebanon: Authorities step up repression through use of terrorism charges against protesters”, 8 March](#)
5. [Lebanon: Open Letter to Human Rights Committee of the Lebanese Parliament Regarding Violations of Rights During Protests in Tripoli in January 2021 \(Index: MDE 18/3733/2021\), 22 February](#)
6. [“Lebanon: Parliament police take part in vicious attack on families of Beirut blast victims and journalists”, 12 August](#)
7. [Lebanon: “I Wished I Would Die” – Syrian Refugees Arbitrarily Detained on Terrorism-Related Charges and Tortured in Lebanon \(Index: MDE 18/3671/2021\), 23 March](#)
8. [“Lebanon: General Security must halt imminent deportation of six Syrians”, 8 September](#)

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ecoi.net summary:

Report on the human rights
situation covering 2021

Country:

Lebanon

Source:

[AI – Amnesty International](#)

Original link:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/lebanon/report-lebanon/>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

29 March 2022

Document ID:

2070277

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

