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2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Lebanon

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Lebanon during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, and enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious restrictions on internet freedom; refoulement of refugees to a country where they would face torture or persecution, including serious harms such as a threat to life or freedom or other mistreatment that would constitute a separate human rights abuse; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government corruption; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults, which were enforced; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and existence of the worst forms of child labor.

The government did not take credible steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.

Nonstate armed groups, including Hizballah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian militias, operated with impunity, using intimidation, harassment, and violence against perceived critics and opponents. Armed members of these groups impeded access to certain neighborhoods, refugee camps, and other areas where they operated outside the reach and authority of the government. These groups allegedly also operated unofficial detention facilities in which they unlawfully detained individuals, sometimes incommunicado, for indefinite periods of time.

Section 1.

Respect for the Integrity of the Person

A. ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE AND OTHER UNLAWFUL OR POLITICALLY MOTIVATED KILLINGS

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings, during the year.

On April 5, a military court judge ordered the pretrial release of four detainees involved in the case regarding the September 2022 death of Syrian citizen Bashar Abdel Saoud, except for one lower-ranking state security soldier. The case remained pending as of year's end.

Investigations continued into the 2021 killing of Lokman Slim, a political activist and vocal critic of Hizballah. No findings were made public by year's end.

B. DISAPPEARANCE

There were no known reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities during the year.

C. TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN, OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT, AND OTHER RELATED ABUSES

The law prohibited using acts of violence to obtain a confession or information regarding a crime, but the judiciary rarely investigated or prosecuted allegations of torture. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) alleged instances where security officials tortured detainees. Authorities acknowledged violent abuse sometimes occurred during pretrial detention at police stations or military installations where officials interrogated suspects without an attorney present.

The Lebanese Center for Human Rights documented 25 cases of torture by security forces during the year. It reported torture cases often went undocumented because prisoners' wounds healed during prolonged incarceration, making corroboration of their claims difficult.

Amnesty International reported in September the Tripoli Bar Association filed 22 detainee complaints of torture with the government in 2022 as well as an additional six during the first 45 days of the year, all allegedly at the hands of security forces.

A lack of transparency and urgency in investigations, leading to impunity, was a persistent problem in the security forces, including the Internal Security Forces (ISF), the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), and the Parliamentary Police Force, according to NGO and media reports. Impunity was also a significant problem with respect to the actions of nonstate armed groups, such as Hizballah. The law allowed a security force unit accused of conducting abuses to conduct its own internal investigation and try its implicated security force members in military court for charges unrelated to their official duties.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh and life threatening due to food shortages, gross overcrowding, and inadequate sanitary conditions. Prison facilities were inadequately equipped for persons with disabilities.

Nonstate armed groups such as Hizballah and Palestinian militias also reportedly operated unofficial detention facilities.

Abusive Physical Conditions: As of October, there were approximately 9,254 prisoners and detainees, including pretrial detainees and remanded prisoners, in facilities built to hold 4,760 inmates, according to the ISF.

Most prisons lacked adequate food, sanitation, medical care, ventilation, and lighting, and authorities did not regulate temperatures consistently. In August, HRW reported food in prisons remained insufficient and of such poor quality that it was often unfit for consumption.

Administration: Although the ISF did investigate alleged abuses in prisons and detention centers, prison directors reportedly often protected police and correctional officers under investigation. As of October, the ISF committee reported it had received 16 complaints.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted monitoring of prison and detention conditions by independent local and international human rights groups and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

D. ARBITRARY ARREST OR DETENTION

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court; the government generally observed these requirements. The law required judicial warrants before arrests except in cases of active pursuit. Nonetheless, NGOs and civil society groups alleged the government arbitrarily arrested and detained individuals, particularly protesters, refugees, and migrant workers.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law generally required a warrant for arrest and provided the right to a medical examination. It also required referral of detained individuals to a prosecutor within 48 hours of arrest. The law required officials to inform detainees promptly of the charges filed against them, and authorities generally adhered to this requirement. The law permitted military intelligence personnel to make arrests without warrants in cases involving military personnel or involving civilians suspected of espionage, treason, weapons possession, or terrorism.

The law required a suspect caught in the act of committing a crime to be referred to an examining judge, who had to decide whether to issue an indictment or release the suspect. The law stipulated bail be available to detainees in all cases regardless of the charges against them, although the amounts required could be prohibitively high.

The law stated a suspect or the subject of a complaint had the right from the moment of arrest to contact a family member, an attorney, their employer, or an advocate of their choosing, and if needed, an interpreter. The government did not consistently respect these rights. The law stated a lawyer could attend preliminary questioning of a detainee by the judicial police. Use of this right by some detainees, especially those who were low-income, remained limited in part due to failure of implementing mechanisms to provide lawyers free of charge.

The law permitted a person to be held in police custody during an investigation for up to 48 hours. If the investigation required additional time, the law stipulated a general prosecutor could extend the period of custody for another 48 hours. If the suspect lacked the resources to obtain legal counsel, the law required authorities to provide free legal aid. Judicial police were not required to inform an individual who lacked legal counsel that the regional bar association could assign them one.

Although the law granted some persons who were arrested the right to remain silent, authorities did not always inform individuals of this right. The law stipulated detainees should not be “coerced to speak or to undergo questioning, on pain of nullifying their statements.” The law excluded suspects accused of homicide, drug crimes, endangerment of state security, violent crimes, crimes involving terrorism, and those with a previous criminal conviction from this protection.

The law allowed authorities to prosecute officials for “deprivation of personal freedom” in cases of prolonged arrest beyond legal limits, but authorities rarely filed such charges.

International observers reported authorities failed to observe many provisions of the law and government security forces continued the practice of unjust detention. In addition, Hizballah continued the practice of unlawful detention, including holding detainees incommunicado.

Arbitrary Arrest: According to local NGOs, cases of arbitrary arrest occurred, but most of those arrested chose not to report violations. NGOs reported most cases involved members of vulnerable groups, such as refugees, drug users, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals or migrant workers, who often feared retribution by authorities and had limited legal recourse.

Pretrial Detention: Lengthy pretrial detention was a significant problem. The law stated the period of detention for a misdemeanor could not exceed two months. The law allowed officials to extend

this period up to two additional months. The law stipulated the initial period of detention for felonies could not exceed six months but also permitted extensions.

Pretrial detention periods were often lengthy, in some cases equal to or exceeding the maximum allowable sentence under the law for the alleged crime. A series of strikes by judges and judicial workers beginning in August 2022 and ending in January exacerbated already lengthy case backlogs, causing some pretrial detention periods for felonies to last for months or years.

E. DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL

Although the constitution provided for an independent judiciary, government officials routinely subjected the judiciary to intimidation or political pressure, particularly through negotiations among political factions regarding the appointment of key prosecutors and investigating magistrates.

Defendants involved in routine civil and criminal proceedings sometimes solicited the assistance of prominent individuals to influence the outcomes of their cases.

Trial Procedures

The constitution provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right.

Trials were generally public, but judges sometimes ordered closed court sessions. Defendants had the right to free interpretation, if needed; however, interpreters were rarely available.

The Military Court had jurisdiction over cases involving the military, police, and government officials, as well as those involving civilians accused of espionage, treason, weapons possession, and draft evasion. It sometimes tried civilians on security charges or for violations of the military code of justice. While civilian courts in some circumstances tried military personnel, the Military Court often heard these cases, including for charges unrelated to official military duty. Human rights activists noted such proceedings created the potential for impunity.

Governance and judicial reach in Palestinian refugee camps varied greatly, with most camps under the control of joint Palestinian security forces representing multiple factions, based on an informal understanding between Palestinian factions and the LAF dating to the 1960s. Palestinian groups in refugee camps operated an autonomous system of justice with little transparency to outsiders and beyond the control of the state.

By law, the government permitted recognized religious groups to administer their own rules on family and personal status issues, including marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Shia, Sunni, Druze, and recognized Christian groups (Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Latin Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Coptic, Chaldean, Assyrian, and Protestant) had state-appointed, government-subsidized religious courts to administer family and personal status law according to the respective religious group's beliefs.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no known reports of political prisoners or detainees.

F. TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

Not applicable.

G. PROPERTY SEIZURE AND RESTITUTION

Syrian refugees continued to be evicted from informal settlements and other irregular housing. The number of evictions increased significantly during the second quarter of the year, mainly due to the owners' reappropriation of property and tenant-landlord tensions exacerbated by increased antirefugee rhetoric. While municipalities and the LAF carried out some collective evictions, landlords instigated the vast majority of reported collective evictions, most of which took place in the Beka'a Valley region.

H. ARBITRARY OR UNLAWFUL INTERFERENCE WITH PRIVACY, FAMILY, HOME, OR CORRESPONDENCE

Although the law prohibited such actions, the security services monitored private email and other digital correspondence. The law allowed for the interception of telephone calls, with prior authorization from the prime minister or the judiciary, at the request of the minister of interior or minister of defense in cases of "extreme emergency" such as counterterrorism operations, threats to state security, and combating organized crime. Freedom House reported authorities regularly monitored social media and electronic communications, including those of prominent individuals such as politicians, dissidents, and journalists.

Militias operating outside of central government authority frequently violated citizens' privacy. Various nonstate armed groups such as Hizballah and Palestinian militias used informer networks, telephone monitoring, and electronic monitoring to obtain information regarding their perceived adversaries.

I. CONFLICT-RELATED ABUSES

Starting in October, Hezbollah, Palestinian militants, and the Israeli Defense Forces engaged in sporadic, and often tense, exchanges of fire along the Blue Line. This led to the deaths of 26 Lebanese civilians as a result of Israeli cross-border artillery, missile fire, or aerial bombardment through the end of the year. On November 14, an HRW report stated an Israeli strike on a family car in the southern part of the country on November 5 that killed three young girls and their grandmother and wounded the girls' mother "should be investigated as an apparent war crime." On December 7, an HRW report stated two Israeli strikes in the south on October 13 that killed Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah and injured six other clearly marked journalists was "an apparently deliberate attack on civilians and thus a war crime." (See section 1.i. in the Israel *Human Rights Report*.)

Section 2.

Respect for Civil Liberties

A. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING FOR MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

The constitution provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press, and stipulated that restrictions could be imposed only under exceptional circumstances. Nevertheless, there were serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions against journalists, censorship, and enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression.

Freedom of Expression: While individuals were somewhat free to criticize the government and discuss matters of public interest, several legal restrictions limited this right. The law criminalized erroneous or false news; threats or blackmail; insults, defamation, and contempt; dishonoring or insulting the president or that of a foreign country; inciting a crime through a publication; and sectarian provocation.

The military code of justice prohibited insulting the security forces, and the Military Court prosecuted some of the misdemeanor cases on this charge during the year.

Freedom House reported individuals sometimes faced police questioning, arrests, short detentions, or fines if they criticized the government, the military, foreign heads of state, or other powerful entities and individuals.

Authorities selectively applied elements of the law permitting censorship of pornographic material, political opinion, and religious material considered a threat to national security or offensive to the dignity of the head of state or foreign leaders. On two separate occasions in August, authorities arrested comedian Nour Hajjar based on comments he made during his comedy routines. On August 25, military police interrogated Hajjar because of a joke regarding the military and detained him for 11 hours before releasing him. He was detained again on August 29 and interrogated for several hours because of a complaint from religious leaders, who accused him of threatening the civil peace by insulting Islam during a stand-up comedy routine he performed in 2018; Hajjar was released later that evening. The two reports filed against him remained pending at year's end.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists faced violence, intimidation, and harassment. While some outlets avoided reporting from areas where Hizballah exercised influence, those that did report from such locations often removed identifying markings from their vehicles and equipment. Authorities did not protect members of the media from violence or intimidation by members of political, religious, and other influence groups. Protesters and security forces attacked or harassed journalists covering protests on several occasions.

On March 30 and April 4, the General Directorate for State Security summoned Jean Kassir, director of the *Megaphone* news website, to appear for questioning after the platform published an article criticizing senior officials, including the country's chief prosecutor.

On August 9, LAF members shoved Mahmoud Shukr, a correspondent of the *al-Hadath* channel, while he was covering an incident in which a truck carrying Hizballah weapons and ammunition overturned on a busy thoroughfare outside Beirut. The incident sparked an armed confrontation between Hizballah members and residents of the area that led to two deaths. The Samir Kassir Eyes Foundation reported a bodyguard for member of parliament Cesar Abi Khalil threatened to "break" MTV correspondent Ghadi Bou Moussa if he continued to photograph the politician during the network's coverage of the incident.

On September 30, Christian and Muslim extremists attacked demonstrators at the "Freedoms March" in Beirut. *Megaphone News* reported allegations the ISF used excessive force against members of the *Sharika wa Laken* and *Naqd* media outlets.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: The law stipulated rules and conditions for becoming a journalist and for the licensing of new publications.

No specific law regulated online speech. Authorities sometimes used various laws, including cybercrime statutes, to prosecute individuals, journalists, and bloggers for what they expressed online.

The law governing audiovisual media banned live broadcasts of unauthorized political gatherings and certain religious events, as well as any content promoting a relationship with Israel. The law prohibited the broadcast of programs deemed to harm the state or its relations with foreign countries. The law also prohibited the broadcast of programs deemed to harm public morals, ignite

sectarian strife, or insult religious beliefs. Freedom House reported nearly all media outlets depended on the patronage of political parties, wealthy individuals, or foreign powers, and consequently practiced some degree of self-censorship.

Authorities sometimes prosecuted online, print, and television journalists for violations of the country's publications law, subjecting such work to censorship especially for content involving politics, religion, sex, or Israel. At times, prosecutors referred these cases to criminal courts, but more often referred them to the Publications Court where they typically remained open for a year or more and resulted in fines or dismissal.

The General Directorate of Security (DGS) reviewed and censored foreign newspapers, magazines, and books to determine their admissibility into the country. Most of these reviews were for explicit, pornographic content. Some journalists reported political violence and extralegal intimidation led to self-censorship.

Libel/Slander Laws: Under the law, libel, slander, and blasphemy were criminal offenses, and authorities enforced these laws. In most cases, criminal courts heard libel and other defamation complaints. Prison sentences ranged from one to three years, but more often, courts ordered fines or the removal of the offending material from the internet. Several human rights NGOs reported authorities filed dozens of criminal defamation suits against journalists, bloggers, political activists, and private citizens to intimidate and silence critics or those exposing alleged misconduct or corruption. While these cases rarely resulted in prolonged detentions or jail sentences, interrogations by police and lengthy, expensive trials reportedly created a chilling effect on free speech.

The law allowed private citizens to file criminal complaints and required investigating judges to consider them, especially in cases of alleged defamation. Politicians at times responded to allegations of wrongdoing leveled at them by filing criminal complaints claiming defamation.

Amnesty International documented 11 cases of authorities using defamation and insult laws to suppress freedom of expression, especially among journalists.

On July 10, a Beirut criminal court judge sentenced MTV broadcaster Dima Sadek to one year's imprisonment because of a defamation suit filed by Free Patriotic Movement Chief Gebran Bassil in 2020. She appealed the ruling but as of November, an appellate court had not heard her case.

The law prohibited the press from publishing blasphemous content regarding the country's officially recognized religious groups or content liable to provoke sectarian feuds. There were no known prosecutions under this law during the year.

Nongovernmental Impact: Religious figures sometimes sought to rally public sentiment to inhibit freedom of expression, including through coercion and threats of violence. Some nongovernmental militias sought to inhibit freedom of expression, including for members of the LGBTQI+ community or perceived allies, through intimidating rhetoric and physical attacks. Leaders of Hizballah and the Amal Movement political party cited "foreign interference" as one justification for limiting media publications in areas under their influence.

Internet Freedom

The government restricted some access to the internet. The government maintained a monopoly over the internet backbone, as well as over the fixed and mobile telephone infrastructure, and in general exercised tight control over internet service providers by requiring them to obtain permits to operate.

Through court orders filed with the ISF's Cybercrimes Bureau, the government reportedly restricted access to some websites to block online gambling, pornography, religiously provocative material, extremist ideology, and Israeli websites. NGOs reported the Ministry of Telecommunications did

not notify website owners regarding blockage of their websites and gave owners only 48 hours to file an appeal to have the decision overturned.

When human rights groups published online posts deemed critical of political leaders or religious figures, they were sometimes subjected to online or in-person intimidation. The ISF's Cybercrimes Bureau and other state security agencies also summoned journalists, bloggers, and activists for questioning concerning their social media and blog posts, especially when they criticized political figures or religious sects.

On March 31, Cybercrimes Bureau officials summoned the editor in chief of the investigative journalism outlet *Public Source* after receiving complaints from the head of the Lebanese Forces party regarding a 2022 *Public Source* report alleging the party had committed environmental crimes decades earlier.

On September 6, the ISF's Cybercrimes Bureau summoned *Beirut Today* editor in chief Lynn Cheikh Moussa over a tweet in which she identified an alleged sexual predator.

B. FREEDOMS OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION

The constitution provided for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The Ministry of Interior required organizers to obtain a permit three days prior to any demonstration. Despite this requirement, however, citizens routinely gathered without permits or coordination with security services.

Security forces occasionally intervened to disperse demonstrations, usually when protesters caused property damage or clashes broke out between opposing protesters. The ISF sometimes used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse protesters authorities alleged were engaging in violence or vandalism. In some instances, the LAF used nonlethal force to disperse protesters who resisted efforts to clear key thoroughfares. Amnesty International and the MENA Rights Group reported security forces used excessive force against protesters on some occasions.

Freedom of Association

The constitution provided for freedom of association, with some conditions established by law, and the government generally respected the law.

No prior authorization was required to form an association, but organizers were required to notify the Ministry of Interior to obtain legal recognition. The ministry then verified that the organization respected "public order, public morals, and state security" before officially recognizing it. In some cases, the ministry sent an NGO's notification paperwork to the security services to initiate an inquiry of the organization's founding members. According to Freedom House, NGOs sometimes faced bureaucratic obstruction or intimidation by security services, depending on their line of work or activities, noting groups that focused on Syria-related matters or were led by Syrian refugees were especially prone to scrutiny and interference.

Organizations were obligated to invite ministry representatives to any general assembly where members voted on bylaws, amendments, or seats on the board of directors; the ministry then validated the vote or election. If the organization failed to comply, the law allowed the Council of Ministers to dissolve it by decree.

The law empowered the cabinet to license all political parties; however, Hizballah's "political wing" operated without a license.

In areas under Hizballah's sway, independent NGOs faced harassment and intimidation, including social, political, and financial pressures.

C. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

D. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND THE RIGHT TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY

The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. The government generally respected these rights for citizens but placed extensive limitations on the rights of refugee populations and asylum seekers, most of whom were Palestinian, Syrian, or Iraqi.

In-country Movement: Nonstate armed groups hindered or prevented movement in areas where they operated. According to security services, armed members of Hizballah impeded access to some areas.

E. PROTECTION OF REFUGEES

The government continued to call for Syrian refugees to return to Syria but coordinated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations to allow the provision of protection and assistance to refugee residents, asylum seekers, and other persons of concern. During the year, some government officials limited humanitarian organizations from providing certain types of assistance to refugees. Officials imposed restrictions on the transfer value of food and cash assistance and limited sanitation services in informal tented settlements. Some government officials, media outlets, and members of the general public contributed to a considerable rise in antirefugee rhetoric that bordered on incitement to violence against refugees.

As of October 27, there were approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, of whom 790,000 were registered with UNHCR. The government had not allowed UNHCR to register Syrian refugees since 2015. There were no formal refugee camps in the country for Syrians. Most Syrian refugees resided in urban areas, many in unfinished, substandard, or nonresidential buildings, while others lived in informal tented settlements. According to the 2022 UNHCR assessment, nearly all Syrian refugees were in debt and food insecure after taking out loans to cover basic needs.

Based on existing immigration rules, refugees and asylum seekers from Syria were not explicitly permitted access to the country. Only short business trips, medical treatment, transit, or study remained available as justifications for Syrians wanting to enter the country. Syrians who held a preexisting valid residency permit based on sponsorship by a Lebanese citizen were still allowed to exit and re-enter Lebanon.

Syrian refugees faced barriers in obtaining and affording the identification documents from the Syrian government required to renew their Lebanese residency permits. Refugees of other nationalities – especially Iraqis – who wished to either obtain or maintain their legal residency also faced difficulties due to high renewal fees and sponsorship requirements.

Authorities granted entry visas only to those Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) who had a verified embassy appointment, a preapproved visa from the DGS, or an airline ticket and visa to a

third country. The duration for most of these visas was only 24 hours.

PRS children up to age 15 were included under their parents' identity card and residency permit. Thereafter, they were required to either obtain identity documents in Syria (at the risk of receiving an exit stamp on their identity documents and potentially losing their Lebanese residency) or obtain a passport through the Syrian embassy at a minimum cost of \$400, a fee most PRS could not afford. However, the DGS permitted PRS children older than 15 to use their individual civil extract (a document containing personal identity information) as a substitute identity document until age 18.

Access to Asylum: The law did not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and Lebanon was not a party to either the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.

Refoulement: According to UNHCR, the LAF conducted individual deportations of 960 persons from January to August, an 89 percent increase from the same period in 2022. Group deportations by the LAF also increased during the year, with at least three reportedly occurring following the arrest of passengers of boat departures.

Beginning in early April, the LAF conducted a series of raids primarily targeting refugees in urban residential areas in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The raids then spread to every governorate. Authorities increased their scrutiny of Syrians at official checkpoints and established additional random checkpoints. These actions allegedly targeted Syrians without residency permits or documentation. Humanitarian organizations reported the LAF arrested at least 2,360 Syrians between April and May and carried out group deportations of 1,867 persons to Syria. While the LAF stated it stopped conducting these raids in mid-May, reports continued of DGS deportations of Syrians following their arrest at military checkpoints.

While the raids primarily targeted Syrian refugees, humanitarian organizations also reported a small number of PRS were included as part of larger group deportations. Human rights organizations reported the Syrian regime arbitrarily detained, tortured, forcibly disappeared, and forcibly conscripted many of the individuals deported from Lebanon following their return to Syria.

Humanitarian organizations contended the government's deportation policy carried a significant risk of refoulement. Refugees who expressed a credible fear of persecution or torture upon return were often not afforded a formal review before deportation. Human rights groups expressed serious concerns regarding the human rights implications of returning refugees to Syrian authorities and observed the government often failed to respect due process in making its return decisions and deported some individuals registered with UNHCR. UNHCR and international donors urged the government to provide for a judicial or independent administrative review of each case, as well as the consistent application of procedural safeguards before carrying out deportations. The government maintained it did not have the capacity to hold court hearings on all deportation cases as required by law.

Foreigners arrested due to irregular entry or residency faced administrative detention without being sentenced by a court. Cases of this nature typically resulted in the detainee's deportation, except for non-Syrians registered with UNHCR who expressed the need for international protection and for those who had already secured resettlement to a third country.

Abuse of Refugees and Asylum Seekers: NGOs and UN agencies reported incidents of sexual harassment and exploitation of refugees by employers and landlords. This abuse included instances in which families were pressured to agree to the early marriage of their daughters, ostensibly to relieve economic hardship.

Authorities arrested a farm owner and his associates after they violently beat 15 Syrian and three Lebanese field workers, including five minors, on June 22. The victims agreed to drop charges after the farm owner paid them financial compensation.

In view of the poor economic environment, limited freedom of movement, and little opportunity for livelihoods for adults, many Syrian refugee families often relied on children to earn money for the family, including by begging or selling small items on the streets. The need to generate income put refugee children at greater risk than other children for exploitation, gender-based violence, and child labor. Some refugee children and the children of foreign domestic workers also faced obstacles to equal treatment under the law. NGOs reported discrimination against them, including bullying linked to race, skin color, religion, and nationality, although some could attend public school.

Freedom of Movement: UN agencies reported local officials frequently used the threat of evictions, curfews, and other restrictive measures against Syrians.

In Palestinian refugee camps, self-appointed security committees provided security for refugees through an agreement with the government. Checkpoints operated by government security forces controlled the movement of persons and material into and out of six of the 12 official Palestinian refugee camps.

Authorities made residency determinations slowly, preventing renewal of most Syrian refugees' legal documentation. Lack of documentation, including through confiscation at checkpoints, significantly affected freedom of movement due to the risk of arbitrary arrest and subsequent deportation. Refugees detained at security checkpoints in these circumstances reported authorities either confiscated their identity documents or required payment of fines before releasing them.

UNHCR reported restrictions on movement increasingly forced families to send children and young women (whom authorities were less likely to stop but who were more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse) to perform family errands.

While there was no official limitation of movement for PRS in the country, PRS without legal status faced de facto obstacles, mainly the threat of arrest at checkpoints.

Employment: The government treated both PRS and Syrian refugees as foreigners, subjecting them to additional disadvantages in the labor market. There were reports such workers were paid below the minimum wage, required to work excessive hours, or forced into debt bondage. Formal and informal work restrictions also left many refugees without access to most "white-collar" professions that would offer increased social mobility.

To be employed in the formal labor market, Palestinian refugee workers, whether from Syria or from Lebanon, needed an annual work permit the employer had to request from the Ministry of Labor. This application process was reportedly often lengthy, cumbersome, and marred with uncertainty. As a result, very few Palestinian refugees worked in the formal sector.

A lack of written contracts in the informal labor sector, paucity of employment benefits, and insecure job tenure contributed to unstable income and working conditions for refugees.

While most refugees received a work permit at no charge, the government required PRS to pay the same fees for one as other non-Lebanese nationals. The application process available to other Palestinian refugees in Lebanon excluded PRS. Like other foreigners, PRS seeking to work in Lebanon had to first request approval from the Ministry of Labor and the DGS before coming to Lebanon. Once in the country, they could receive work permits and legal residency tied to their employment. In practice, however, such arrangements were extremely rare.

The law permitted Syrian legal residents to work only in the agricultural, construction, and custodial fields. Partner organizations reported no significant increases in the enforcement of employment restrictions during the year, despite the increase in antirefugee rhetoric. Refugees opted to limit the frequency of their movements, and thus their access to income-generating activities, in periods when deportations increased.

Access to Basic Services: The law considered Palestinian refugees registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to be foreigners. UNRWA provided health, education, social services, and emergency assistance to registered Palestinian refugees residing in the country. Palestinian refugees faced de facto restrictions on accessing national education services. Rising transportation costs associated with the increased cost of fuel were a major barrier for Palestinian refugee children to access education. Many had to leave school at an early age to earn an income.

Palestinian refugees benefited from neither the national sickness and maternity funds nor the family allowances fund authorized under the National Social Security Fund. With the exception of funding worker's compensation, UNRWA continued to bear the cost of basic medical, maternity, and family health-care expenses for Palestinian refugees.

Almost half of all Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA lived in overpopulated camps, some of which suffered heavy damage from violent conflicts. From July 29 until mid-September, sporadic heavy fighting between rival armed groups in the Ein al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp killed at least 30 persons. Occupation of, and damage to, all eight UNRWA schools in Ein al-Hilweh Camp delayed the beginning of the school year. UNRWA estimated the poverty rate of Palestinian refugees at 80 percent as of March. Many Palestinian refugees experienced significant difficulties paying for essential goods and services, including foodstuffs, electricity, health care, and rent. Many received only a few hours of electricity per day and struggled to access health care and hospitals due to high transportation costs. Increasingly, landlords raised rents and required tenants to pay them in U.S. dollars; Palestinian refugees' income, aside from UNRWA's cash assistance paid in U.S. dollars, largely was in Lebanese pounds, a currency that lost 98 percent of its value since 2019.

The law prohibited Palestinians from purchasing or inheriting property.

PRS received limited basic support from UNRWA, including food aid, cash assistance, and winter assistance, such as cash to purchase fuel for heating. Children of PRS were able to enroll in UNRWA schools and received care at UNRWA health clinics. Children without legal status in the country, however, faced barriers when taking official school examinations and receiving official certification of exam results from the government.

Public schools operated in two shifts, a morning session for Lebanese children and an afternoon session typically attended by Syrian refugee children. According to UNHCR estimates, more than half of refugee children ages 3 to 18 did not receive any education during the year.

Syrian refugees had access to a limited number of UNHCR-contracted hospitals for lifesaving and obstetric care.

Iraqi refugees had access to both the public and private education systems. Iraqi refugees also had access to the primary health-care system. UNHCR, through NGOs, provided secondary health care with donor support.

Durable Solutions: The government did not consider local integration of any refugees a viable solution. In May, the DGS announced it opened registration for Syrian refugees seeking a facilitated return to Syria. As of the end of the year, however, the DGS had not initiated any facilitated returns.

F. STATUS AND TREATMENT OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS)

Fighting in 2007 destroyed the Nahr el-Bared Palestinian Refugee Camp in the north, displacing its approximately 27,000 residents. Many of the displaced resided in areas adjacent to the camp or in other places where UNRWA services were available. The camp's reconstruction, which began in 2008, was approximately 85 percent complete as of August. UNRWA expected 20,878 displaced persons to return to the reconstructed camp; 17,477 had done so as of August.

For further information about IDPs in the country, please see the materials of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center: <https://www.internal-displacement.org> .

G. STATELESS PERSONS

There were no official statistics on the size of the stateless population. The country contributed to statelessness by discriminating against women in its nationality laws; through discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, or disability; and by discrimination in birth registrations.

Citizenship was derived exclusively from the father, resulting in statelessness for children of a citizen mother and a noncitizen father when registration under the father's nationality was not possible. This legal discrimination particularly affected Lebanese, Palestinians, and, increasingly, Syrians from households headed by women. Undocumented Syrian refugees were unable to register their marriages and the births of their children due to their lack of official status. Additionally, administrative obstacles or a lack of understanding of the regulations prevented registration of some children born to citizen fathers. During the year, the government extended a waiver allowing late registration of Syrian children born in the country since 2011 to be affected administratively instead of through the courts.

Palestinian refugees residing in the country could not obtain citizenship and were not considered citizens of any other country. Palestinian refugee women married to citizens could obtain citizenship after one year of marriage. Children of Palestinian refugees faced discrimination in birth registration, as bureaucratic and administrative procedures at the Directorate of Political Affairs and Refugees (DPAR) made it difficult to register these children after age one. According to the law, birth registration of children older than one required a court procedure, in some cases an investigation by the DGS, and final approval from the DPAR. The birth registration process often took more than a year to complete and was complex to navigate, especially for the DPAR-registered parents of Palestinian refugee children.

UNRWA estimated 3,000 to 5,000 Palestinians remained unregistered with both UNRWA itself and the government. Nonregistered Palestinians faced restrictions on movement, risked arrest or detention, and encountered obstacles completing civil registration procedures.

Undocumented Palestinians not registered in other countries where UNRWA operated (such as Syria or Jordan) were usually ineligible for the full range of UNRWA services. In most cases, and as part of its discretionary power to include vulnerable groups of Palestinians on an exceptional basis, UNRWA nonetheless provided primary health care, education, and vocational training services to undocumented Palestinians. The majority of these were men, many of them married to UNRWA-registered refugees or Lebanese citizen women who could not confer refugee status or citizenship to their husbands or children.

Approximately 1,500 of an estimated 100,000 Kurds living in the country lacked citizenship, despite decades of family presence in the country.

Stateless persons lacked official identity documents that would permit them to travel abroad. They had limited access to the regular labor market and lacked access to many professions. Additionally, they had limited access to public schools or public health-care facilities and could not register marriages or births. They were not allowed to own or inherit property.

Section 3.

Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

Although the law provided citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections conducted by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage, political

participation suffered due to lack of government control over parts of the country, defects in the electoral process, the country's economic, financial, and social crises, and public corruption.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Abuse or Irregularities in Recent Elections: While the most recent parliamentary elections (2022) were conducted peacefully and were free and fair in many respects, observers from the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections reported numerous procedural irregularities, and there were allegations of corruption and widespread vote buying. Independent candidates were reportedly harassed or physically threatened by supporters of the dominant political parties in their districts.

The constitution required presidential elections between one and two months before the end of the incumbent president's term. Former President Michel Aoun left office at the end of October 2022. No candidate received the required two-thirds majority in any of the 12 parliamentary votes to choose a president during the year. As such, Najib Mikati, whose government had functioned in a caretaker status since the May 2022 parliamentary elections, remained in office as caretaker prime minister. At year's end, the presidency remained vacant. On April 18, parliament postponed for up to a year the municipal elections scheduled for May, which had already been postponed a year earlier.

Political Parties and Political Participation: All major political parties and numerous smaller ones were based almost exclusively on religious affiliation, and parliamentary seats were allocated based on religion. Nonsectarian parties gained a foothold in parliament in 2022 when 12 first-time, reform-minded members won election. Established political parties and alliances largely maintained their positions by using intimidation, social pressure, and propaganda to marginalize new political forces.

Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable Groups: The law did not prevent or limit participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they participated actively. There were significant barriers to women's participation in politics, including religious restrictions, institutionalized inequality, legal obstacles, political culture, and societal discrimination. Women candidates were far less likely than men to receive media coverage during the campaign, and they were reportedly more likely to be the targets of violent speech on social media.

According to long-standing agreements on sectarian power sharing, the president had to be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament a Shi'a Muslim. Authorities allocated every government-recognized religious group at least one seat in parliament regardless of the number of its adherents, with the exception of Isma'ili Islam and Judaism, neither of which had seats allocated. Voters also elected three parliamentarians representing minorities (one Syriac Orthodox Christian and two Alawites) in the 2022 elections.

Since refugees were not citizens, they had no political rights in the country.

Section 4.

Corruption in Government

Although the law provided criminal penalties for official corruption, the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials reportedly engaged in corrupt practices with impunity on a wide scale.

Corruption: The government continued to lack control over rampant corruption. There was limited parliamentary or auditing oversight of revenue collection and expenditures. Various government

initiatives intended to limit corruption were not successful. The most common types of corruption included political patronage; judicial misconduct, especially in investigations of official wrongdoing; and bribery at multiple levels within the national and municipal governments.

Freedom House reported political leaders and government officials often operated behind closed doors, outside of state institutions, and with little regard for formal procedures. Authorities reportedly sometimes intimidated, harassed, or filed criminal defamation suits against journalists and others seeking to expose alleged government misconduct or corruption.

On August 14, the Central Bank's Special Investigation Commission froze the assets and bank accounts of former Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh, his brother Raja Salameh, his assistant Marianne Howayek, his son Nadi Salameh, and Anna Kasakova, all of whom were sanctioned for involvement in corruption by several other countries.

Riad Salameh attended two hearings by a visiting French judicial delegation between January 11 and 20. He failed to attend a hearing in Paris on May 9 where prosecutors planned to press preliminary fraud and money laundering charges against him. As a result, French prosecutors issued an arrest warrant for him on May 16. Salameh remained at liberty in the country as of the year's end.

On August 7, following political pressure by several members of parliament, the Ministry of Finance published the report of an independent forensic audit. According to the Associated Press, the report revealed years of misconduct by Riad Salameh and \$111 million in "illegitimate commissions" taken by Salameh and his accomplices. On August 22, Public Prosecutor Ghassan Oueidat referred the report to the Special Investigation Commission, the financial prosecutor, and the appeals judge of Beirut's criminal court. No additional actions were reported by year's end.

Media continued to report political interference stalled the investigation into the 2020 Port of Beirut explosion. On January 25, Prosecutor General Oueidat ordered the release of 17 individuals held in pretrial detention following the explosion; they had already spent more time in jail than if they had been tried and convicted. Long-standing vacancies on the Court of Cassation prevented the court from resolving former officials' complaints against the investigating judge, accusing him of political bias. Disagreement between politicians and judges on what court should try elected government officials suspected of criminal activity also delayed the investigation.

For additional information about corruption in Lebanon, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

Section 5.

Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Monitoring and Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

Several domestic and international human rights groups operated without government restrictions to monitor or investigate human rights conditions or cases and publish their findings. Government officials were sometimes cooperative and responsive to these groups' views, but there was limited accountability for human rights abuses.

Retribution against Human Rights Defenders: On May 24, local and international NGOs reported plainclothes officers of the ISF's intelligence branch arbitrarily detained Abdelrahman Tarek, an Egyptian human rights activist who sought refuge in Lebanon after he endured arbitrary detention and torture for seven years in Egypt. The ISF detained Tarek without an arrest warrant and denied him the ability to have a lawyer present. His detention sparked collective advocacy to free him by local civil society, activists, foreign embassies, and the international human rights community. He was released after six hours.

Government Human Rights Bodies: Neither the 10-member NHRC nor its constituent five-member National Preventive Mechanism against Torture were effective in their mandates of guiding the ministries in protecting human rights. On June 15, the NHRC published a report stating the government had failed to approve the decrees authorizing it to execute its mandate. As of year's end, the NHRC neither had a budget nor had commenced its work.

Section 6.

Discrimination and Societal Abuses

WOMEN

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalized rape (of women only) and the use of threats or violence to claim a “marital right to intercourse,” although it did not explicitly outlaw spousal or intimate or domestic partner rape. While the government effectively enforced the law, the interpretation of cases by different religious courts led to inconsistent civil law rulings throughout the country. The minimum prison sentence for a person convicted of rape was five years and was seven years for the rape of a minor (defined by the law as a child younger than 18). The law did not criminalize so-called corrective rape of LGBTQI+ persons.

The law criminalized domestic violence, gave women the ability to file a restraining order against their abuser, and assigned special units within the ISF to investigate domestic violence complaints. NGOs alleged the definition of domestic violence was narrow and did not provide adequate protection from all forms of abuse, especially spousal rape and rape by other male family members. Although the law provided for a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison for battery, religious courts often cited religiously based personal status laws and cultural expectations to require a battered wife to return home. Some police, especially in rural areas, treated domestic violence as a social rather than criminal matter.

NGOs and activists claimed the domestic violence law did not sufficiently protect survivors or punish abusers, who they alleged often received disproportionately light sentences.

Police and judicial officials worked to improve their management of domestic violence cases but noted social and religious pressures – especially in more conservative communities – led to the underreporting of cases. Some survivors, often under pressure from relatives, sought arbitration through religious courts or between families rather than through the justice system. There were cases of foreign domestic workers, usually women, who suffered from mistreatment, abuse, and in some instances rape or conditions akin to slavery.

The ISF alerted its human rights unit to report all cases involving victims of domestic violence and other vulnerable groups; officers tracked the cases and provided appropriate support to victims.

The Women's Affairs Division in the Ministry of Social Affairs and several NGOs provided support services to address sexual or gender-based violence, including counseling and shelter for survivors.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment: The law criminalized sexual harassment, which nonetheless remained a widespread problem. The economic crisis in the country increased the risks for exposure of women and girls to gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, sexual violence, child marriage, and intimate partner violence. On March 25, media reported Hussein Zeaiter shot and killed his wife Zeinab and fled the scene with his three children. In a video circulating on social media, the victim's brother stated, “I would have done the same thing if her husband had not done it.” The local mayor characterized the killing as an “honor crime.” The investigation was underway at year's end.

Social and cultural practices disincentivized, stigmatized, and endangered women and girls from seeking justice related to gender-based violence or harassment. Access to justice on these issues was particularly difficult for women domestic migrant workers and unregistered Syrian refugees.

Discrimination: Women suffered discrimination under the law and in practice, including under the penal and personal status codes. The constitution did not explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sex. In matters of marriage, child custody, inheritance, and divorce, personal status laws provided unequal treatment across the various religious court systems and generally discriminated against women. All 18 recognized religious groups had their own personal status courts, and laws varied from one group to another. Religious law on child custody matters favored the father in most instances, regardless of confession. Sharia courts weighed the testimony of one man as equal to that of two women. Nationality law also discriminated against women, who could not confer citizenship to their spouses and children. Women were allowed to own property but often ceded control of it to male relatives due to cultural norms and family pressure.

Women experienced employment and occupation discrimination. The law did not distinguish between women and men in employment and provided for equal pay for both sexes. There were exceptions excluding women from a variety of construction and industrial jobs such as mining, factories, agriculture, energy, and transportation, although authorities did not always enforce these prohibitions. The law did not explicitly prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace. Although the law gave an employee the right to resign without prior notice if the employer or representative committed an indecent offense toward the employee or a family member, there were no legal consequences for the perpetrator.

There were multiple reports domestic workers (mainly women from East Africa and Southeast Asia) – tied to their employers through the visa sponsorship system – faced physical, mental, and sexual abuse, unsafe working conditions, and nonpayment of wages. NGOs assisting migrant workers reported security forces and judges did not always adequately investigate these crimes, and victims sometimes refused to file complaints or retracted testimony due to threats and fear of reprisal or deportation.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Women in rural areas faced social pressure on their reproductive choices due to long-held societal values. Although not all health care centers offering sexual and reproductive health services were equipped to offer clinical management of rape, all 11 government health-care facilities certified to do so provided survivors access to emergency contraception and postexposure prophylaxis.

SYSTEMIC RACIAL OR ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

No laws specifically protected marginalized racial or ethnic groups against violence, discrimination, or hate crimes.

International observers continued to raise concerns that authorities selectively enforced curfews only on Syrian refugees, who, because they often lacked legal residency status, generally incurred more severe consequences than other refugees for curfew violations, including confiscation of identification documents and fines. A few violent incidents against refugees occurred.

Citizens of African descent reported instances of race-based discrimination and harassment by police. Foreign Arab, African, and Asian students, professionals, and tourists reported being denied access to bars, clubs, restaurants, and private beaches at the direction and discretion of venue owners and managers.

CHILDREN

Birth Registration: If a child's birth was not registered within the first year, the process for legitimating the birth was long and costly, often deterring families from registration. Syrian refugees did not need legal residency to register the birth of their children, and authorities often waived several requirements for late birth registration by Syrian refugees. Birth registration remained inaccessible to some because the government required often-unavailable proof of legal residence and legal marriage.

Additional impediments refugees faced included the inability to pay registration fees or travel costs, a lack of information, and the limited capacity of civil registry offices. Failure to register births resulted in denial of some public services.

Education: Education for citizens was free and compulsory through the primary phase. Noncitizen and stateless children, including those born of noncitizen fathers and citizen mothers and refugees, lacked this right. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education continued a policy stipulating non-Lebanese students could not outnumber Lebanese in classrooms during the morning school shift, sometimes limiting enrollment. Syrian refugee children were not legally entitled to enroll in public schools during regular hours but could attend schools' second shifts.

Child Abuse: The country lacked a comprehensive child protection law, although the law furnished some protection to children who were victims of violence. The Ministry of Social Affairs maintained a hotline to report cases of child abuse. Child protection needs increased during the year, with more children at risk of exploitation, physical and emotional abuse, child labor, and early marriage, according to UNICEF and UNHCR.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: There was no legal minimum age for marriage. The government did not perform civil marriages or enforce minimum age requirements imposed by various religious sects. The minimum age of marriage varied from ages 14 to 18, depending on the sect. Religious courts generally enforced respective minimum age limits for marriage. UN agencies reported a shift in the age of girls subjected to early marriages in the country during the year, however, with some as young as 12 to 13. UN agencies, NGOs, and government officials observed high rates of early marriage among the Syrian refugee population, in some cases four times the rate of child marriage compared to the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011. The agencies partially attributed this circumstance to social and economic pressure on families with limited resources.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibited and punished commercial sexual exploitation, including the sale and grooming of children, child sex trafficking, and child pornography. The minimum age for consensual sex was 18, and statutory rape penalties included hard labor for a minimum of five years and a minimum of seven years' imprisonment if the victim was younger than 15. The government generally enforced the law.

ANTISEMITISM

At year's end there were an estimated 70-100 Jews living in the country and 5,500 registered Jewish voters who lived abroad but had the right to vote in parliamentary elections. Antisemitic discourse appeared in the media from time to time, and some politicians used antisemitic rhetoric.

The Israelite Communal Council, which represented the interests of the country's Jewish citizens, repeatedly but unsuccessfully submitted requests to change its government-appointed name to reduce stigma. The council blamed its official name in part for the difficulties experienced with renewals every six years.

For further information on incidents in the country of antisemitism, whether or not those incidents were motivated by religion, and for reporting on the ability of Jews to exercise freedom of religion or belief, please see the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

ACTS OF VIOLENCE, CRIMINALIZATION, AND OTHER ABUSES BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION, OR SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Criminalization: The law prohibited “sexual intercourse against nature,” a term understood to criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults. Authorities occasionally enforced the law, which carried a penalty of up to one year in jail, in civilian and military courts. In July, nine members of parliament submitted a draft law to repeal this article; signatories were subjected to online harassment. In August, the culture minister and a member of parliament introduced separate bills to explicitly criminalize consensual same-sex relations between adults and punish anyone who “promotes homosexuality,” which was undefined, with up to three years’ in prison. There was no vote on any of these bills by year’s end.

Violence and Harassment: As of December 18, the Lebanese LGBTQI+ rights NGO Helem documented 159 cases of violence and physical abuse against LGBTQI+ persons, including 25 incidents of domestic violence. Additionally, Helem reported 350 cases of verbal abuse. NGOs received reports from LGBTQI+ refugees of physical abuse by local gangs, which the victims did not report to the ISF.

Human rights organizations reported the government harassed members of the LGBTQI+ community through traditional methods, such as street harassment, arrests, and crackdowns on events or gatherings, and digital targeting, such as entrapment on social media and dating applications, online extortion, online harassment, and “outing” individuals online. As a result of being outed, LGBTQI+ individuals reported facing family violence and arbitrary arrest based on personal information found on cell phones and other devices through unlawful searches. An HRW report found LGBTQI+ Syrian refugees were especially vulnerable to digital targeting by the government.

HRW found most of those prosecuted for their sexual orientation or gender identity were acquitted upon appeal but documented one person’s detention for 52 days at a police station. The organization also documented cases of online extortion and blackmail by persons threatening to out LGBTQI+ individuals to their families and the authorities.

There were reports ISF officers mistreated LGBTQI+ individuals in custody, particularly in areas outside of Beirut. Forms of mistreatment included forced HIV testing and threats of prolonged detention or exposing their identities to family or friends. The government did not investigate, prosecute, or punish those complicit in violence and abuse by state or nonstate actors against LGBTQI+ persons.

Public officials, political and religious leaders, and members of the general public contributed to a marked increase in anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric during the year. In a July 22 speech, Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah explicitly incited violence against LGBTQI+ individuals and called for them to be killed. Nasrallah also urged use of derogatory terms to describe LGBTQI+ persons.

On August 23, members of the “Soldiers of God” attacked an LGBTQI+-friendly club in Beirut, beating patrons and preventing them from leaving. In videos posted on social media, the attackers cursed at patrons and told them to “get out of the country.” According to HRW, ISF officers who arrived while the attack was under way did not intervene and instead questioned the bar owner and guests regarding the nature of the performance. No one had been arrested for the attack at year’s end.

Discrimination: The law did not prohibit discrimination by state and nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. The law did not explicitly recognize LGBTQI+ couples and their families or grant them rights equal to rights of other persons. Official and societal discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons was a serious problem. Some LGBTQI+ individuals faced employment discrimination, as did transgender women due to the inconsistency between official documentation and gender self-presentation.

Individuals who faced problems because of their sexual orientation or their gender identity or expression were reluctant to report incidents due to fear of additional discrimination or reprisal. There were no government efforts to prevent such discrimination or provide means of redress for those experiencing it.

The domestic human rights organization Society for Inclusion and Development (SIDC) reported 85 cases of violence and discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons during the year. Of these, 35 persons experienced workplace discrimination as a result of their sexual identity or presentation and 16 persons experienced discrimination in the form of freedom of assembly restrictions from landlords and local authorities.

During the year, the SIDC reported a transgender woman was evicted from her family's home because of her gender identity and afterwards faced a constant threat of eviction by her landlord.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Gender marker change was possible, but the legal requirements to do so were not clearly defined. Issues of personal status such as name and gender could be changed only by a ruling through one of the country's religious courts. Procedural obstacles (including high fees, lengthy procedures, and unavailability of legal assistance) deterred some transgender persons from pursuing legal gender recognition. Transgender persons inability to obtain identity documents affirming their gender presentation contributed to discrimination in employment, in finding and maintaining housing, and in health care.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices: There were reports of faith-based organizations offering sexual orientation change efforts (also referred to as "conversion therapy"), but it was not clear whether participants were forced to attend against their will. Some mental health practitioners in the country argued against "conversion" therapies, stating that they were not effective. In December, the SIDC reported family members forced an LGBTQI+ person to undergo "conversion therapy" from a mental health professional the family chose. Professional physicians' associations in Beirut prohibited their members from performing forced anal examinations of men suspected of same-sex activity, but according to NGOs no local associations outside the capital banned them.

There were no known reports of medically unnecessary and irreversible "normalization" surgeries being performed on children or nonconsenting adult intersex persons.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: The government severely restricted these freedoms with regard LGBTQI+ individuals, including via targeted harassment and arrests. A 2022 Ministry of Interior ban on peaceful gatherings "related to or addressing homosexuality" remained in place. Members of nonstate groups also restricted these fundamental freedoms through intimidation, harassment, and violence. During the year, more than a dozen media organizations expressed concerns the recent crackdown on freedoms under the guise of "combatting homosexuality" would inevitably impact all public freedoms.

On June 17, the Islamic Cultural Center in Lebanon asked authorities to investigate the NGO Helem and called for its dissolution, due to its "provocative actions in public spaces, including numerous [LGBTQI+] celebrations," as well as rainbow-flag-raising ceremonies at numerous embassies during Pride Month.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

By law, persons with disabilities had the right to employment, education, health services, accessibility, and to vote; however, there was no evidence the government effectively enforced the law. Persons with disabilities did not have access to education, employment, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. Although legally prohibited, discrimination against persons with disabilities continued.

The law defined a “disability” as a physical, vision, hearing, or mental impairment. It required that persons with disabilities fill at least 3 percent of all government and private-sector positions, provided they met the qualifications for the position. There was no evidence the government enforced the law. Employers were legally exempt from penalties if they provided evidence that no otherwise qualified person with disabilities applied for the job within three months of its advertisement.

In April, the Ministry of Social Affairs partnered with international organizations to establish a national disability allowance providing supplemental income to persons with disabilities in the country.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education required that newly constructed schools include all necessary facilities to accommodate persons with disabilities. Nonetheless, the public school system was ill-equipped to accommodate students with disabilities.

NGOs reported persons with disabilities generally lacked access to education, since both public and private schools often refused to admit them. Depending on the type and severity of the student’s disability, parents sometimes sent their disabled children to mainstream schools. Schools that admitted students with disabilities often charged parents additional fees, citing a lack of appropriate facilities or staff. In addition, school staff were often unable to identify specific learning disabilities in children and could not adequately advise parents. In these cases, children often repeated grades or dropped out of school.

The law mandated access to buildings for persons with disabilities, but the government failed to amend building codes to implement these provisions. The law did not mandate access to information or accommodations for communication for persons with disabilities.

OTHER SOCIETAL VIOLENCE OR DISCRIMINATION

HIV and AIDS remained stigmatized due to sensitivities concerning extramarital relations and LGBTQI+ identities. HIV-positive persons experienced employment and occupation discrimination. NGOs reported there were limited resources to direct patients to clinics where they could receive tests without stigma or discrimination. Many persons with HIV and AIDS were unable to pay for routine tests the Ministry of Public Health did not cover, including the blood test the ministry required prior to the start of treatment. The law obliged the government to provide treatment to all HIV-positive citizens and Palestinian and Syrian refugees living in the country. Nonetheless, treatment was available at only one hospital in Beirut, making it difficult for patients outside the capital to receive the care they needed.

Palestinian refugees remained barred from working in 39 skilled professions, including medicine, law, and engineering, all of which required membership in a professional association. According to reports from UN agencies, government officials, and Palestinian advocacy groups, Palestinian refugees consistently reported discrimination in hiring due to excessive bureaucracy and societal stigmas.

Migrant workers and domestic workers faced employment discrimination. Syrian workers, usually employed as manual laborers and construction workers, suffered particular discrimination.

Section 7.

A. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The law provided for the right of private sector workers to form and join trade unions, bargain collectively, and strike but placed restrictions on these rights. In principle, the penalties for abuses of these rights were commensurate with those for other laws involving denial of civil rights, such as discrimination. The law prohibited civil servants and a broad range of public-sector workers from engaging in collective bargaining or striking. Some private-sector worker groups were not allowed to organize and bargain collectively, including agricultural, domestic, and migrant workers in the informal economy. The law required Ministry of Labor approval to form a union. The ministry controlled the conduct of all trade union elections, including election dates, procedures, and ratification of results. The law permitted the administrative dissolution of trade unions and barred trade unions from political activity.

The law prohibited antiunion discrimination. If employers terminated a union member's contract for union activity, the law permitted workers to receive compensation and legal indemnity and to institute proceedings before an arbitration board. Once the board made a determination, the employer could be compelled to reinstate the worker (although this protection was limited to the elected members of a union's board). Anecdotal evidence showed widespread antiunion discrimination in both the public and private sectors. The International Labor Organization (ILO) noted prohibitions on the right to strike in banking, private schools, retail businesses, daily and occasional workers, and the civil service constituted situations in which freedom of association protections did not meet the standards of the ILO convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize.

Foreigners with legal resident status were permitted to join trade unions. According to the ILO, however, most unions did not encourage or accept the participation of foreign workers. The law permitted foreign workers to join existing unions (regardless of nationality and reciprocity agreements) but denied them the right to form their own unions. Foreign workers were not granted full membership by most unions and could neither vote in trade union elections nor run for union office.

Palestinian refugees were generally allowed to organize their own unions. Few other refugees participated actively in trade unions because of restrictions on their right to work. While some unions required citizenship, others were open to foreign nationals whose home countries had reciprocity agreements with Lebanon.

The law protected the right of workers to bargain collectively, but a minimum of 60 percent of workers had to agree on the goals beforehand. The law required a vote of two-thirds of union members at a general assembly to ratify collective bargaining agreements.

Unions had the right to strike, but only after approval from the Ministry of Interior. Organizers of a strike (at least three of whom had to be identified by name) were required to notify the ministry in advance of the number of participants and the intended location of the strike. Of a union's membership, 5 percent had to assume responsibility for maintaining order among the strikers, and organizers had to sign a document assuming full responsibility for damages occurring during a demonstration.

There were other significant restrictions on the right to strike. The law prohibited public-sector employees, domestic workers, and agricultural workers from joining or establishing unions or going on strike. The law required public sector workers to settle disputes through compulsory arbitration.

Throughout the year, several labor federations staged strikes to protest inadequate wages and poor working conditions stemming from the country's years-long economic crisis. Public sector employees – including judges, judicial clerks, public school teachers, and air traffic controllers – staged walkouts demanding an increase in salaries and transportation subsidies. The value of salaries and subsidies, paid in Lebanese pounds, declined by 98 percent compared to the U.S. dollar since 2019. Employees of the state-run electricity and telecommunications utilities also went on strike, making similar demands for higher pay and better working conditions.

The government's enforcement of applicable law was weak, including prohibitions on antiunion discrimination. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining were not always respected. The government and other political actors interfered with the functioning of worker organizations, particularly the main federation, the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers, the only national confederation recognized by the government.

Antiunion discrimination and other instances of employer interference in union functions occurred. Some employers fired workers in the process of forming a union before the union could be formally established and published in the official gazette.

B. PROHIBITION OF FORCED OR COMPULSORY LABOR

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

C. PROHIBITION OF CHILD LABOR AND MINIMUM AGE FOR EMPLOYMENT

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings> .

D. DISCRIMINATION (SEE SECTION 6)

E. ACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS OF WORK

Wage and Hour Laws: The labor law stipulated a minimum wage, although it did not apply to foreign workers, including Syrians, PRS, and migrant domestic workers. Observers concluded that the minimum wage was lower than the minimum living wage, owing to the steep depreciation in the value of the Lebanese pound. According to a UN Humanitarian Aid report published on June 16, the minimum monthly wage was less than 675,000 Lebanese pounds (\$25 based on the parallel market exchange rate at the time).

There was no official minimum wage for domestic workers. Employment contracts for domestic workers stipulated monthly wages; however, the contractual wage depended on the nationality of the worker. Whenever an employee signed a contract with an employer, the contract had to be registered with the Directorate of General Security for the worker to obtain a residency permit. While the contract established uniform terms and conditions of employment and provided some labor protections, it did not address wages for domestic workers.

The law prescribed a standard 48-hour work week with a weekly rest period that could not be less than 36 consecutive hours. The law stipulated 48 hours of work as the maximum per week in most businesses except for the agricultural sector. The law permitted a 12-hour day under certain

conditions but stipulated that overtime pay should be 150 percent of normal pay. The law did not set limits on compulsory overtime.

Many workers took on second and even third jobs to meet their basic living necessities. Some private-sector employers failed to provide employees with family and transportation allowances as stipulated under the law and failed to register them with the National Social Security Fund.

Occupational Safety and Health: The Ministry of Labor set occupational safety and health (OSH) standards. The law required employers to implement proper safety measures and to hold fire, third-party liability, and workers' compensation insurance. The ministry had the authority to revoke a company's license if its inspectors found a company noncompliant. The law stipulated workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, although government officials did not protect employees who exercised this right. The responsibility for identifying hazards in the work environment remained with OSH experts and not workers.

Labor experts deemed the country's OSH standards inappropriate for the main industries in the country and noted that the government did not regularly enforce them. OSH violations were especially prevalent in the construction, industrial and informal sectors.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The Ministry of Labor's enforcement team handled all inspections of potential labor violations, although it lacked the staffing, resources, legal tools, and political support to carry out its mandate of enforcing minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. Political interference with inspectors sometimes affected the quality of inspections. Penalties for wage and hour violations were commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

Workers could report wage and hour violations directly to the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers, the Ministry of Labor, or the National Social Security Fund, or indirectly through their respective unions. In most cases, workers opted to remain silent due to fear of dismissal. Acceptable conditions of work statutes did not apply to those involved in work within the context of a family, day laborers, temporary workers in the public sector, or workers in the agricultural sector.

Violations of wage and overtime pay were most common in the construction industry and among migrant workers, particularly with domestic workers. Foreign domestic workers often faced physical, mental, and sexual abuse, to include unsafe working conditions and nonpayment of wages.

Penalties for violations of OSH laws were commensurate with those for similar crimes such as negligence. Penalties for OSH violations were rarely applied against violators. While most licensed businesses and factories strove to meet national OSH workplace standards, conditions in informal factories and businesses were poorly regulated and often did not meet these standards. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and to initiate sanctions, but a shortage of OSH inspectors hampered enforcement. There were no reported cases in which the ministry revoked a company's license for OSH violations.

Some employers subjected domestic workers, mostly of Asian and African origin, to nonpayment of wages, mistreatment, and abuse, including rape. In many cases, domestic workers endured long hours without vacations or holidays. Victims of abuse could file civil suits or seek other legal action – often with the assistance of NGOs – but most victims, counseled by their embassies or consulates, settled for an administrative resolution that usually included monetary compensation and repatriation.

Authorities typically did not prosecute perpetrators of abuse against domestic workers for reasons that included the victims' refusal to press charges and a lack of evidence. Authorities settled an unknown number of cases of nonpayment of wages through negotiation. According to the embassies and consulates representing countries with large domestic worker populations, many of

their citizens opted not to report violations of their labor contracts until after they returned to their home countries because they preferred not to stay in the country for a lengthy judicial process.

Migrant workers were especially vulnerable to wage, hour, and OSH violations. Most arrived in the country through local- and source-country recruitment agencies. Although the law required recruitment agencies to be licensed by the Ministry of Labor, the government did not adequately monitor their activities. The visa sponsorship system tied a foreign worker's employment visa to a specific employer, making it difficult to change employers. In cases of employment termination, the worker lost their legal status. This discouraged many migrant workers from filing complaints.

A 2021 report by the ILO estimated 78 percent of total employment was informal and not subject to labor legislation, income taxation, social protection, or entitlements such as paid leave.