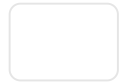


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2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Lebanon

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon is a parliamentary republic based on the 1943 National Pact, which apportions governmental authority among a Maronite Christian president, a Shia speaker of the Chamber of Deputies (parliament), and a Sunni prime minister. The law officially recognizes 18 religious sects or confessions. Parliament elected Michel Aoun to the presidency in 2016; his term expired on October 31 and no successor had been chosen by December. On May 15, the government conducted parliamentary elections that international observers considered free and fair. Following the election of the new parliament, the cabinet of Prime Minister Najib Mikati went into caretaker status.

The Internal Security Forces, under the Ministry of Interior, has responsibility for law enforcement. The Directorate of General Security, also under the Ministry of Interior, has responsibility for border control but exercises some domestic security responsibilities as well. The Lebanese Armed Forces, under the Ministry of Defense, has responsibility for external security but is authorized to arrest and detain suspects on national security grounds. In recent years, the Lebanese Armed Forces also arrested alleged drug traffickers, managed protests, enforced building codes related to refugee shelters, and intervened to quell violence between rival political factions. The General Directorate of State Security, reporting to the prime minister through the Higher Defense Council, has responsibility for investigating espionage and other national security matters. The Parliamentary Police Force reports to the speaker of parliament and has responsibility for protecting parliament premises and the speaker's residence. Both the Internal Security Forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces provide units to the Parliamentary Police Force. Civilian authorities maintained control over the government's armed forces and other security forces, although U.S.-designated terrorist organization Hizballah, Palestinian militias, and other violent extremist organizations operated outside the direction or control

of government officials. Members of government security forces and nonstate armed groups committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killing; torture; arbitrary arrests and detentions; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; serious restrictions on freedom of expression, including violence, threats of violence or unjustified arrests or prosecutions against journalists, censorship, and enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious restrictions on internet freedom; threats of refoulement of refugees to a country where they could face torture or persecution; serious high-level and widespread official corruption; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; existence and enforcement of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; and existence of the worst forms of child labor.

The country suffered from endemic corruption. Although the law provides for prosecution and punishment of officials who committed human rights abuses or engaged in corruption, enforcement remained a significant problem, with perpetrators benefiting from widespread impunity for human rights abuses, including evading or interfering in judicial processes.

Nonstate armed groups, including Hizballah and Palestinian militias, operated with relative impunity, using intimidation, harassment, and occasionally violence against perceived critics and opponents. Armed members of these forces controlled access to certain neighborhoods, camps, and other areas where they effectively operated outside the reach and authority of the government. These organizations 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 was one report by a human rights group asserting that the government or its agents committed an arbitrary or unlawful killing.

On August 30, Amnesty International and other human rights monitoring organizations reported that Syrian citizen Bashar Abdel Saoud died after reportedly being tortured in a detention center run by the General Directorate for State Security (DGSS). The DGSS alleged the detainee confessed to belonging to a terrorist cell affiliated with ISIS, to which he had allegedly pledged allegiance. The DGSS did not provide details about the time or circumstances of arrest or death, but said it immediately referred “the incident” to judicial authorities. On November 29, a Military Court judge indicted a lieutenant and four other soldiers from the South Lebanon State Security office in Bint Jbeil, who had been arrested in connection with this case in September, on torture charges. The case remained unresolved as of December.

Internal investigations continued, with no findings released as of December, into allegations of excessive force by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) during their response to large-scale demonstrations in Tripoli in January 2021 in which one protester died and over 200 suffered injuries from live fire, rubber bullets, and tear gas. The investigations resulted in the referral of more than 100 cases for prosecution to the Military Court; the investigations were ongoing at year’s end.

Investigations continued into the 2021 death of Lokman Slim, a prominent political activist and vocal critic of Hizballah who was found dead from multiple bullet wounds in a rental car in the southern village of Addousieh. No findings had been made public by year's end.

On July 1, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon entered a residual phase to preserve its records and archives, safeguard residual obligations to victims and witnesses of the 2005 assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri, and respond to requests for information from national authorities.

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

At year's end the 10-member National Human Rights Institute and its five-member National Preventive Mechanism against Torture, appointed by the cabinet in 2019, had not yet taken up their assigned mandates of, respectively, monitoring the human rights situation in the country (including investigating complaints of human rights abuses and issuing periodic reports) and overseeing implementation of the antitorture law by inspecting places of detention, investigating torture allegations, and issuing recommendations to improve the treatment of detainees.

Human rights and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) organizations reported that police in Tripoli and other cities outside the capital carried out forced anal exams of men suspected of same-sex sexual activity (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics).

Impunity was a significant problem in the security forces, including the ISF, LAF, and Parliamentary Police Force (PPF), according to NGO and media reports. Impunity was also a significant problem with respect to the actions of nonstate armed groups, such as Hizballah. A lack of transparency and urgency in ISF and LAF investigations contributed to impunity in these organizations. A security force unit accused of conducting abuses could conduct its own internal investigation and try its implicated security force members in military court for charges unrelated to their official duties (see section 1.e., Trial Procedures).

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prisons and detention centers were often overcrowded, and prisoners sometimes lacked access to basic sanitation. As was true for most buildings in the country, 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 6, there were approximately 9,500 prisoners and detainees, including pretrial detainees and remanded prisoners, in facilities built to hold 3,500 inmates, according to the ISF. Authorities often held pretrial detainees together with convicted prisoners. There were 15 minors and 277 women held in prisons, according to the ISF. The ISF incarcerated women at three dedicated women's prisons in Baabda, Beirut, and Tripoli.

Most prisons lacked adequate sanitation, ventilation, and lighting, and authorities did not regulate temperatures consistently. In the notoriously overcrowded Roumieh prison, groups of prisoners often slept in rooms originally built for far fewer inmates, and basic medical care suffered from inadequate staffing, poor working conditions, and extreme overcrowding. Overcrowding in detention facilities continued to exacerbate the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks, particularly in Roumieh.

Administration: Family members generally submitted abuse complaints to the Ministry of Interior during or following in-person prison visits. Prisoners and detainees could also report abuse directly to the ISF Human Rights Department. If detention center investigators assigned by the minister of interior found physical abuse, the investigator assigned a medical team to confirm the abuse, and a judge ruled at the conclusion of the review. As of October 6, the ISF committee reported it had received nine complaints. Prison directors reportedly often protected police and correctional officers under investigation.

Independent Monitoring: The government permitted independent monitoring of prison and detention conditions by local and international human rights groups and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and such monitoring took place.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court, and the government generally observed these requirements. The law requires judicial warrants before arrests except in cases of active pursuit. Nonetheless, NGOs and civil society groups alleged that the government arbitrarily arrested and detained individuals, particularly protesters, refugees, and migrant workers. Typically, these detentions lasted between several hours and several days, and focused on administrative questions about the residency or work status of detainees, according to NGOs and civil society groups.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law generally requires a warrant for arrest and provides the right to a medical examination and referral to a prosecutor within 48 hours of arrest. The law requires that officials promptly inform detainees of the charges against them, and authorities generally adhered to this requirement. However, the law permits 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 requires authorities to inform detainees of the charges filed against them. A suspect caught in the act of committing a crime must be referred to an examining judge, who decides whether to issue an indictment or order the release of the suspect. By law, bail is available in all cases regardless of the charges, although the amounts required could be prohibitively high.

The law states that from the moment of arrest, a suspect or the subject of a complaint has the right to contact a family member, an attorney, their employer, or an advocate of their choosing, and an interpreter if needed, but the government did not consistently respect these rights. The law does not explicitly state, however, whether a lawyer may attend preliminary questioning with the judicial police. In practical terms, the lawyer may or may not be allowed to do so.

The law provides that a person may be held in police custody for investigation for up to 48 hours, unless the investigation requires additional time, in which case the general prosecutor may renew the period of custody for another 48 hours. If the suspect lacks the resources to obtain legal counsel, authorities must provide free legal aid. The law does not require the judicial police to inform an individual who lacks legal counsel that one may be assigned through the regional bar association.

The law does not require authorities to inform individuals they have the right to remain silent. Many provisions of the law simply state that if the individual being questioned refuses to make a statement or remain silent, this should be recorded and that the detainees may not be “coerced to speak or to undergo questioning, on pain of nullifying their statements.” The law excludes from this protection suspects accused of homicide, drug crimes, endangerment of state security, violent crimes, crimes involving terrorism, and those with a previous criminal conviction.

Authorities may prosecute officials for “deprivation of personal freedom” in cases of prolonged arrest beyond legal limits, but rarely filed such charges.

International observers reported that authorities failed to observe many provisions of the law and that 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 victims chose not to report violations. NGOs reported that most cases involved vulnerable groups, such as refugees, drug users, LGBTQI+ individuals, or migrant workers, who often feared retribution by authorities and had limited legal recourse. Civil society groups reported that authorities frequently detained foreign nationals arbitrarily.

Pretrial Detention: The law states the period of detention for a misdemeanor may not exceed two months. Officials may extend this period up to two additional months. For felonies, the initial period of detention may not exceed six months but may be subsequently renewed. A strike by judicial officials and judges that began in August compounded lengthy backlogs that have caused some pretrial detention periods for felonies to last for months or years. Seventeen individuals detained following the August 2020 Port of Beirut explosion remained in pretrial detention at year’s end.

Pretrial detention periods were often lengthy, in some cases equal to or exceeding the maximum allowable sentence under the law for the alleged crime. As of October 6, the ISF reported 7,710 prisoners in pretrial detention, or approximately 80 percent of the 9,500 total detainees.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, government officials subjected the judiciary to political pressure, particularly through negotiations among political factions regarding the appointment of key prosecutors and investigating magistrates. Prior to the end of his term on October

31, President Aoun did not sign a routine draft decree for judicial appointments that had been under consideration by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance, and the presidency since 2020.

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 provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and the judiciary generally enforced this right.

Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Trials are generally public, but judges have the discretion to order a closed court session. Defendants have the right to be present at trial, consult with an attorney in a timely manner, and question witnesses against them. Defendants may present witnesses and evidence. Defendants have the right to free interpretation; however, interpreters were rarely available. Defendants have the right not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt, and they have the right of appeal.

The Military Court has 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 also may try civilians on security charges or for violations of the military code of justice. While civilian courts may try military personnel, the Military Court often heard these cases, including for charges unrelated to official military duty. Human rights activists have noted that 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. Palestinian groups in refugee camps operated an autonomous system of justice with little transparency to outsiders and beyond the control of the state.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no known reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is an independent judiciary in civil matters, but plaintiffs seldom submitted civil lawsuits seeking damages for government human rights abuses. During the year there were no examples of a civil court awarding a person compensation for such abuses.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law prohibits such actions, but there were reports that security services nonetheless monitored private email and other digital correspondence. The law allows 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.

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.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for members of the press, and stipulates that restrictions may be imposed only under exceptional circumstances. The government generally respected this right. The law holds journalists criminally responsible for erroneous or false news; threats or blackmail; insult, defamation, and contempt; dishonoring or insulting the president or the president of another foreign country; inciting a crime through a publication; and sectarian provocation.

Freedom of Expression: Individuals were generally free to criticize the government and discuss matters of public interest; however, several legal restrictions limit this right. The law prohibits discussing the honor of the president, insulting him or the president of a foreign country, or defaming public officials, public entities, and individuals. The military code of justice prohibits insulting the security forces, and the Military Court prosecuted civilians under this statute.

On June 8, the ISF summoned freelance journalist Luna Safwan for questioning following a defamation case filed by film director and journalist Jaafar al-Attar, against whom Safwan and several other women had filed a sexual harassment case in 2021.

On June 24, the Military Court summoned stand-up comedian Chaden Fakih for “insulting and mocking the ISF” and fined her for a satirical video she shared on her Instagram page in 2021 in which she asked the ISF for sanitary pads during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists continued to face intimidation and harassment. Political tension led some outlets to fear entering certain areas where Hizballah exercised influence to report without removing branding or logos identifying the outlets. Protesters and security forces attacked or harassed journalists covering protests on several occasions. On December 28, assailants attacked the studios of al-Jadeed TV with a Molotov cocktail and gunfire after the outlet broadcast a comedy sketch implying sexual relations between southern Lebanese women and foreign UN peacekeepers.

On August 3, Hizballah supporters attacked press photographer Hassan Shaaban after he filmed residents of the southern village of Beit Yahoun protesting the water shortage in their homes for several consecutive days. The same assailants reiterated their threat to Shaaban the next day with a bullet hung on his car window.

On August 13, journalist and television host Dima Sadek was the target of a violent campaign on social media, following her posting of a photo of the deceased Iranian Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini with the caption “The Satanic Verses.” Sadek, who posted the image in reaction to the attack on British writer Salman Rushdie on August 12 in New York, stated in her tweet, “I am the subject of a public incitement-to-murder campaign launched by Jawad Nasrallah,” the son of Hizballah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah. Sadek accompanied her message with a screenshot of a tweet from another internet user saying that “spilling Dima Sadek’s blood is a moral obligation.” The Skeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom denounced this campaign of “incitement and threat for murder and rape.”

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

publications.

No specific law regulates online speech. Authorities may prosecute individuals, journalists, and bloggers for what they express online under various laws, including cybercrime statutes.

The law governing audiovisual media bans live broadcasts of unauthorized political gatherings and certain religious events. It also bans any content that promotes a relationship with Israel. Media outlets must receive a Class "A" license from the cabinet to broadcast any type of political news or programs and a Class "B" license for entertainment. The law prohibits broadcasting programs that harm the state or its relations with foreign countries. The law also prohibits the broadcast of programs that seek to harm public morals, ignite sectarian strife, or insult religious beliefs.

Authorities continued to prosecute online, print, and television journalists for violations of the country's publications law. Prosecutors sometimes referred these cases to criminal courts based on private complaints and their own discretion, but more often they referred these cases to the Publications Court. The Muhal Observatory for Freedom of Expression reported that authorities summoned freelance journalist Marwa Saab on June 20 after she posted a story that angered film director and journalist Jaafar al-Attar. Publications Court cases typically remained open for a year or more and resulted in fines or dismissal.

Authorities selectively applied elements of the law that permit 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. The General Directorate of Security (DGS) may also review and censor any foreign newspaper, magazine, or book to determine its admissibility into the country, but these reviews were mostly for explicit, pornographic content. Some journalists reported that political violence and extralegal intimidation led to self-censorship.

Libel/Slander 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 that in dozens of cases, authorities filed criminal defamation suits against journalists, bloggers, political activists, and private citizens, to include posts in WhatsApp groups or on Facebook. 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 prohibits the press from publishing blasphemous content regarding the country's officially recognized religious groups or content that may provoke sectarian feuds. There were no known prosecutions under this law during the year.

Private citizens may file criminal complaints, which the law requires investigating judges to consider, and frequently did so in defamation cases. Politicians at times responded to allegations of wrongdoing leveled at them by filing criminal complaints alleging defamation.

The ISF Cybercrimes Bureau reported that it had received 295 defamation cases for investigation as of October 6. The bureau reportedly investigated all the referrals of defamation cases during the year, with half of the investigations ongoing at year's end.

Nongovernmental Impact: Religious figures sometimes sought to rally public sentiment to inhibit freedom of expression, including through coercion and threats of violence. Leaders of Hizballah and

the Amal Movement political party cited “foreign interference” as one justification for limiting media publications in areas that they controlled.

Internet Freedom

The law does not restrict 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 (ISPs). Private ISPs obtain a permit by decree from the Ministry of Telecommunications.

The government reportedly restricted access to some websites to block online gambling, pornography, religiously provocative material, extremist ideology, and Israeli websites, but there were no verified reports the government systematically attempted to collect personally identifiable information via the internet. Generally, authorities censored websites through court orders filed with the ISF's Cybercrimes Bureau, which then issued a final order to the Ministry of Telecommunications. NGOs reported that the ministry did not notify website owners about blockage of their websites and gave owners only 48 hours to file an appeal to have the decision overturned.

Restrictions on freedom of expression concerning government officials applied to social media communications, which authorities typically considered a form of publication rather than private correspondence. Human rights groups reported that political parties and their supporters intimidated individuals online and in person in response to online posts deemed critical of political leaders or religious figures. The ISF's Cybercrimes Bureau and other state security agencies also summoned journalists, bloggers, and activists for questioning about their social media and blog posts, especially when they criticized political figures or religious sects.

On June 15, security officers visited the home of television journalist Sabine Youssef after the Mount Lebanon appellate court issued an arrest and investigation warrant against her on the charge of insulting the president in a tweet.

On June 25, lawyer and activist Khaled Merheb received death threats after publishing a social media post criticizing the grand mufti's opposition to the rights of LGBTQI+ persons.

Media reported that Lama Fakih, an employee of HRW researching the Port of Beirut explosion, was targeted with NSO Group's Pegasus spyware during the year.

Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no reports of government restrictions specific to academic freedom, but libel and slander laws applied.

Most private universities enjoyed freedom of expression, and students could hold student elections and organize cultural, social, and political activities.

The DGS Censorship Bureau reviewed all films and plays. Its decision-making process lacked transparency and reportedly was influenced by religious institutions and political groups. The Censorship Bureau banned Universal Pictures' *Minions: The Rise of Gru* on July 8 because of its depiction of an evil nun character. On June 13, it also banned Pixar's *Lightyear* because of a same-sex kiss between two of the characters.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

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

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution provides for the freedom of peaceful assembly and the government generally respected this right. The Ministry of Interior required organizers to obtain a permit from the Ministry of Interior three days prior to any demonstration.

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

Freedom of Association

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

No prior authorization is required to form an association, but organizers must notify the Ministry of Interior to obtain legal recognition, and the ministry must verify that the organization respects “public order, public morals, and state security.” In some cases, the ministry sent an NGO’s notification paperwork to the security forces to initiate inquiries about an organization’s founding members. Organizations must invite ministry representatives to any general assembly where members vote on bylaws, amendments, or seats on the board of directors. The ministry must then validate the vote or election. If the organization fails to comply with these procedures, the Council of Ministers may dissolve it by decree.

The cabinet must 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 provides 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 (see section 2.e., Protection of Refugees).

In-country Movement: Nonstate armed groups hindered or prevented movement in areas where they operated. According to the security services, armed members of Hizballah controlled access to some areas, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine prevented access to a border area. Within

families, men sometimes exercised considerable control over female relatives, restricting their activities outside the home or their contact with friends and relatives.

Citizenship: Citizenship is derived exclusively from the father. A citizen mother married to a noncitizen father may not transmit Lebanese citizenship to her children (see section 2.g., Stateless Persons).

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, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. Observers noted a relative rise in anti-refugee rhetoric that bordered on incitement to violence against refugees.

According to the latest UNHCR vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees conducted in 2021, there were approximately 825,000 Syrian refugees in the country registered with UNHCR. Syrian refugees who arrived after 2015, when the government instructed UNHCR to stop registering them, are not included in UNHCR's numbers, but the agency estimates there are approximately 1.3 million Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. 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. Approximately 20 percent lived in informal tented settlements, often adjacent to agricultural land, according to UNHCR. According to the 2021 UNHCR assessment, refugees often took loans to cover basic needs such as rent, food, and health care, leaving more than 90 percent in debt and food insecure.

Existing immigration rules do not explicitly permit access to the country for refugees and asylum seekers from Syria. Since 2015, authorities have restricted entry of Syrians into the country to individuals in specific categories, such as those with a Lebanese sponsor, traveling for the purposes of transit, or attending a medical or embassy appointment. In March, the DGS removed "displaced" (admitted to the country based on humanitarian grounds) from the list of entry categories for Syrian nationals.

Due to the Syrian government's hostility toward the refugee population, Syrian refugees faced barriers in obtaining the Syrian identification documents (IDs) required to renew their Lebanese residency permits. The Syrian embassy also charged fees for IDs that were unaffordable for most refugees. Obtaining and maintaining legal residency was also a challenge for refugees of other nationalities, especially Iraqis, 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 pre-approved visa from 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 the age of 15 were included under their parents' identity card and residency permit. Thereafter they officially must 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 cost of \$350, a fee that most PRS could not afford. However, the DGS permitted PRS children above the age of 15 to use their birth certificates as a substitute identity document until age 18.

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and Lebanon is 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: Although there were no instances of mass refoulement, government officials repeatedly called for the return of Syrian refugees and occasionally threatened to expel them, notwithstanding the protection risks and lack of basic services returnees would face.

In October the DGS resumed facilitated return movements of Syrian refugees conducted prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNHCR contacted returnees and maintained a presence at staging sites prior to departure and reported no instances of involuntary or forced returns. The Minister of Displaced Affairs announced in July a plan to return up to 15,000 Syrian refugees per month, but this plan had not gone into effect by year's end. The Higher Defense Council, a body chaired by the president that includes cabinet ministers and the heads of the security service, enacted a 2019 decision that required deportation of anyone arrested and found to have entered the country illegally thereafter. In the first half of the year, deportations of Syrians increased compared to the same period in 2021, according to UNHCR.

Humanitarian organizations consider the government's deportation policy, particularly the 2019 Higher Defense Council decision, to have significantly elevated the risk of refoulement because refugees who expressed a credible fear of persecution or torture upon return were often not afforded a formal review before deportation. Human rights groups raised concerns regarding the risk of turning refugees over to Syrian authorities. Although government officials maintained that their deportation policy applied only to illegal migrants and not to asylum seekers, human rights groups observed that the government often failed to respect due process in making its return decisions. UNHCR and international donors continued to urge 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 that it did not have the capacity to hold court hearings on all deportation cases as required by law.

Non-Syrians arrested due to irregular entry or residency faced administrative detention without being sentenced by a court. The DGS held these individuals in a migrant retention facility where officials processed their immigration files before making administrative deportation decisions. Unless a person registered with UNHCR expressed the need for international protection or had already secured resettlement to a third country, cases of this nature typically resulted in the detainee's deportation.

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: NGOs and UN agencies continued to report incidents of sexual harassment and exploitation of refugees by employers and landlords, including paying workers below the minimum wage, forcing workers to work excessive hours, debt bondage (see section 7.e., Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement), and pressuring families into agreeing to the early marriage of their daughters, ostensibly to relieve economic hardship (see section 6, Children).

Freedom of Movement: UN agencies reported that local officials frequently used the threat of evictions to exert control over refugees or to appease host communities competing with refugees for jobs and other resources. In July, the LAF began a campaign in the west and central Beka'a Valley to identify "unauthorized" tents in informal settlements and families who had moved in without government approval. Authorities had identified at least 117 such tents and dismantled 45 as of

August 11. The affected refugee families had few options for relocation near where they had been living.

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 imposed curfews in several municipalities across the country, allegedly to improve security of all communities or for public health concerns.

Due to the slow implementation of residency determinations, most Syrian refugees could not renew their legal documents, which significantly affected their freedom of movement due to the possibility of arrest at checkpoints, particularly for adult men. While authorities released most detainees within a few days, some refugees reported that authorities either confiscated their IDs or required them to pay fines before releasing them.

UNHCR staff reported that 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 is 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.

Syrian refugees in informal settlements and other types of housing continued to face risks of eviction. According to UNHCR, 2,517 Syrians were evicted from their homes between January and the end of September. The number of evicted Syrians rose 21 percent, from 1,028 between April and June to 1,243 from July to September. It was unclear whether this increase in evictions correlated with a rise in government anti-refugee rhetoric during the second half of the year. Both collective and individual evictions occurred with little if any opportunity for legal challenge.

Employment: The government treats both PRS and Syrians as foreigners. As a result, both groups of refugees faced additional disadvantages in the labor market.

To be employed in the formal labor market, Palestinian refugee workers need an annual work permit that the employer must request from the Ministry of Labor. This application process was reportedly often lengthy, cumbersome, and marred with uncertainty.

A lack of written contracts, paucity of employment benefits, and insecure job tenure also contributed to unstable working conditions.

While most non-Syrian Palestinian refugees can get a work permit for free, PRS must pay the same fees for a work permit as other non-Lebanese nationals. PRS are also excluded from participating in the streamlined application process available to other Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. As with Syrian refugees, PRS may obtain a work permit if their employer provides a contract and covers the full cost. If a PRS worker did not have residency, a work permit could be obtained in conjunction with an employment contract. In practice, however, such arrangements were extremely rare.

The law permits Syrian legal residents to work only in the agricultural, construction, and custodial fields. Labor force participation among Syrian women was 16 percent, compared to 81 percent for

Syrian men. Enforcement of employment restrictions eased during the year.

Access to Basic Services: The law considers Palestinian refugees registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA) to be foreigners. UNRWA provided health, education, social services, and emergency assistance to registered Palestinian refugees residing in the country. Palestinian refugees continued to face de facto restrictions on accessing national education services. Rising transportation costs associated with increasing use of UNRWA schools constituted a key barrier to accessing education for Palestinian refugee children, many of whom also had to leave school at an early age to earn an income.

Palestinians did not benefit from national sickness and maternity funds or the family allowances fund. UNRWA continued to bear the cost of basic medical, maternity, or family health care expenses (excluding worker's compensation). Informal restrictions on work in certain industries also left many refugees dependent on UNRWA for education, health care, and social services (see section 7.d.).

The amount of land allocated to the 12 official Palestinian refugee camps in the country has changed only marginally since 1948, despite a four-fold increase in the population. Consequently, most Palestinian refugees lived in overpopulated camps, some of which suffered heavy damage in past conflicts (see also section 2.e., Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons). According to UNRWA, poverty rates increased among Palestinian refugee families from 73 percent in July 2021 to 86 percent in March. Many Palestinian refugees experienced significant difficulties paying for essential goods and services including foodstuffs, electricity, and rent. Many received only a few hours of electricity per day and struggled to access hospitals due to high transportation costs. Increasingly, landlords raised rents and required tenants to pay them in U.S. dollars; Palestinian refugees' income was in Lebanese pounds, a currency that has lost 95 percent of its value since 2019.

The government did not permit UNRWA to install individual electricity meters in apartments, preferring that UNRWA pay a single bill rather than collecting from individual households as if the occupants were permanent residents of the country. This practice limited Palestinian refugee residents' access to electricity.

The law prohibits Palestinians from purchasing or inheriting property.

Palestinian refugees who arrived from Syria since 2011 received limited basic support from UNRWA, including food aid, cash assistance, and winter assistance, such as cash to purchase fuel for heating. Authorities permitted children of PRS to enroll in UNRWA schools and access UNRWA health clinics.

Due to delays and closures driven by the economic crisis, student enrollment in public schools declined significantly in the 2021-2022 school year. Official numbers are not yet finalized, but the Ministry of Education and Higher Education reported to UNICEF that around 187,900 Syrian refugee students were enrolled in scholastic year 2021-2022. The ministry estimated that 159,400 children (of all nationalities) were enrolled for the 2022-2023 scholastic year. In addition, approximately 30,000 non-Lebanese students participated in structured educational activities conducted outside of a formal school environment as of the end of June. According to UNHCR estimates, more than one-half of refugee children aged 3 to 18 were not receiving education. Donor funding to UN agencies covered school-related expenses, such as school fees, books, and uniforms.

Syrian refugees had access to many nonprofit and private health centers and local clinics for primary care services, and UN agencies and NGOs funded most of the associated costs with international

donor support. 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.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Fighting in 2007 destroyed the Nahr el-Bared Palestinian Refugee Camp, displacing its approximately 27,000 residents. Many of the displaced resided in areas adjacent to the camp or in other areas of the country where UNRWA services were available. The reconstruction of the camp, begun in 2008, was approximately 82 percent complete at the end of the year. The balance of the project was not fully funded. Of those displaced following the camp's destruction, UNRWA expected 20,878 to return to the reconstructed camp; 16,781 had done so as of December. The remaining 6,122 individuals initially indicated they would return to the camp but subsequently opted to settle in a different location. The temporary settlements that provided housing for them near the camp were completely vacated by the beginning of the year. UNRWA began directing the savings in rent and maintenance to the remaining eligible displaced families as cash rental subsidy payments of \$75 per month until their homes are reconstructed.

g. Stateless Persons

There were no official statistics on the size of the stateless population. The country contributes to statelessness, including through: discrimination against women in nationality laws; discrimination on other grounds, such as ethnicity, religion, or disability, in nationality laws or their administration in practice; and discrimination in birth registrations.

Citizenship is 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 is 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, some children born to citizen fathers did not have their births registered due to administrative obstacles or a lack of understanding of the regulations. During the year, the government extended a waiver allowing late registration of Syrian children born in the country since 2011 to be effected 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 were able to 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 (DPRA) made it difficult to register these children after the age of one year. According to the law, birth registration of children older than one year requires a court procedure, in some cases an investigation by the DGS, and final approval from the DPRA. Where paternity is in doubt or the applicant is age 18 years or more, he or she may also be required to take a DNA test. The birth

registration process can take more than a year to complete and is extremely complex to navigate, especially for the DPRA-registered parents of Palestinian refugee children.

UNRWA estimated that 3,000 to 5,000 Palestinians remained unregistered with either it or the government. These Palestinians began to arrive in the country during the 1960s and do not hold any formal valid identification documentation. The government does not recognize their legal status in the country. 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 operates, 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 transmit 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 employment market and no access to many professions. Additionally, they could neither access public schools or public health care facilities nor register marriages or births. They also could not own or inherit property.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

Although the law provides 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 ongoing economic, financial, and social crises, and public corruption.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Parliamentary elections, which according to the constitution should have been held in 2020, took place on May 15. Observers concluded that the elections were generally free and fair. The constitution requires presidential elections between one and two months before the end of the incumbent president's term.

Political Parties and Political Participation: All major political parties and numerous smaller ones were almost exclusively based on religious affiliation, and parliamentary seats were allocated on a confessional basis.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No law limits participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. There were, however, significant cultural barriers to women's participation in politics. Only one woman served in the 24-member cabinet during the year. In April, the Ministry of the Interior and Municipalities announced that 118 women ran for parliament, representing 16 percent of the total number of candidates; a draft law to establish a quota of women in parliament died in committee. Three parties introduced

voluntary quotas for women. Eight women won their elections and joined the 128-seat parliament. There was limited female leadership in political parties.

Members of minority groups participated in politics. Apart from Ismaili Islam and Judaism, authorities allocated every government-recognized religious group at least one seat in parliament regardless of the number of its adherents. Voters elected three parliamentarians representing minorities (one Syriac Orthodox Christian and two Alawites) in the 2022 elections. One of the minority parliamentarians was a woman.

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

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The country suffers from endemic corruption. Although the law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, the government has not implemented the law effectively, and officials reportedly engaged in corrupt practices with impunity on a wide scale. Government and security officials, customs agents, and members of the judiciary were subject to laws prohibiting bribery and extortion, but the lack of strong enforcement limited the law's effectiveness.

Corruption: The government continued to lack control over 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 generally included political patronage; judicial failures, especially in investigations of official wrongdoing; and bribery at multiple levels within the national and municipal governments.

On January 24, the government appointed the six members of the anticorruption commission called for in its 2020 Anticorruption National Strategy and allocated the commission a budget of 10 billion Lebanese pounds (\$431,000 based on the parallel market exchange rate at the time).

On March 10, the prosecutor general arrested Raja Salameh, who, along with his brother Riad, the governor of the Central Bank, was under investigation for embezzling two billion Lebanese pounds (\$83,333 based on the parallel market exchange rate at the time) from the Central Bank. Authorities released him in May after he posted a record bail of 100 billion Lebanese pounds (\$4.4 million based on the parallel market exchange rate at the time). On March 28, Eurojust, a European Union justice agency based in The Hague, reported that France, Germany, and Luxembourg had seized properties and frozen assets worth 120 million euros (\$132 million) from the Salameh brothers.

On June 27, the accounting firm conducting forensic and financial audits of the Central Bank's accounts renewed its audit, which it had suspended in 2020 because of a political impasse over the government's provision of financial records.

On July 26, parliament approved a bill lifting the secrecy of bank accounts of sitting and former ministers, parliamentarians, and civil servants. The measure allows some government bodies to lift banking secrecy in cases of criminal investigations including illicit enrichment, money laundering, and terrorism financing.

A year after parliamentary approval, the public procurement law entered into force on July 29. While the new law pushed for increased transparency, competition, and integrity in public procurement

processes, the government continued to face several technical, logistical, and capacity limitations on its ability to implement the law.

Media continued to report that political interference stalled the investigation into the 2020 port explosion. Numerous media outlets reported that long-standing vacancies on the Court of Cassation prevented the court from resolving complaints levied by former officials against the investigating judge, accusing him of political bias. Disagreement between politicians and judges on whether elected government officials suspected of criminal activity should be tried in the Supreme Council for the Trial of Presidents and Ministers or in normal criminal courts also delayed the investigation.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

Several domestic and international human rights groups operated without government restrictions, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were sometimes responsive to these groups' views, but there was limited accountability for human rights abuses.

Government Human Rights Bodies: Parliament's Committee on Human Rights struggled to make the necessary legal changes to guide ministries in protecting human rights. As of year's end, neither the 10-member National Human Rights Institute nor the five-member National Preventive Mechanism against Torture located within it had a budget or commenced its work (see section 1.c., Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment).

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape (of women only) and the use of threats or violence to claim a "marital right to intercourse," although it does not explicitly outlaw spousal rape. While the government effectively enforced the law, the interpretation of cases by different confessional courts led to inconsistent civil law rulings throughout the country. The minimum prison sentence for a person convicted of rape is five years, increasing to seven years for the rape of a minor. The law no longer frees rapists from prosecution or nullifies their convictions if they married their victims.

The law criminalizes domestic violence, calls for the provision of shelters, gives women the ability to file a restraining order against the abuser, and assigns special units within the ISF to investigate domestic violence complaints. NGOs alleged that the definition of domestic violence was narrow and did not provide adequate protection from all forms of abuse, such as spousal rape. Although the law provides for a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison for battery, religious courts can cite confessionally based personal status laws to require a battered wife to return to a home shared with her abuser. Some police, especially in rural areas, treated domestic violence as a social rather than criminal matter.

NGOs and activists criticized the domestic violence law, claiming that it does 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 they noted that social and religious pressures – especially in more conservative communities – led to 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 reports and cases of foreign domestic workers, usually women, suffering from mistreatment, abuse, and in some instances rape or conditions akin to slavery.

The ISF continued its practice of alerting its human rights unit to all cases involving victims of domestic violence and other vulnerable groups, so officers could track the cases and provide appropriate support to victims.

The Women's Affairs Division in the Ministry of Social Affairs and several NGOs continued projects to address sexual or gender-based violence, such as providing counseling and shelter for survivors.

On August 14, Ghinwa Allawi attempted suicide after being subjected to systematic physical abuse at the hands of her husband, an adjutant in the ISF. He took a video of his actions which he sent to her family; it also circulated on social media. No further information was available concerning whether Allawi's husband was charged.

On August 17, Hana Khoder died from burns because of her husband's setting her afire 10 days earlier. Khoder was five months pregnant; her baby also died.

Sexual Harassment: The law criminalizes sexual harassment, which nonetheless remained a widespread problem. According to a study published in October by Institute for Migrations at the Lebanese American University, 68 percent of Lebanon's estimated 250,000 migrant domestic workers experienced at least one incident of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Reproductive Rights: Couples and individuals have the right to decide the number, spacing, and timing of their children and to manage their reproductive health.

Women, including survivors of sexual violence, generally had the information and means to manage their reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion, or violence, although women in rural areas faced social pressure on their reproductive choices due to long-held societal values. Government health care facilities provided access to sexual and reproductive health services, to include emergency contraception as part of the clinical management of rape. The sexual and reproductive health services offered by the government are largely supported by international donor funding.

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

Discrimination: Women suffered discrimination under the law and in practice, including under the penal and personal status codes. The constitution does not explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sex. In matters of marriage, child custody, inheritance, and divorce, personal status laws provide unequal treatment across the various confessional court systems but generally discriminate against women. All 18 recognized religious groups have their own personal status courts responsible for handling these matters, and laws vary depending on the religious group. For example, Sunni religious courts apply an inheritance law that provides a daughter one-half the inheritance of a son. Religious law on child custody matters favors the father in most instances, regardless of confession. Sharia

courts weigh the testimony of one man as equal to that of two women. Nationality law also discriminates against women, who may not confer citizenship to their spouses and children. By law women may own property, but they often ceded control of it to male relatives due to cultural norms and family pressure. The law does not distinguish between women and men in employment and provides for equal pay for men and women, although workplace gender discrimination, including wage discrimination, exists (see section 7.d., Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation).

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

International observers continued to raise concerns that authorities selectively enforced curfews on Syrian refugees only. Because Syrian refugees often lacked legal residency status, they generally incurred more severe consequences than other refugees if detained for a curfew violation. Cases of ID confiscation and fines for breaking curfews continued, and a few violent incidents against refugees occurred.

Lebanese of African descent reported instances of race-based discrimination and reported harassment by police, who periodically demanded to see their papers. 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 or managers.

On June 22, a video circulated of farmer Charbel Tarabay beating and abusing Syrian and Lebanese workers who were picking cherries for him in the northern village of Majdel Akkoura. Reportedly to cover up for refusing to pay them their salaries, Tarabay accused them of stealing money from him. The video showed the workers being forced to take off their clothes, after which they suffered repeated beatings with electrical cables. Tarabay said in the video, "Send this out to all Syrians in the area and show them what Charbel is capable of doing." Authorities arrested Tarabay and an investigation was ongoing at year's end. Press reported that the head of the parliamentary Human Rights Committee said, "The abhorrent practices of torture call for absolute condemnation. We demand the arrest of the perpetrators of these acts that violate laws and human norms and offend people's dignity."

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship is derived exclusively from the father, which may result in statelessness for children of a citizen mother and noncitizen father who may not transmit his own citizenship (see section 2.g., Stateless Persons). If a child's birth is not registered within the first year, the process for legitimating the birth is long and costly, often deterring families from registration. Syrian refugees no longer need legal residency to register the birth of their children. Authorities also waived several requirements for late birth registration by Syrian refugees. Birth registration remained inaccessible to some because the government required proof of legal residence and legal marriage, and this documentation was often unavailable to refugees.

Education: Education for citizens is 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 that non-Lebanese students could not outnumber Lebanese in any given classroom during the regular school shift, which sometimes limited enrollment. Syrian refugee children were not legally entitled to enroll in public schools at regular hours, although they could attend schools' second shifts.

Child Abuse: The country lacked a comprehensive child protection law, although legal provisions 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, Early, and Forced Marriage: There is no legal minimum age for marriage, and the government does not perform civil marriage. Each sect has its own religious courts governing matters of personal status, such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. The minimum age of marriage varies from ages 14 to 18, depending on the sect. UN agencies, NGOs, and government officials continued to observe high rates of early marriage among the Syrian refugee population, in some cases four times the rate of child marriage as before the conflict began. They partially attributed this circumstance to social and economic pressure on families with limited resources.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits and punishes commercial sexual exploitation, including child sex trafficking and child pornography. The minimum age for consensual sex is 18 for both men and women, and statutory rape penalties include hard labor for a minimum of five years and a minimum of seven years' imprisonment if the victim is younger than 15 years old. The government generally enforced the law. On July 7, authorities arrested retired army officer Elias Daher for drugging, raping, and recording videos of more than 20 children, both girls and boys, in the northern village of al-Qaa.

Displaced Children: Some refugee children lived and worked on the street. 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 in the streets. Refugee children were at greater risk than Lebanese children for exploitation, gender-based violence, and child labor since they had greater freedom of movement compared to their parents, who often lacked residency permits. 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.

Antisemitism

At year's end there were an estimated 50 Jews living in the country and 5,500 registered Jewish voters who lived abroad but had the right to vote in parliamentary elections.

The Israelite Communal Council 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.

Military courts continued to prosecute citizens who married or became engaged to Israelis. In December, Muhammad Youssef Bannout was released after serving a one-year sentence imposed by a military court and paying a fine of 500,000 Lebanese pounds (\$330 based on the parallel market exchange rate at the time) because he married a Palestinian woman with Israeli citizenship living in Germany.

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 prohibits “sexual intercourse against nature,” a term understood to criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults. Authorities occasionally enforced the law, which carries a penalty of up to one year in prison, in civilian and military courts.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: The Lebanese LGBTQI+ rights NGO Helem documented 475 cases of violence against LGBTQI+ persons in 2022, including 15 kidnappings, 299 instances of physical abuse, 132 death threats, and 29 rapes. Additionally, Helem reported 311 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. Observers referred victims to UNHCR-sponsored protective services. There were reports of the security forces using dating apps to entrap and harass members of the LGBTQI+ community by masquerading as gay men.

Discrimination: No provisions of law extend antidiscrimination protections to LGBTQI+ persons based on their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. NGOs stated that official and societal discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons persisted. NGOs also continued to report employment discrimination faced by transgender women due to the inconsistency between official documentation and gender self-presentation. NGOs reported that they aided LGBTQI+ individuals in the form of medical and mental health care, food, housing, and cash assistance.

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.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Gender marker change is possible, but the legal requirements to do so have not been clearly defined. Issues of personal status such as name and gender can only be changed by a ruling through one of the country's 15 sectarian personal status courts. In 2016, a court ruled that a transgender man could change his name and gender marker on his identity documents. Procedural obstacles (including high fees, lengthy procedures, and unavailability of legal assistance), however, deterred some trans persons from pursuing legal gender recognition. The inability of transgender persons to obtain identity documents that affirm their gender presentation contributed to discrimination in employment, in finding and maintaining housing, and in health care.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: Although human rights and LGBTQI+ organizations acknowledged some improvements in detainee treatment during the year, primarily in Beirut and the Mount Lebanon region, these organizations and former detainees reported that 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. There were reports of sexual orientation change efforts (also referred to as “conversion therapy”) being offered by faith-based organizations, but it was not clear that participants were forced to attend against their will. Some mental health practitioners argued against “conversion” therapies, stating that they were not effective. LGBTQI+ organizations reported that Beirut police banned forced anal exams of men suspected of same-sex sexual activity, while police in Tripoli and other cities continued to carry out the

practice. Professional physicians' associations in Beirut prohibit their members from performing such examinations, but according to NGOs no local associations outside the capital have banned them.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: On June 24, Minister of Interior Bassam Mawlawi directed the ISF and DGS to ban any "gatherings, events, or meetings promoting homosexuality," citing complaints by religious authorities. Prior to the decision, Sunni Grand Mufti Abdel Latif Deryan announced that Sunni clerics would allow neither legalization of homosexuality nor passage of a civil marriage law. Shia Jaafari Sheikh Ahmad Qabalan also issued a statement strongly rejecting what he referred to as a "human anomaly" and saying he would never accept it in Lebanon. On June 25, members of a Christian militia group tore down a billboard with thousands of flowers forming the LGBTQ+ Pride flag.

Mawlawi's directive led to a sweep of LGBTQI+-friendly organizations and establishments. On June 26, security officers visited an organization in Beirut, intimidating its staff and patrons and asking questions about the organization and its activities. HRW reported that, based on Mawlawi's directive, officers from DGS and Internal Security questioned LGBTQI+ and feminist activists at a cultural center in Beirut about a planned seven-person workshop, telling them to cancel the event or apply for a permit. Thereafter the activists received repeated calls from Internal Security's information branch inviting them for "a chat over coffee," which they declined. The callers also indicated that they were monitoring the activists' social media accounts.

On November 16, the State Shura Council – the judicial body that hears cases to which the state or public administration itself is a party – temporarily suspended Mawlawi's directive. The ruling came in response to a lawsuit filed by NGOs.

Since 2019, the Networking, Exchange, Development, Wellness, and Achievement sexual health conference, organized by LGBTQI+ rights NGO Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality, has taken place outside the country due to both security concerns, following DGS and other agencies' threats to expose attendees from other LGBTQI+-hostile countries to their governments, and to a ban on foreign attendees.

Persons with Disabilities

By law, persons with disabilities have the right to employment, education, health services, accessibility, and to vote; however, there was no evidence the government effectively enforced the law. Although legally prohibited, discrimination against persons with disabilities continued.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and the National Council of Disabled have responsibility for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

On May 30, caretaker Minister of Industry George Boujikian issued a decree requiring companies with more than 30 employees to hire persons with special needs. Companies hiring the requisite number of disabled workers received tax breaks as an incentive.

Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Makati signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on September 8. Presidential signature is the final step required for Lebanon to ratify the convention, but the president did not sign it before his term in office ended on October 31.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education requires that newly constructed schools include all necessary facilities to accommodate the physically challenged. Nonetheless, the public school system

was ill-equipped to accommodate students with disabilities.

NGOs reported that the disabled 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 may send their disabled children to mainstream schools. Schools that did admit them 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 therefore adequately advise parents. In these cases, children often repeated grades or dropped out of school.

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

During the May parliamentary elections, the Lebanese Union for People with Disabilities deployed disabled elections observers to polling places across the country to survey the accessibility of polling places for voters with physical limitations.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

HIV and AIDS are stigmatized due to sensitivities about extramarital relations and LGBTQI+ identities. NGOs reported that resources to direct patients to clinics where they can receive tests without stigma or discrimination were limited. In addition to stigma and discrimination, many persons with HIV and AIDS were unable to pay for routine tests that the Ministry of Public Health does not cover, including the blood test that must be completed and submitted to the ministry before any treatment may begin. The law requires the government to provide treatment to all HIV-positive citizens and Palestinian and Syrian refugees living in the country. Nonetheless, treatment was only available at one hospital in Beirut, making it difficult for patients outside the capital to receive the care they needed.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of private sector workers to form and join trade unions, bargain collectively, and strike, but places 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 prohibits civil servants and a broad range of public sector workers from engaging in collective bargaining or going on strike. Some private sector worker groups also do not enjoy the right to organize and bargain collectively, including agricultural, domestic, and migrant workers in the informal economy. The Ministry of Labor must approve the formation of unions, and it controlled the conduct of all trade union elections, including election dates, procedures, and ratification of results. The law permits the administrative dissolution of trade unions and bars trade unions from political activity.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination. If employers terminate a union member's contract for union activity, the law allows workers to receive compensation and legal indemnity and to institute proceedings before an arbitration board. Once the board decides, an employer may be compelled to reinstate the worker, although this protection is limited only to the elected members of a union's board. Anecdotal evidence showed widespread antiunion discrimination in both the public and private sectors, although this issue did not receive significant media coverage. The International Labor Organization (ILO) noted banking, private schools, retail businesses, daily and occasional workers, and

the civil service as sectors in which freedom of association protections did not meet the standards of relevant ILO conventions.

By law foreigners with legal resident status may join trade unions. According to the ILO, however, most unions do not encourage or accept the participation of foreign workers. The law permits migrant workers to join existing unions (regardless of nationality and reciprocity agreements) but denies them the right to form their own unions. They do not enjoy full membership since they may neither vote in trade union elections nor run for union office.

In general, Palestinian refugees may organize their own unions. Nevertheless, few 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 protects the right of workers to bargain collectively, but a minimum of 60 percent of workers must agree on the goals beforehand. Two-thirds of union members at a general assembly must ratify collective bargaining agreements.

Unions have the right to strike after receiving approval from the Ministry of Interior. Organizers of a strike (at least three of whom must be identified by name) must notify the ministry of the number of participants in advance and the intended location of the strike, and 5 percent of a union's members must take responsibility for maintaining order during the strike to ensure that it is peaceful and orderly. Strike organizers must sign a document whereby they assume full responsibility for all damages occurring during a demonstration.

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

Despite legal restrictions, civil servants began an open-ended strike on June 13 that grew to include all national government ministries and administrative bodies. This strike followed a work slowdown that began in July 2021 to demand salary adjustments to compensate for the rising cost of living, an increase in transportation allowances, and measures to reverse a decline in health and social benefits. On July 28, the head of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL), Bechara al-Asmar, asked public sector workers to end the general strike but to remain on a work slowdown at minimal staffing levels while negotiations with the government continued. The work slowdown was ongoing at the end of the year. The president of the Federation of Land Transport, Bassam Tleiss, also called for several strikes and protests that occurred intermittently during the year, affecting public transportation.

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 CGTL, which is the only national confederation recognized by the government. Members of the National Federation of Workers and Employees in Lebanon, another organization representing the independent trade union movement, held a sit-in in front of the Tripoli

Municipal Palace and a march on August 11 to demand an end to the ongoing strife within the municipal council and the election of a new council president.

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

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor, but the government was not effective in enforcing the law. The domestic worker population is excluded from legal protection and thus is vulnerable to exploitation.

Children and foreign workers employed in the agriculture and domestic work sectors were vulnerable to forced labor. In violation of the law, employment agencies and employers routinely withheld foreign workers' passports, especially in the cases of domestic workers, sometimes for years. In some instances, employers withheld salaries for a contract's full two-year duration, according to reports from NGOs that assist migrant workers.

Also see the Department of State's *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 with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law provides for equality among all citizens and prohibits employment discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status. The law does not specifically provide for protection against employment discrimination based on religion, national origin, age, and refugee or stateless status, sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV status, or other communicable diseases. Laws against discrimination in employment and occupation were not enforced in some geographic areas. It is unclear whether penalties were commensurate to those under other laws related to civil rights because the penalties are unpublished. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to women, persons with disabilities, foreign domestic workers, LGBTQI+ individuals, and HIV-positive persons (see section 6). The law does not distinguish between women and men in employment and provides for equal pay for both sexes. However, there are exceptions that exclude women from a variety of industrial and construction jobs. The law prohibits women from working in such industries as mining, factories, agriculture, energy, and transportation, although the law was not enforced in multiple sectors, including factories and agriculture. The law does not explicitly prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace. Although the law gives an employee the right to resign without prior notice if the employer or representative commits an indecent offense toward the employee or a family member, there are no legal consequences for the perpetrator.

A 2000 law defines a "disability" as a physical, vision, hearing, or mental impairment. It stipulates persons with disabilities must fill at least 3 percent of all government and private sector positions, provided they fulfill the qualifications for the position. There was no evidence the government

enforced the law. Employers are legally exempt from penalties if they provide evidence that no otherwise qualified person with disabilities applied for employment within the job's three months of advertisement.

Palestinians remained barred from working in 39 skilled professions, including medicine, law, and engineering, all of which require membership in a professional association. In December 2021, parliament passed legislation to allow Palestinians born in Lebanon to work in the nursing field.

Migrant workers and domestic workers faced employment discrimination. During the reporting period, Syrian workers, usually employed as manual laborers and construction workers, continued to suffer discrimination. The Ministry of Labor issued a revised draft of the standard unified contract intended to strengthen protections for migrant and domestic workers.

Palestinian refugees consistently reported discrimination in hiring due to excessive bureaucracy and societal stigma according to reports from UN agencies, government officials, and Palestinian advocacy groups.

NGOs and UN agencies continued to report incidents of sexual harassment and exploitation of refugees by employers and landlords, including paying workers less than minimum wage, requiring them to work excessive hours, and debt bondage. There were multiple reports of domestic workers (mainly from East Africa and Southeast Asia) who were tied to their employers through visa sponsorship, known as the *kafala* system. They faced physical, mental, and sexual abuse, unsafe working conditions, and nonpayment of wages. According to NGOs that assisted migrant workers in reporting abuses to authorities, 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.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The legal minimum wage was last raised in 2012. Some regulations affected income without affecting wages, such as public and private sector employees' daily transportation allowances, which increased during the year in line with rising fuel prices. On February 11, the government approved an increased stipend for public sector employees equivalent to half a month's salary, provided workers reported to duty as usual. The government offered the stipends, varying between 1.5 million and 3 million Lebanese pounds (\$71 to \$142 based on the parallel market exchange rate at the time), to offset depreciation of public sector employee's salaries. 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 signs a contract with an employer, the contract must be registered with the Directorate of General Security for the worker to obtain a residency permit. While the contract set uniform terms and conditions of employment and provided some labor protections, it did not address wages for domestic workers.

The law prescribes a standard 48-hour work week with a weekly rest period that must not be less than 36 consecutive hours. The law stipulates 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 does not set limits on compulsory overtime.

According to a January survey published by International Labor Organization (ILO), workers in the industrial sector (to include the agricultural, mining, manufacturing, utilities, construction, and transportation fields) worked an average of 44 hours per week, while workers in other sectors worked an average of 43 hours per week. These figures account for work hours at a main job; many workers took on second and, in some cases, 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 did not register them with the National Social Security Fund.

Occupational Safety and Health: The Ministry of Labor sets occupational safety and health (OSH) standards. The law requires employers to implement proper safety measures and to hold fire, third-party liability, and workers' compensation insurance. The ministry has the authority to revoke a company's license if its inspectors find a company noncompliant. The law stipulates workers may remove themselves from situations that endanger 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 Lebanon's OSH standards not appropriate 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, but a lack of staffing, resources, legal tools, and political support impeded its work. 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 CGTL, the Ministry of Labor, 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 do 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. According to NGOs that assisted migrant workers in reporting these abuses to authorities, security forces and judges did not always adequately investigate these crimes, and victims sometimes refused to file complaints or retracted their testimonies due to threats and fear of reprisal or deportation.

Penalties for violations of OSH laws were commensurate with those for similar crimes such as negligence. In practice, 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 non-payment 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 did not report violations of their labor contracts until after they returned to their home countries, preferring 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 requires recruitment agencies to be licensed by the Ministry of Labor, the government did not adequately monitor their activities. The kafala 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 legal status. This discouraged many migrant workers from filing complaints.

Informal Sector: The informal sector of the economy continued to grow as a share of the total economy. Informal employment was prevalent in agriculture, small scale retail, repair and mechanical work, construction, and begging.

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