

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	864
Land:	Libanon
Kilde:	The New Humanitarian
Titel:	The moral imperative to protect Lebanon's LGBTIQ+ displaced
Udgivet:	4. november 2024
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	11. december 2024

The moral imperative to protect Lebanon's LGBTIQ+ displaced

‘We cannot afford to ignore the voices of those who are doubly marginalised.’



Most of the over **1 million** civilians who have been forced to flee their homes in Lebanon by the escalating war between Israel and Hezbollah are facing immense hardship. But

hidden within that number are LGBTIQ+ people who have been displaced, and their challenges in accessing safety and aid are compounded by another battle – a fight for visibility and acceptance in a society that often refuses to acknowledge their existence and has selectively targeted them at different points in the country’s political history.

While Lebanon is known for its relatively open atmosphere for LGBTIQ+ organising, particularly in Beirut, the south – where the majority of Lebanon’s displaced have had to flee because of Israel’s invasion and bombs – is, for the most part, more conservative, due to a combination of religious and cultural factors. In addition, various political groups that hold sway in the region make it less open to LGBTIQ+ rights. This means that the experiences of queer people who have had to leave their homes paints a starkly different picture than the “openness” of Beirut.

For these individuals, the intersection of their sexual and gender identities with their displacement has created an environment where their safety and survival depend on maintaining a delicate balance of remaining invisible to the majority, and carefully visible to a select few. But they shouldn’t be ignored.

Invisibility as a survival strategy

For many queer internally displaced persons (IDPs), hiding their identity has become a matter of survival. In nearly 20 interviews I conducted with LGBTIQ+ IDPs from south Lebanon since the onset of the conflict in October 2023, the overwhelming theme is one of fear and concealment. They were scared of the physical dangers of war, but they also felt they needed to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid discrimination from fellow displaced people, host communities, and even aid workers.

“We’ve learned to conceal parts of our identity to survive and access support amid this tragedy. But then again, we’ve always concealed ourselves to survive.”

One Syrian participant, a gay man displaced from south Lebanon and now residing in an informal collective shelter in Beirut with other queer-identifying individuals, shared the painful reality of concealing his identity to avoid persecution. “We’ve learned to conceal parts of our identity to survive and access support amid this tragedy. But then again, we’ve always concealed ourselves to survive.” Like all the people I interviewed, he spoke on the condition that his name would not be revealed, out of concern for his safety.

For many, this concealment is a lifelong strategy that is only intensified by the threats of conflict and displacement. The psychological toll of living in hiding is immense. The interviews revealed high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among LGBTIQ+ displaced people.

As one displaced Lebanese man explained: “Fear of exposure is terrifying for us as queer people in the south, especially in areas controlled by certain hyper ‘religious’ and conservative armed groups.” For people like him, already navigating the trauma of displacement, the added pressure of hiding their true selves only deepens their sense of isolation.

Gaps in humanitarian support

Despite Lebanon’s reputation as a hub for queer activism, LGBTIQ+ individuals have long been a target of the country’s political class, and homosexuality has been selectively criminalised.

This is one of the reasons that the humanitarian response to helping this group – in this and other crises – has been deeply [inadequate](#). In addition, many large international aid groups have been adopting a “one-size-fits-all” approach, failing to recognise or address the unique needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals within displaced populations.

This oversight has left many LGBTIQ+ IDPs without critical support. Members of the community, [trans men and women](#), have reported being rejected by shelters due to their gender identities.

“Queer-friendly organisations can no longer reach us,” lamented one displaced Syrian lesbian woman who is in Tyre, in the south. Before the escalation in violence that began mid-September, she and others had relied on local and international NGOs based in Beirut for HIV medication, psychological support, and access to safe spaces. Now, with access to those services cut off by the conflict – many NGOs have stopped this work due to limited resources and a shift towards providing shelter – LGBTIQ+ individuals like her have been left to fend for themselves.

Smaller, [local NGOs](#) have stepped in where they can, offering some level of support. Despite limited resources, these grassroots organisations often provide more inclusive services – like cash and mental health support – than their larger counterparts due to their in-depth knowledge about the communities they serve. But, as one Lebanese trans man who was displaced from the south and is currently staying in Beirut pointed out: “While sometimes you want them to [tailor their services more], at least they adopt a welcoming approach and do not isolate anyone.”

This [gap](#) in services that cater to vulnerable people is particularly stark for [trans individuals](#). One trans Syrian refugee woman, displaced from the south to Beirut, described how she was turned away from shelters intended for both women and families after her home was bombed. “I am unwelcome in family shelters and unsafe in male-dominated ones,” she said. As a result, she found refuge with a group of [migrant workers](#) in an overcrowded rented apartment – a temporary solution that offers safety, but little long-term security.

Resilience in the face of adversity

Despite the challenges, the resilience of Lebanon’s displaced LGBTIQ+ community is undeniable. Many have found ways to survive through informal [support networks](#). In the absence of formal aid, these networks – often facilitated through encrypted messaging apps like WhatsApp – have become lifelines. One lesbian woman from south Lebanon described how a WhatsApp group helped her and others share information about safe spaces, [queer-friendly services](#), and transportation out of dangerous areas. These include shelters, guest houses, as well as meet-ups for services, aid and support. “At one point, there were more than 100 participants in one of the groups I was in,” she said.

For many LGBTIQ+ IDPs, the threat of exploitation is constant, exacerbated by their already marginalised status and the absence of protective services.

While these networks provide crucial support, they are not enough to meet the community’s needs. Many queer IDPs remain isolated, without access to healthcare, legal protection, or even basic necessities. The absence of and separation from previously [safe spaces](#) – places where individuals can be open about their identities without fear of reprisal – further [compounds](#) their isolation.

This lack of support is particularly dangerous for individuals at risk of [sexual exploitation](#). For many LGBTIQ+ IDPs, the threat of exploitation [is constant](#), exacerbated by their already [marginalised status](#) and the absence of protective services. A report by local NGO Helem documented more than [4,000 abuses](#) against this community in 2021 alone, including cases of rape, physical abuse, blackmail, arrests, and torture at the hands of law enforcement officials.

One interviewee, a gay Syrian refugee man, shared his harrowing experience of fleeing the south: “I hitchhiked to Beirut, and at one point, I had to perform a sexual act to be allowed to continue the journey.”

Deeper vulnerabilities

The experiences of [trans](#) individuals and [refugees](#) who are also LGBTIQ+ reveal an even deeper layer of vulnerability. Trans individuals face rejection from [shelters](#) designed for men or women, as their identities do not fit neatly into the [binary categories](#) these services rely on. For them, the conflict is amplifying society’s existing [rejection](#) of non-binary and gender-nonconforming identities.

LGBTIQ+ displaced people who are also refugees from [Syria](#) or [Palestine](#) face compounded discrimination. Already [marginalised](#) because of their refugee status, they struggle to find [shelter](#) and [support](#) within a response that prioritises Lebanese citizens. Multiple reports have surfaced about refugees being [turned away](#) from shelters. As one Lebanese gay man noted, “Our Syrian and Palestinian brothers and sisters within the queer community are facing much larger hurdles than us. Their experiences have so many more dimensions of vulnerability to them.”

This double marginalisation creates what one interviewee described as “a perfect storm of vulnerability”, whereby LGBTIQ+ displaced people must navigate a labyrinth of discrimination based on their nationality, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Inclusive humanitarian response

The stories of Lebanon’s LGBTIQ+ displaced are a reminder that displacement is not a unidimensional experience. The humanitarian response to Lebanon’s ongoing mass internal displacement must do more to recognise and address the specific needs of marginalised groups, particularly sexual and gender minorities. This means creating safe spaces, ensuring access to healthcare and legal assistance, and fostering an environment where LGBTIQ+ individuals can express their identities without fear.

A truly inclusive humanitarian response is not just a moral imperative – it is a necessity if we are to build a future where no one is left behind.

As one Lebanese trans woman from the south, currently sheltering in Beirut, told me: “We are people. The [survival] measures we have resorted to in order to flee for our lives often take place with limited humanitarian resources, and absolutely no government resources.”

In a region where conflict and displacement are tragically common, we cannot afford to ignore the voices of those who are doubly marginalised. A truly inclusive humanitarian response is not just a moral imperative – it is a necessity if we are to build a future where no one is left behind.