

# LEBANON 2019 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## 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. Lebanese law officially recognizes 18 religious sects or confessions. In 2016 parliament elected Michel Aoun to the presidency, ending more than two years of political deadlock. Following the 2017 passage of the country's new electoral law, the government held parliamentary elections in May 2018, after parliament had extended its legal term three times between 2013 and 2017. The elections were peaceful and considered generally free and fair. President Michel Aoun accepted Prime Minister Saad Hariri's resignation on October 29 following almost two weeks of protests starting October 17. As of the end of the year, no new government had been formed.

The Internal Security Forces (ISF), under the Ministry of Interior, are responsible for law enforcement, while the Directorate of General Security (DGS), also under the Ministry of Interior, is responsible for border control but also exercises some domestic security responsibilities. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), under the Ministry of Defense, are responsible for external security but authorized to arrest and detain suspects on national security grounds; they also arrested alleged drug traffickers, managed protests, enforced building codes related to refugee shelters, and intervened to prevent violence between rival political factions. The General Directorate of State Security (GDSS), reporting to the prime minister through the Higher Defense Council, is responsible for investigating espionage and other national security issues. Civilian authorities maintained control over the government's armed forces and other security forces, although Palestinian security and militia forces, the designated foreign terrorist organization (FTO) Hizballah, and other extremist elements operated outside the direction or control of government officials.

The Syrian conflict affected the country economically and socially. Over the past several years, the Syrian conflict has generated an influx of more than one million refugees and strained the country's already weak infrastructure and ability to deliver social services.

Significant human rights issues included: arbitrary or unlawful killings by nonstate actors; allegations of torture by security forces; excessive periods of pretrial

detention by security forces; undue and increasing restrictions on freedoms of speech and press, including laws criminalizing libel and a number of forms of expression; high-level and widespread official corruption; criminalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) status or conduct; and forced or compulsory child labor.

Although the legal structure provides for prosecution and punishment of officials who committed human rights abuses, enforcement remained a problem, and government officials enjoyed a measure of impunity for human rights abuses, including evading or influencing judicial processes.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

Closing arguments in the trial concerning the 2005 attack that killed former prime minister Rafik Hariri and 22 other individuals took place in September 2018 at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. As of September 5, the three judges assigned to the case were still deliberating and had not returned a verdict.

### **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

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 such acts. In March the cabinet appointed the five members of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) against Torture, a body within the 10-member National Human Rights Institute (NHRI), as called for in the 2017 antitorture law. The NHRI is mandated to monitor the human rights situation in the country by reviewing laws, decrees, and administrative decisions and by investigating complaints of human rights violations and issuing periodic reports of its findings. The NPM oversees the implementation of the antitorture law. It has the authority

to conduct regular unannounced visits to all places of detention, investigate the use of torture, and issue recommendations to improve the treatment of detainees. The NHRI has yet to begin its assigned functions due to lack of designated funds.

Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) alleged that security officials tortured detainees, including incidents of abuse at certain police stations. The government denied the systematic use of torture, although authorities acknowledged violent abuse sometimes occurred during preliminary investigations at police stations or military installations where officials interrogated suspects without an attorney present.

On May 11, detainee Hassan Diqa was found dead after he was moved from prison to a hospital due to partial paralysis of his left leg and severe back pain. Diqa's family filed a lawsuit claiming Diqa was subject to torture in detention, leading to his death. Diqa was arrested in November 2018, on a drug-related crime. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights called for a thorough and independent investigation. As of September 5, there was no clear evidence that Diqa's death was a result of torture, although evidence emerged that proper procedures in accordance with the antitorture law were not followed. The case remained under investigation and was being discussed in the parliamentary Human Rights Committee.

On May 30, the Military Court acquitted ISF lieutenant colonel Suzanne al-Hajj and sentenced the hacker Elie Ghabash to a year in prison for fabricating charges against Lebanese actor Ziad Itani of spying for Israel. The court, however, sentenced Hajj to two months in jail for withholding information, which can be substituted by a fine of 200,000 Lebanese pounds (LBP) (\$133). Itani alleged that officers from the GDSS detained him incommunicado for six days in 2017 and tortured him until he confessed to collaborating with an Israeli agent. In November 2018 Itani filed a civil lawsuit with the State Prosecutor's Office against the persons accused of framing him and against the GDSS officials who conducted the preliminary investigation, who he claims tortured him. In November 2018 the state prosecutor referred the case to the military prosecutor, on the grounds that Itani's complaint was directed against security officers. On April 12, the military court transferred Itani's case of torture to a civilian court. There were no reports that officials launched an investigation of the GDSS officers involved, despite provisions in the antitorture law requiring an investigation within 48 hours of a complaint.

Although human rights and LGBTI organizations acknowledged some improvements in detainee treatment during the year, these organizations and former detainees continued to report that ISF officers mistreated drug users, persons involved in prostitution, and LGBTI individuals in custody particularly outside of Beirut, including through forced HIV testing, threats of prolonged detention, and threats to expose their identities to family or friends. LGBTI rights NGOs reported anal exams of men suspected of same-sex sexual activity have been banned in Beirut police stations, but they stated such exams were being carried out in Tripoli and other cities outside the capital. While physician syndicates in Beirut have banned their members from performing such procedures, NGOs said that local syndicates outside the capital have not all done so.

### **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.

Physical Conditions: As of October there were approximately 10,032 prisoners and detainees, including pretrial detainees and remanded prisoners, in facilities built to hold 3,500 inmates. Authorities often held pretrial detainees together with convicted prisoners. ISF statistics indicated that the prisons incarcerated 114 minors and 324 women. The ISF incarcerated women at four dedicated women's prisons (Baabda, Beirut, Zahle, and Tripoli).

According to a government official, most prisons lacked adequate sanitation, ventilation, and lighting, and authorities did not regulate temperatures consistently. Prisoners lacked consistent access to potable water. Roumieh prisoners often slept 10 in a room originally built to accommodate two prisoners and basic medical care suffered from inadequate staffing, poor working conditions, and extreme overcrowding. The ISF reported that 18 individuals died in detention facilities during the year. According to the ISF, 16 died of medical issues including heart attacks, hypertension, hypotension, hyperglycemia, hypoglycemia, tuberculosis, and lung problems; one prisoner committed suicide, and one was accidentally electrocuted due to faulty wiring. Some NGOs complained of authorities' negligence and failure to provide appropriate medical care to prisoners, which may have contributed to some deaths. The ISF reported that none died of police abuse.

Administration: The ISF's Committee to Monitor Against the Use of Torture and Other Inhuman Practices in Prisons and Detention Centers conducted 135 prison

visits as of October. If detention center investigators assigned by the minister of interior found physical abuse, the military investigator assigned a medical team to confirm the abuse, and the judge ruled at the conclusion of the review. As of October 9, there were 133 complaints reported to the ISF committee. According to the ISF Human Rights Unit, in the course of its own investigations, the ISF took disciplinary action against officers it found responsible for abuse or mistreatment, including dismissals, but it did not publicize this information.

In 2018 authorities arrested an ISF prison officer on charges of sexual abuse against an inmate. The case continued as of September but no additional details were available.

Most investigations were initiated by prisoners' family members contacting the Ministry of Interior to report complaints, although prison directors could also initiate investigations. According to a government official, prison directors often protected officers under investigation. Prisoners and detainees have the ability to report abuse directly to the ISF Human Rights Unit.

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. The ICRC regularly visited 16 prisons and detention centers and visited a further 12 on an ad hoc basis.

Nongovernmental entities, such as the FTO Hizballah and Palestinian nonstate militias, also reportedly operated unofficial detention facilities.

Improvements: ISF training and corrections staff institutionalized best practices to protect human rights through developing and implementing standard operating procedures and modifying hiring practices and training programs to improve professionalization among new officers.

NGOs reported that judges increasingly abided by the State Prosecutor's 2018 order to cease prosecution of drug users before providing them the opportunity to participate in a treatment program; NGOs and international organizations previously cited the prosecution of drug users as a factor contributing to extended pretrial detention and overcrowding in prisons and detention centers.

#### **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 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 some incidents of the government arbitrarily arresting and detaining individuals, particularly refugees and migrant workers. Typically, these detentions were for short periods and related to administrative questions associated with the residency or work status of these populations, often lasting between several hours to one or more days.

On October 29, between 15 and 20 persons were arrested and detained in Tyre and accused of arson at a property erroneously thought to be affiliated with Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri. The Arab Journalists Against Violence syndicate issued a statement labeling the detainees as protesters and the arrests arbitrary. The *An-Nahar* newspaper also linked the arrests to protesters' political activities rather than to any crimes they had committed. Eight of the detainees remained in custody as of December 3.

### **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 individuals of the charges against them, and authorities generally adhered to this requirement. If authorities hold a detainee longer than 48 hours without formal charges, the arrest is considered arbitrary, and authorities must release the detainee or request a formal extension. The code of criminal procedures 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 period of custody may be renewed for another 48 hours.

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 may be prohibitively high.

The code of criminal procedures states that from the moment of arrest, a suspect or the subject of a complaint has the right to contact a member of his family, an attorney, his employer, an advocate of his choosing; has the right to an interpreter if needed; and has the right to undergo a medical examination on the approval of

the general prosecutor. It does not, however, mention whether a lawyer may attend preliminary questioning with the judicial police. In practical terms the lawyer may or may not be allowed to attend the preliminary questioning with judicial police. Under the framework of the law, it is possible to hold a suspect at a police station for 48 hours, renewable for another 48 hours upon an approval of the general prosecutor, before allowing the individual to exercise the right to contact an attorney. 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 individuals being questioned refuse 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 nullity of 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 responsible for prolonged arrest on charges of depriving personal freedom, but they rarely filed charges.

Authorities failed to observe many provisions of the law, and government security forces as well as armed nonstate actors such as Hizballah, continued the practice of extrajudicial arrest and detention, including incommunicado detention.

Additionally, 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.

Arbitrary Arrest: According to local NGOs, cases of arbitrary detention occurred, but most victims chose not to report violations against them to the authorities. NGOs reported most cases involved vulnerable groups such as refugees, drug users, LGBTI individuals, and migrant workers. Civil society groups reported 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 by a maximum of two additional months. The initial period of custody may not exceed six months for a

felony, but the detention may be renewed. Due to judicial backlogs, pretrial detention periods for felonies may last for months or years.

Pretrial detention periods were often lengthy due to delays in due process, in some cases equal to or exceeding the maximum sentence for the alleged crime. As of October the ISF reported 6,307 prisoners in pretrial detention, or roughly 63 percent of the 10,032 total detainees. According to a study by the Lebanese Center for Human Rights, detainees spent on average one year in pretrial detention prior to sentencing, although those suspected of terrorism, espionage and violent homicide were often held much longer. According to local NGOs, some Lebanese Sunni militants who were detained after returning from fighting in Syria have remained in pretrial detention for more than five years.

#### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, authorities subjected the judiciary to political pressure, particularly through negotiations among political factions regarding the appointment of key prosecutors and investigating magistrates. On September 13, the chief of the Higher Court for Justice was replaced through a directive of the Council of Ministers, although chief justices typically remain in that position until retirement. Some judicial observers attributed the removal to political considerations. Political leaders at times attempted to influence the judicial handling of politically charged cases and opposing political and sectarian factions accused one another of undue influence.

For example, politicians of the predominantly Sunni political party Future Movement and predominantly Christian political party Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) exchanged accusations of attempted judicial interference following a terrorist attack in Tripoli on June 3. Politicians of the predominantly Druze Progressive Socialist Party accused FPM politicians of interfering to direct the investigation of a violent clash involving a Druze politician allied with the FPM to a preferred judge through an irregular procedure. Defendants involved in routine civil and criminal proceedings sometimes solicited the assistance of prominent individuals to influence the outcome of their cases. Beginning in February investigations began on allegations of corruption, bribery, and manipulation of judicial files within security and judicial bodies. On February 15, the bodyguard of the Mount Lebanon public prosecutor, a State Security officer, was arrested on charges of corruption and bribery.

## **Trial Procedures**

The constitution and the law provide for the right to a fair and public trial.

Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty and have the right to be promptly informed of the charges against them. Trials are generally public, but judges have the discretion to order a closed court session. Defendants have the right to be present at trial, to consult with an attorney in a timely manner, and to 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; 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 hears these cases, including for charges unrelated to official military duty. Human rights activists raised concerns that such proceedings created the potential for impunity.

Governance and justice in the Palestinian 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 mostly nontransparent to outsiders and beyond the control of the state. For example, local popular committees in the camps attempted to resolve disputes through informal mediation methods but occasionally transferred those accused of more serious offenses (for example, murder and terrorism) to state authorities for trial.

## **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no 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 violations. During the year there were no examples of a civil court awarding a person compensation

for such violations. There is no regional mechanism to appeal adverse domestic human rights decisions.

The country has registered reservations regarding individual complaints on all international human rights treaties, and appeals to international human rights bodies or special procedures such as the Committee Against Torture are accessible only after exhausting all domestic remedies. In May a coalition of NGOs sent a submission to the special rapporteur on freedom of speech concerning the Ministry of Telecommunications' blocking of Grindr, to which, as of September 5, the government had not yet replied.

### **Property Restitution**

There was an increase during the year of municipalities and security services evicting Syrian refugees from informal settlements on private land, in some cases over the objections of the Lebanese landlord. While evictions generally cited violations of building, environmental codes, or both, they proceeded without any opportunity for legal challenge. On March 11, 45 Syrian refugee families were evicted from informal settlements at Kouba village near Batroun. Most had their homes demolished and belongings destroyed.

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

The law prohibits such actions, but there were reports that authorities interfered with the privacy of persons regarded as enemies of the government.

There also were reports that security services monitored private email and other digital correspondence. In January 2018 the Electronic Frontier Foundation and mobile security firm Lookout reported a spyware campaign operating from servers they identified as belonging to the DGS. According to the report, since 2012, the campaign targeted the communications and activities of users in several countries, including Lebanese journalists and activists, by installing malware from fake versions of secure Android apps such as WhatsApp. There was no information available regarding any investigation into this campaign.

The law provides for the interception of telephone calls with prior authorization from the prime minister at the request of the minister of interior or minister of defense.

Militias and non-Lebanese forces operating outside the area of central government authority frequently violated citizens' privacy rights. Various nonstate actors, such as Hizballah, used informer networks, telephone monitoring, and electronic monitoring to obtain information regarding their perceived adversaries.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press**

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for the press, and stipulates that restrictions may be imposed only under exceptional circumstances. The government generally respected this right, but there were some restrictions, particularly regarding political and social issues.

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

Press and Media, Including Online Media: The 1962 Publications Law regulates print media. The law holds journalists responsible for erroneous or false news; threats or blackmail; insult, defamation, and contempt; causing prejudice to the president's dignity; insulting the president or the president of a foreign country; instigation to commit a crime through a publication; and sectarian provocation. The law further contains detailed rules governing the activities of printing houses, press media, libraries, publishing houses, and distribution companies. This law provides rules and conditions for becoming a journalist and for obtaining licenses for new publications. It also prohibits the press from publishing blasphemous content regarding the country's officially recognized religions or content that may provoke sectarian feuds.

There was uncertainty regarding which legal framework is applicable to online news sites in the country. No specific laws regulate online speech. The penal code, however, contains a number of speech offenses, such as defamation of public officials, public entities, and individuals. Accordingly, authorities are able to prosecute individuals, journalists, and bloggers for what they express online.

On March 11, the Military Court sentenced al-Jadeed TV correspondent Adam Chamseddine in absentia to three months in prison for criticizing the GDSS in a Facebook post. On April 12, a military judge ruled that, because Chamseddine is a journalist, the Military Court did not have jurisdiction over the case and returned the file to the military prosecutor who subsequently dropped all charges.

Authorities heard these cases in both civil and military courts; they generally carried sentences of between one and three years in prison, although typically they resulted in fines.

The law governing audiovisual media bans live broadcasts of unauthorized political gatherings and certain religious events, as well as any broadcast of “any matter of commentary seeking to affect directly or indirectly the well-being of the nation’s economy and finances, material that is propagandistic and promotional, or promotes a relationship with Israel.” Media outlets must receive a license from the Council of Ministers to broadcast any type of political news or programs. The law prohibits broadcasting programs that harm the state or its relations with foreign countries or have an effect on the well-being of such states. The law also prohibits the broadcast of programs that seek to harm public morals, ignite sectarian strife, or insult religious beliefs.

Violence and Harassment: Journalists continued to face intimidation and harassment. Political friction and tension led some outlets to fear entering certain “politically affiliated” areas to report without removing brandings and logos identifying the outlets. For example, MTV reporters have been known to remove their outlet’s logo when entering Hizballah-affiliated areas. Outlets that sought to report in areas under control of Hizballah were required to obtain special permission from Hizballah’s media arm.

Authorities continued to prosecute online, print, and television journalists for violations of the country’s publications law. NGOs and media watchdogs claimed such prosecutions were efforts to intimidate critics. Prosecutors sometimes referred these cases to criminal courts based on both private complaints and their own discretion, but more often they referred such cases to the Publications Court. Publications Court cases typically remained open for a year or more and typically ended with fines or dismissal.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: 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 DGS may review and censor all foreign

newspapers, magazines, and books to determine admissibility into the country, but these reviews are mostly for explicit, pornographic content. Some journalists reported that political violence and extralegal intimidation led to self-censorship.

On September 18, the president of the Lebanese University, Fouad Ayoub, had the judiciary request on his behalf that at least 20 media outlets remove all news and media reports related to him from their websites in an apparent attempt to edit his appearance on search engines. Media outlets were still determining their responses as of December 19.

The law includes guidelines regarding materials deemed unsuitable for publication in a book, newspaper, or magazine. Any violation of the guidelines could result in the author's imprisonment or a fine. Authors could publish books without prior permission from the DGS, but if the book contained material that violated the law, including material considered a threat to national security, the DGS could legally confiscate the book and put the author on trial. Publishing without prior approval a book that contained unauthorized material could put the author at risk of a prison sentence, fine, and confiscation of the published materials.

Authorities from any of the recognized religious groups could request that the DGS ban a book. The government could prosecute offending journalists and publications in the publications court. According to NGOs, as of September each of the 30 book-banning cases the government registered in the publications court in 2017--mainly from libel suits filed by politicians, political parties, and private citizens--was in the process of being resolved. Authorities occasionally also referred such cases to criminal courts, a process not established in law.

Libel/Slander Laws: In most cases criminal courts heard libel and defamation complaints, which can carry sentences of one to three years but typically resulted in fines or a promise to remove offending material from the internet. NGOs and activists reported increased prosecutions under such laws, and political figures or their representatives filed several complaints against critics throughout the year. Human rights NGO ALEF (Association Libanaise pour l'Education et la Formation) reported that in several dozen cases this year, criminal defamation suits were filed against journalists, bloggers, political activists, and private citizens, including for posting their opinions in WhatsApp groups or on Facebook. While these cases rarely, if ever, resulted in prolonged detentions or jail sentences, interrogations by police and lengthy, expensive trials created a chilling effect on political speech.

Following publication of intentionally provocative articles on September 12 that criticized President Aoun and sarcastically suggested that Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the true leader of Lebanon, editors of the newspaper *Nidaa al-Watan* were summoned to appear before the Office of the Prosecutor General for the State on charges of defamation of the president. On September 20, the case was referred to the Publications Court. On November 21, the editor was found not guilty.

Private citizens may file criminal complaints, which the law requires an investigating judge to consider, and many defamation cases were initiated via the allegations of private citizens. Politicians at times responded to allegations of wrongdoing leveled at them by filing criminal complaints alleging defamation. The military justice code also prohibits defamation of the army.

The ISF Cybercrimes Bureau reported that, as of May 15, they had received referrals of 432 defamation cases for investigation. The Cybercrimes Bureau reportedly investigated 1,451 defamation cases in 2018, an increase of 81 percent from 2017. In November Human Rights Watch reported a 325 percent increase in the number defamation cases investigated by authorities and noted prison sentences against at least three individuals in defamation cases between 2015 and 2019. On October 5, four lawyers filed a complaint against the *Economist*, accusing the magazine of damaging the country's reputation and insulting the Lebanese flag in its article reporting on the country's dollar shortage that was published the same day.

On May 13, the GDSS arrested social media activist Rasheed Jumblatt and detained him for four days over a Facebook video post that allegedly included provocative and sectarian comments and insults against Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil. Jumblatt was subsequently released after charges were dropped.

Nongovernmental Impact: Political and religious figures sometimes sought to rally public outcry aimed at inhibiting freedom of expression and the press, including through coercion and threats of violence. This included public statements by some political and religious figures calling for the cancellation of a concert by local indie rock band Mashrou' Leila due to threats of violence or content of the band's music they perceived as offensive (see Academic Freedom and Cultural Events).

## **Internet Freedom**

The law does not restrict access to the internet. The government reportedly censored some websites to block online gambling, pornography, religiously provocative material, extremist forums, and Israeli websites, but there were no verified reports the government systematically attempted to collect personally identifiable information via the internet. On May 24, the Ministry of Telecommunications requested that its internet service provider block Grindr, a networking app used primarily by LGBTI communities, based on a judicial order.

Restrictions on freedom of speech concerning government officials applied to social media communications, which authorities 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, such as in the Mashrou' Leila case (see Academic Freedom and Cultural Events).

The ISF's Cybercrime Bureau and other state security agencies summoned journalists, bloggers, and activists to question them about social media and blog posts, especially when they criticized political figures or religious sects. On July 15, Riad el-Assaad was summoned by the ISF Cybercrime Bureau in response to a post on his Facebook page referencing suspicion of corruption within the Syndicate of Lebanese Contractors. El-Assaad removed the post under threat of detention.

NGOs noted the number of known summonses might not be accurate since many individuals chose not to discuss or report their cases.

### **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

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

The majority of private universities enjoyed freedom of expression, and students were free to hold student elections and organize cultural, social, and political activities.

On July 30, organizers of the Byblos International Festival canceled the performance of indie rock band Mashrou' Leila, citing the need "to avoid bloodshed" after the band faced criticism from some political and religious figures, as well as some private citizens, for a four-year-old post on Facebook of an image that transposed the face of pop diva Madonna onto an image of the Virgin Mary. According to Human Rights Watch and other NGOs, on July 24, security officers

interrogated two band members for six hours. The band removed two songs from its playlist and the offending image from Facebook, and it issued a July 31 statement expressing regret that some had been offended. Despite these steps, the concert was canceled by organizers who cited threats of violence as the official reason for the cancellation.

On July 19, the DGS Censorship Bureau requested the ban of two films, *Hard Paint* (2018) and *Damascus Cover* (2017), on the premise that they promoted homosexuality and the Israeli intelligence service, respectively. As of September 5, the Ministry of Interior had not issued final judgement. The DGS reviewed all films and plays, and there were complaints among the public that the DGS's decision-making process lacked transparency and was influenced by the opinions of religious institutions and political groups.

### **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

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

#### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution provides for the freedom of peaceful assembly with some conditions established by law. Organizers are required to obtain a permit from the Interior Ministry 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. Security forces generally allowed demonstrators to protest peacefully during large, widespread protests that began October 17. Security forces predominantly demonstrated restraint and professionalism in interactions with protesters. The ISF occasionally used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse protesters who 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. Human Rights Watch reported security forces used excessive force against protesters as well as intimidating and, in some cases, beating those attempting to film abuses. On November 1, ISF officers arrested and allegedly beat Salim Ghadban, a protester who had objected to the officers arresting four protesters occupying the Banks Association building in downtown Beirut. Ghadban was taken into temporary custody overnight at el-

Helou police station where he was reportedly unable to contact an attorney, his family, or a physician.

Amnesty International reported that on October 26 the LAF used live ammunition fired in the air to disperse protesters blocking a main road in the northern area of Beddawi, which resulted in the alleged wounding of two protesters. During the same incident, five officers were injured. As of November a military court was investigating the incident. Following Prime Minister Hariri's October 29 resignation, security forces, under increasing pressure from political leaders and the public, began to clear main roads but otherwise allowed demonstrators to peacefully assemble. Some protesters were detained after altercations with security forces, and as of November 19, at least five protesters who had previously been involved in unrelated criminal activity were referred to the judiciary for investigation. On November 12, a LAF bodyguard opened fire from inside a military vehicle attempting to pass through protesters blocking a road in Khaldeh, killing one protester. The LAF arrested the shooter and an investigation into the incident continued as of December 19. Altercations between protesters and supporters of nonstate actor Hizballah occurred sporadically during the protests, and security forces attempted to separate the conflicting groups with varying levels of success. Confrontations escalated into violence the night of November 25, when Hizballah and Amal supporters on motorcycles threw rocks and intimidated protesters in Beirut and opened fire on protesters and destroyed tents in Tyre. Human Rights Watch reported on November 8 that more than three dozen protesters asserted they had seen or were victims of violent attacks, including in Beirut, Bint Jbeil, Nabatieh and Sour, and that security forces failed to intervene to protect them.

Protesters clashed with ISF riot police on the evenings of December 14 and 15 in Beirut, producing the largest numbers of protest-related injuries to both protesters and security forces recorded during the year. Amnesty International on December 19 reported the Lebanese Civil Defense said it had treated 72 individuals for injuries at the scene and that 20 ISF members were taken to the hospital on December 14. Amnesty International denounced the presence of masked men in civilian clothing who allegedly attacked protesters. A Lebanese lawyer filed a formal complaint with the UN Human Rights Council.

### **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 for it 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 papers 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. Failure to do so can result in the dissolution of the organization by a decree issued by the Council of Ministers.

The cabinet must license all political parties (see section 3).

In areas under Hizballah’s sway, independent NGOs faced harassment and intimidation, including social, political, and financial pressures. Hizballah reportedly paid youth who worked in “unacceptable” NGOs to leave the groups.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

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

### **d. Freedom of Movement**

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 from Palestine, Syria, and Iraq (see section 2.f. Protection of Refugees).

In-country Movement: Armed nonstate actors hindered or prevented movement in areas they controlled. Armed Hizballah members controlled access to some areas under Hizballah’s control, and the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine prevented access to a border area under its control, according to the security services. Armed supporters of Druze leader Walid Jumblatt sought to block the motorcades of the foreign minister and of a rival Druze minister on June 30, the latter blockade resulting in a shootout and two deaths. 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 cannot transmit Lebanese citizenship to her children (see section 2.g. Stateless Persons).

#### **e. Internally Displaced Persons**

Fighting in 2007 destroyed the Nahr el-Bared Palestinian refugee camp, displacing approximately 30,000 residents, of whom some 27,000 were registered Palestinian refugees. Many of the displaced resided in areas adjacent to the camp or in other areas of the country where United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) services were available. As of September approximately 75 percent of the displaced families had returned to newly reconstructed apartments in the camp.

#### **f. Protection of Refugees**

As of October there were nearly 920,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Since the government instructed UNHCR to stop registering Syrian refugees in early 2015, this total did not include Syrian refugees who arrived after that time. 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 an October UN assessment. According to a UN study, refugees often took loans to cover even their most basic needs, including rent, food, and health care, putting nearly 90 percent of them in debt and leaving them food insecure.

In early 2015 the government banned the entry of all Syrian refugees except for undefined “humanitarian exceptions.” During the year the Ministry of Social Affairs approved a limited number of Syrian asylum cases, including unaccompanied and separated children, persons with disabilities, medical cases, and resettlement cases under extreme humanitarian criteria.

In addition to nearly 14,000 UNHCR-registered Iraqi refugees residing in the country, a limited number of additional Iraqis entered during the year to escape violence. As of June 30, UNHCR also registered more than 4,200 refugees or asylum seekers from Sudan and other countries.

During the year the government launched campaigns which limited refugees' ability to reside or work in the country. These included forced compliance with building codes limiting the use of concrete and hardened materials in refugee shelters, increased arrests for residency-related offenses, and stepped-up enforcement of labor laws that targeted businesses employing refugees--which affected more than 6,600 refugees.

Abuse of Migrants, Refugees, and Stateless Persons: In April the Higher Defense Council (HDC), a body chaired by the president that includes cabinet ministers and security service heads, issued guidance to the security services to increase enforcement of building codes. This resulted in the destruction of thousands of refugee shelters. Security services forced refugees to destroy and replace hardened walls and roofs; alternatively security services did so themselves or entirely demolished noncompliant shelters. Although authorities generally cited violations of building, environmental codes, or both, there was insufficient judicial review or opportunity to legally challenge eviction or demolition actions.

On June 5, residents of an informal refugee settlement in Deir El Ahmar in Northwest Baalbek claimed that a Civil Defense member, responding to a fire in the camp, recklessly drove into the camp putting children's lives at risk, which resulted in an altercation between camp residents and the driver, who ended up in the hospital. Following the incident, a group of approximately 50 local men, who had previously posted threats against refugees on social media, purportedly to protect the local population, returned to the camp and verbally threatened residents. Later that night the same group entered the camp and set fire to multiple refugee shelters, prompting local authorities to evacuate all 88 refugee families for their safety.

Labor laws were also enforced more strictly to fine employers who employed Syrians or Palestinians and to close illegal refugee-run businesses. Environmental regulations were cited more frequently in the eviction of refugees and bulldozing of dwellings in some locations. Refugee arrests and detentions also increased, and some NGOs funded by international donors to provide water and sanitation services to refugee settlements were sued by the government and fined for allegedly contributing to the pollution of the Litani River.

Multiple NGOs and UN agencies shared reports of sexual harassment and exploitation of refugees by employers and landlords, including paying workers below the minimum wage, working excessive hours, debt bondage, and pressuring families into early marriage for their daughters to relieve economic hardship.

There were multiple reports of foreign migrant domestic workers (mainly from East Africa and Southeast Asia) tied to their employers through legal sponsorship, known as the *kafala* system, who faced physical, mental, and sexual abuse, unsafe working conditions, and nonpayment of wages. According to NGOs who assisted migrant workers in reporting these abuses to authorities, security forces and judges did not always adequately investigate these crimes; victims sometimes refused to file complaints or retracted testimony due to threats and fear of reprisals or deportation.

Refoulement: The government reaffirmed its commitment to the principle of nonrefoulement with respect to Syrians. Some political party representatives, however, employed antirefugee rhetoric, stating assistance to Syrian refugees in particular placed additional burden on the state already facing an economic crisis. The DGS coordinated with Syrian government officials to facilitate the voluntary return of approximately 16,000 refugees from 2017 to September 1, 2019. UNHCR did not organize these group returns but was present at departure points and found no evidence that returns were involuntary or coerced in the cases of those refugees whom they interviewed. Human rights groups including Amnesty International questioned government claims that refugee returns were entirely voluntary, calling the environment “coercive” and citing credible risk of persecution or other human rights abuses upon return to areas controlled by the Syrian regime.

An HDC decision in April required the deportation of anyone arrested and found to have entered the country illegally after April 24. As of September the DGS reported it had deported 2,731 individuals under this order. UN officials considered the government’s new deportation policy as creating a high risk of refoulement given the lack of a formal review process to assess credible fear of persecution or torture. Specifically, the HDC decision requiring the deportation of anyone arrested and found to have entered the country illegally after April 24 elevated the risk of refoulement. Human rights groups and the international community all raised concerns about the risk of turning over refugees to Syrian authorities. There were several anecdotal reports of Syrian refugees who were subsequently abused in detention after being turned over to Syrian authorities by Lebanese officials. Government officials maintained their policy only applied to illegal migrants, not refugees, although it did not appear there was sufficient due process to make such a determination. UNHCR and international donors urged the government to provide for a judicial or independent administrative review before carrying out deportations. The government maintained that while the law requires

a court hearing on all deportation cases, it did not have the bandwidth to process the existing caseload.

Non-Syrian asylum seekers 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. Most cases resulted in deportation of the detainee, except for some instances where UNHCR secured their resettlement to a third country. During the year two Sudanese asylum seekers and four Iraqis (three refugees and one asylum seeker) were deported. In addition, one Iraqi refugee and her two children were not allowed re-entry into Lebanon after they briefly returned to Iraq to obtain an official document.

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status. Nonetheless, the country hosted an estimated 1.5 million refugees, the vast majority of them Syrian. In an effort to address the low number of refugees obtaining and renewing legal residency, since 2017 residency fees have been waived for refugees who had registered with UNHCR prior to 2015. This ruling excluded unregistered refugees or those who had renewed on the basis of Lebanese sponsorship. DGS implementation of the waiver continued to be inconsistent, and there was minimal improvement in the percentage of refugees with legal status. According to the United Nations, only 20 percent of the refugee population held legal residency as of September.

Due to the slow pace of implementation of residency determinations, the majority of Syrian refugees were unable to renew their legal documents, which significantly affected their freedom of movement owing to the possibility of arrests at checkpoints, particularly for adult men. While authorities released most detainees within a few days, some of the refugees said authorities required them to pay fines before releasing them or confiscated their identification documents (IDs). Syrian refugees faced barriers to obtaining Syrian ID documentation required to renew their residency permits in Lebanon because of the hostility of the Syrian government to the refugee population and because Syrian government embassies and consulates charge exorbitant fees. Obtaining and maintaining legal residency was also a challenge for refugees of other nationalities, particularly Iraqis, due to high renewal fees and sponsorship requirements. There is no official limitation of movement for Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) in the country; however, PRS without legal status faced limitations on their freedom of movement, mainly due to the threat of arrest at checkpoints.

Since 2014 authorities granted entry visas at the border only to PRS with either a verified embassy appointment in the country or a flight ticket and visa to a third country. Additionally, limited numbers of PRS secured visas to Lebanon by obtaining prior approval from the DGS, which required a sponsor in the country and could not be processed at border posts. UNRWA estimated that only 12 percent of the PRS in the country had arrived after 2016.

In 2017 the DGS issued a circular allowing the free, unlimited renewal of PRS residency for six months, with no fees for delayed submission. This circular has been consistently used since its issuance and applies to PRS who entered the country legally or who regularized their status before September 2016. The circular also granted temporary residency documents to PRS who turned 15 years old in the country, allowing them to use available documents such as an individual civil status card, instead of passports or national identity cards. Previously children were required to have an ID or valid travel document to be able to renew their residency. If they did not have one of these two documents, their legal status was revoked, and they became at risk of arrest and detention if they were stopped at any checkpoint. The circular, issued for residency renewal and not regularization, did not apply to PRS who entered the country through unofficial border crossings. Authorities issued a departure order to PRS who entered the country through official border crossings but who overstayed their temporary transit visa or failed to renew their visa.

Since 2017 the government waived the condition of valid residency for birth and marriage registration for PRS, expanding the application of a previous circular issued in September 2017 applicable to Syrians. Since March 2018 the Ministry of Interior waived the costly court proceedings to obtain birth registration of PRS and Syrian refugee children older than one year who were born in Lebanon between January 2011 and February 2018. The proof of marriage requirement remained in effect during the year.

Freedom of Movement: Authorities imposed curfews in a number of municipalities across the country, allegedly to improve security of all communities. Some international observers raised concerns that these measures may be discriminatory and excessive, since authorities typically enforced them for Syrian refugees, who mostly lack legal residency status and could face greater consequences if detained for a curfew violation. Municipalities and neighborhoods hosting Syrian refugee populations continued to impose movement restrictions through curfews, evictions, and threats of evictions. UN agencies reported that local municipal 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.

Police checkpoints and curfews imposed by municipalities restricted refugees' movement. Cases of identity document confiscation and fines for breaking curfews continued, and a few violent incidents against refugees occurred. UNHCR staff reported restrictions on movement increasingly forced families to send children and young women, whom authorities are less likely to stop yet who are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, to perform family errands.

Employment: Authorities continued requiring Syrian refugees who wished to obtain residency permits to pledge to abide by the country's laws, under which Syrians may work only in agriculture, construction, and cleaning. In July the Ministry of Labor stepped up enforcement and fined employers who hired refugees outside these sectors.

The law allows a special account to provide end-of-service indemnities or severance pay to Palestinian refugees who retire or resign. These benefits were available only to Palestinians working in the legal labor market. Palestinians did not benefit from national sickness and maternity funds or the family allowances fund. UNRWA continued to bear the cost of any medical, maternity, or family health-care expenses (excluding worker's compensation).

Palestinian refugees received partial access to the benefits of the National Social Security Fund. They may not, however, work in at least 33 professions including medicine, law, and engineering and face informal restrictions on work in other industries. According to UN agencies, government officials, and Palestinian advocacy groups, Palestinian refugees consistently reported discrimination in hiring due to excessive bureaucracy and societal stigma. Lack of written contracts, lack of employment benefits, and insecure job tenure contributed to unstable working conditions.

Palestinian refugees were barred from employment in many fields, making refugees dependent upon UNRWA as the sole provider of education, health care, and social services. A 2010 law expanding employment rights and removing some restrictions on Palestinian refugees was not fully implemented, and Palestinians remained barred from working in most skilled professions, including almost all those that require membership in a professional association. A Ministry of Labor effort to restrict Syrian refugee access to employment led to closure of several

businesses employing or owned by Palestinians, triggering three weeks of protests in July and August.

Access to Basic Services: The government did not consider local integration of any refugees a viable solution.

The law considers UNRWA-registered Palestinian refugees to be foreigners. UNRWA provides health, education, social services, and emergency assistance to registered Palestinian refugees residing in the country. The amount of land allocated to the 12 official Palestinian refugee camps in the country has changed only marginally since 1948, despite a fourfold increase in the population. Consequently, most Palestinian refugees lived in overpopulated camps, some of which suffered heavy damage in past conflicts. By agreement with the government, Palestinian security committees provided security for refugees in the camps.

A comprehensive, multi-year plan to rebuild the Nahr el-Bared Camp in eight stages began in 2008; the project continued at year's end and was approximately 75 percent completed. Remaining reconstruction was not fully funded, with a 99 billion LBP (\$66 million) shortfall remaining. Of the 27,000 Palestinians originally displaced following the camp's destruction, UNRWA expected that approximately 21,000 would return. Many moved into completed apartments this year, and the temporary settlements that housed them near Nahr el-Bared Camp were decommissioned. The government did not permit UNRWA to install individual electricity meters in apartments, preferring that UNRWA pay a single bill rather than collecting from thousands of households, which limited access to electricity for residents.

Palestinian refugees typically could not access public health and education services or own land. A 2001 amendment to the law was designed to exclude Palestinians from purchasing or inheriting property. Palestinians who owned and registered property prior to the 2001 law entering into force could bequeath it to their heirs.

Palestinian refugees residing in the country could not obtain citizenship and were not considered citizens of any other country. Palestinian refugee women married to Lebanese citizens were able to obtain citizenship after one year of marriage. According to the country's nationality law, the father transmits citizenship to children. Palestinian refugees, including children, had limited social and civil rights and no access to government-provided health, education, or other social

services. Children of Palestinian refugees faced discrimination in birth registration, and many had to leave school at an early age to earn an income.

Palestinian refugees who fled Syria for Lebanon 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.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education facilitated the enrollment of more than 200,000 non-Lebanese students, predominantly Syrian refugees, in public schools (basic education from kindergarten to grade nine) in the 2018-19 academic year. Authorities estimated there were almost 338,000 registered Syrians of school age (three to 14 years old) in the country. 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 the majority of 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.

### **g. Stateless Persons**

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 discrimination in the nationality law particularly affected Palestinians and increasingly Syrians from female-headed households. Additionally, some children born to Lebanese fathers did not have their births registered due to administrative obstacles or a lack of understanding of the regulations. There were no official statistics on the size of the stateless population.

Approximately 3,000-5,000 Palestinians were not registered with UNRWA 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. Without documentation and legal status, 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 not necessarily eligible for the full range of services provided by UNRWA. Nonetheless, in most cases UNRWA 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.

The Directorate of Political and Refugee Affairs is responsible for late registration of children of Palestinian refugees. According to the law, birth registration of children older than one year previously required a court procedure, proof of marriage, an investigation by the DGS, and a DNA test. A March 2 decree issued by the Ministry of Interior facilitated the required documentation for birth registration of PRS and Syrian children more than one year old and born in the country since 2011. In such cases authorities no longer required the court procedure and DNA tests to register these children; however, proof of marriage is still mandatory. This decree does not apply to the registration of Palestinian refugee children more than one year old.

Approximately 1,500 of an estimated 100,000 Kurds living in the country lacked citizenship, despite decades of family presence in the country. Most were descendants of migrants and refugees who left Turkey and Syria during World War I, but authorities continued to deny them citizenship to preserve the country's sectarian balance. The government issued a naturalization decree in 1994, but high costs and administrative obstacles prevented many individuals from acquiring official status. Some individuals who had previously received official status had their citizenship revoked in 2011 under a presidential decree. Others held an "ID under consideration" document without a date or place of birth.

Stateless persons lacked official identity documents that would permit them to travel abroad and could face difficulties traveling internally, including detention for not carrying identity documents. They had limited access to the regular employment market and no access to many professions. Additionally, they could not access public schools or public health-care facilities, register marriages or births, or 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, lack of government control over parts of the country, defects in the electoral process, previous prolonged extensions of parliament's mandate, and corruption in public office restricted this ability.

#### **Elections and Political Participation**

Recent Elections: Michel Aoun was elected president in 2016, ending two and one-half years of political stalemate. Following the passage of a new electoral law, parliamentary elections were held in May 2018 for the first time in nine years. Observers concluded that the elections were generally free and fair. On July 31, President Michel Aoun signed a decree calling for the parliamentary by-election to fill Hizballah MP Nawwaf Moussawi's seat in Tyre following his resignation. The by-election was scheduled to be held on September 15, but a Hizballah-affiliated candidate ran unopposed after other candidates withdrew their candidacies.

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

Participation of Women and Minorities: No laws limit participation of women or members of minorities in the political process, and they did participate. There were, however, significant cultural barriers to women's participation in politics. Prior to 2004, no woman held a cabinet position, and there have been only seven female ministers subsequently, including current ministers. Four women served in the 30-member cabinet formed in January, one of whom became the Arab world's first female interior minister. Only six of 128 members of parliament were women, and several of the female members of parliament were close relatives of prominent male politicians. Female leadership of political parties was limited, although three parties introduced voluntary quotas for their membership. Since 2017 women have been able to run in municipal elections in their native towns instead of the municipality of their spouses.

Minorities participated in politics. Regardless of the number of its adherents, authorities allocated every government-recognized religion, except Coptic Christianity, Ismaili Islam, and Judaism, at least one seat in parliament. Voters elected three parliamentarians representing minorities (one Syriac Orthodox

Christian and two Alawites) in the 2018 elections. None of the minority parliamentarians were women. Members of these groups also held high positions in government and the LAF.

Since refugees are not Lebanese citizens, they have no Lebanese political rights.

#### **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

Although the law provides criminal penalties for official corruption, the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials reportedly engaged in corrupt practices with impunity and on a wide scale. Government security officials, ISF, agencies, customs, and the judiciary were subject to laws against bribery and extortion. The lack of strong enforcement limited the law's effectiveness. The Ministry of State for Combating Corruption was eliminated when a new government was formed on January 31; the ministry previously had little operational budget or authority.

The Central Inspection Board (CIB), an oversight body within the Office of the Prime Minister, is responsible for monitoring administrative departments, including procurement and financial actions, and remained mostly independent of political interference. The CIB may inspect employees of the national and municipal government, and has the authority to seek their removal or refer cases for prosecution. The CIB's authority does not extend to cabinet ministers or to municipal executives. The Social Security Fund and the Council for Development and Reconstruction, public entities that managed large funding flows, were outside the CIB's jurisdiction.

Corruption: Observers widely considered government control of corruption to be poor. There was limited parliamentary or auditing authority oversight of revenue collection and expenditures. During the continuing protests that began October 17, alleged corruption in the government and public sector was a major complaint of protesters and a major impetus for the protests. Within the first month after protests began, there was an increase in the number of corruption-related investigations and prosecution actions.

Types of corruption generally encountered included systemic patronage; judicial failures, especially in investigations of official wrongdoing; and bribery at multiple levels within the national and municipal governments. Corruption led to diversion of resources intended for other objectives. A few judges were suspended from duty pending investigation of allegations of receiving bribes from lawyers and

intermediaries; some were released while one judge remained under further investigation as of November 19.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires the president of the republic, the president of the Chamber of Deputies, the president of the Council of Ministers, as well as ministers, members of parliament, and judges to disclose their financial assets in a sealed envelope deposited at the Constitutional Council, but the government does not make the information available to the public. They must also do the same when they leave office. Heads of municipalities disclose their financial assets in a sealed envelope deposited at the Ministry of Interior, and civil servants deposit their sealed envelopes at the Civil Servants Council, which are also not available to the public. If a case is brought to the State Council for noncompliance, the State Council may take judiciary administrative action to remove the offender from office.

### **Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, 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.

There was no information on reports from previous years of international and local human rights groups being targeted by security services for harassment.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The position of State Minister for Human Rights was eliminated in the new cabinet formed in January. Parliament's Committee on Human Rights struggled to make legal changes to guide ministries in protecting specific human rights. In March 2018 the cabinet appointed the five members of the National Preventive Mechanism against Torture, a body within the 10-member National Human Rights Institute, but as of October the Institute, which was created in 2016, had no budget and had still not commenced its work (see section 1.c., Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment).

### **Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons**

#### **Women**

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape 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, its interpretation by religious courts in cases brought before them, not to civil courts, precluded full implementation of civil law in all provinces, such as in the case of an abused wife compelled to return to her husband under personal status laws, despite battery being outlawed in the penal code. The minimum prison sentence for a person convicted of rape is five years, or seven years for raping a minor. In 2017 parliament repealed the article of the penal code that freed rapists from prosecution and nullified their convictions if they married their victims.

The law criminalizes domestic violence, calls for provision of shelters, gives women the ability to file a restraining order against the abuser, and assigns special units within the ISF to receive domestic violence complaints. NGOs alleged that the definition of domestic violence was narrow and did not provide adequate protection from all forms of abuse. Although the penal code provides for a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison for battery, religious courts could cite personal status laws to require a battered wife to return to her home despite physical abuse. 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 victims or punish abusers, who they alleged often received disproportionately light sentences. On July 30, the Mount Lebanon Criminal Court closed the case of a man who shot and killed his wife outside their home in Aramoun in 2015 following a dispute. The final verdict sentenced the husband to 25 years of hard labor and required him to pay LBP 150 million (\$100,000) to the victim’s heirs.

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, while some victims 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 cases rape or conditions akin to slavery.

According to women’s rights NGO KAFA, victims reported that police response to complaints submitted by battered or abused women improved. During the year ISF and judicial officials received training on best practices for handling cases

involving female detainees, including victims of domestic violence and sexual exploitation. NGOs that provided services to such victims reported increased access to potential victims in ISF and DGS custody. The ISF continued its practice begun in 2018 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 victims and training ISF personnel to combat violence in prisons.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: On March 2, hundreds of protesters, including some lawmakers, marched on parliament to demand raising the minimum age of marriage to 18. Marriage is governed by 18 different sect-based personal status laws, and all sects allow girls to be married before age 18.

Sexual Harassment: The law prohibits sexual harassment, but authorities did not enforce the law effectively, and it remained a widespread problem.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

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 on the basis of 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 issues, and laws vary depending on the religious group. For example, Sunni religious courts applied 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 religion. 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, although widows may confer citizenship to their minor children born of a citizen father. Since August 2018 divorced women have been allowed to include the names of their children on their civil records.

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 in practice.

## **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.d.). If a child's birth is not registered within the first year, the process for legitimizing the birth is long and costly, often deterring families from registration. Syrian refugees no longer need legal residency to register the birth of their child. Authorities also waived several requirements for late birth registration by Syrian refugees. Birth registration still remained inaccessible to some, because the government required proof of legal residence and legal marriage, documentation which was often unavailable to refugees.

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. Syrian refugee children are not legally entitled to enroll in public schools at regular hours, although they may attend schools' second shifts.

Religious courts ruled on civil cases involving family matters such as child custody in the case of divorce.

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 directed that non-Lebanese students could not outnumber Lebanese in any given classroom during the regular school shift, which sometimes limited enrollment.

Child Abuse: The country lacked a comprehensive child protection law; however, the law on the Protection of at-Risk Children or Children Violating the Law, provided some protection to children who were victims of violence.

As of August 27, the child protection NGO Himaya reported assisting with more than 914 cases of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse as well as exploitation and neglect. The Ministry of Social Affairs had a hotline to report cases of child abuse. In a typical example, representatives of a local shelter for abused women and children described a case of a father who sexually and physically abused a child in the shelter's care. According to the organization, the father escaped punishment through religious courts, as many families chose to handle such cases through these courts rather than the national justice system.

Early and Forced Marriage: There is no legal minimum age for marriage, and the government does not perform civil marriages, although Minister of Interior Raya al-Hassan in February publicly voiced her support for reintroducing the debate on whether or not to allow civil marriage in Lebanon. Most religious leaders opposed civil marriage, despite the fact that Lebanon recognizes civil marriages conducted outside the country. The various sects each have their own religious courts governing issues of personal status, such as marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. The minimum age of marriage varies from age 14 to age 18 depending on the sect. UN agencies, NGOs, and government officials noted high rates of early marriage among the Syrian refugee population. They partially attributed this circumstance to social and economic pressure on families with limited resources.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The penal code prohibits and punishes commercial sexual exploitation, child pornography, and forced prostitution. 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.

The ISF, DGS, and judicial officials improved enforcement of the country's antitrafficking law, which prohibits the sexual exploitation of children. NGOs provided training throughout the year to increase police and judicial officials' sensitivity to the issue and reported increased numbers of potential victims that authorities referred to NGO-run shelters and victim protection programs. This included a training for DGS officers focused on behavioral psychology and effective communication skills with victims with trainees selected from departments that specialize in direct communication with citizens, migrants, refugees, travelers, and those at the airport and at the administrative retention

center. Separately, four trainings were conducted for DGS officers on countertrafficking and identification of victims of human trafficking.

Displaced Children: Some refugee children lived and worked on the street. Given 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.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education facilitated enrollment of almost 200,000 non-Lebanese children in the 2018-19 academic year. More than one-half of refugee children ages three to 18 were out of school, according to UNHCR. The government and some NGOs offered a number of informal education programs to eligible students.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

## **Anti-Semitism**

In a May interview with *al-Joumhouria*, Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri used an anti-Semitic slur when explaining Israel's position on its maritime border with Lebanon.

At year's end there were an estimated 70 Jews living in the country and 5,500 registered Jewish voters who lived abroad but had the right to vote in parliamentary elections.

The Jewish Community Council reported that throughout the year a construction site adjacent to the Jewish cemetery in Beirut regularly dumped trash and rubble into the cemetery. Council members said municipal authorities agreed to speak with the construction company but that dumping continued as of September 11. On September 18, the ISF called in for questioning a member of the Jewish Community Council who manages the cemetery, questioning him about the

number and type of visitors to the cemetery and local synagogues over the summer. The council member was not detained, but his phone was temporarily confiscated.

Rooms, shops, and a gas station were built on the land of the Jewish cemetery in Tripoli, and a lawsuit was filed in 2011. While the suit was still pending, authorities had taken no action by year's end.

### **Trafficking in Persons**

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

### **Persons with Disabilities**

According to the law, persons with disabilities have the right to employment, education, health services, accessibility, and the right to vote; however, there was no evidence the government effectively enforced the law. Although prohibited by law, discrimination against persons with disabilities continued. On February 11, the minister of foreign affairs appointed Joe Rahhal, who himself has a physical disability, as his advisor of persons with special disabilities.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and the National Council of Disabled are responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. According to the president of the Arab Organization of Disabled People, little progress had occurred since parliament passed the law on disabilities in 2000. Resource limitations restricted the ability of the government to investigate adequately abuses against persons with disabilities.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education stipulated that for new school building construction "schools should include all necessary facilities in order to receive the physically challenged." Nonetheless, the public-school system was ill-equipped to accommodate students with disabilities.

Depending on the type and nature of the disability, children with a disability may attend mainstream school. Due to a lack of awareness or knowledge, school staff often did not identify a specific disability in children and could not adequately advise parents. In such cases children often repeated classes or dropped out of school. According to a 2018 Human Rights Watch report, children with disabilities lacked access to education, as both public and private schools often

improperly refused to admit them or charged additional fees, citing a lack of appropriate facilities or staff.

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.

### **National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities**

Lebanese of African descent attributed discrimination to the color of their skin and claimed 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.

Syrian workers, usually employed as manual laborers and construction workers, continued to suffer discrimination. Many municipalities enforced a curfew on Syrians' movements in their neighborhoods in an effort to control security.

### **Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code prohibits sexual relations “contradicting the laws of nature” and effectively criminalizes consensual, same-sex sexual conduct among adults. The law was occasionally enforced in civilian and military courts, and it carries a penalty of up to one year in prison. On April 1, a civilian court in Saida ruled on a 2017 case, convicting two men accused of homosexual activity under Article 534. The initial sentence of jail time was replaced with a fine of LBP 500,000 (\$333). On March 30, a military prosecutor in Beirut acquitted four military personnel accused of “sodomy.” The judge cleared the group of charges of committing sexual acts “contrary to nature” and declined to issue warrants for their arrest, commenting that the penal code does not specify what kind of relationship can be considered “contrary to nature.” The ruling was the first of its kind by a military prosecutor. Some government and judicial officials, along with NGOs and legal experts, questioned whether the law actually criminalizes same-sex sexual conduct.

No provisions of law provide antidiscrimination protections to LGBTI persons based on their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex

characteristics. NGOs continued to report employment discrimination faced by transgender women due to the inconsistency between official documentation and gender self-presentation.

NGOs stated that official and societal discrimination against LGBTI persons persisted. Observers received reports from LGBTI refugees of physical abuse by local gangs, which the victims did not report to the ISF. Observers referred victims to UNHCR-sponsored protective services.

During the year government agents interfered with or restricted events focused on LGBTI rights. On January 31, prominent LGBTI rights NGO Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality (AFE) confirmed that it would move regional programs outside the country beginning in 2019. The decision followed a DGS attempt to shut down the September 2018 Networking, Exchange, Development, Wellness, and Achievement (NEDWA) sexual-health conference through intimidation of AFE's executive director and the threat of DGS or other agencies exposing attendees from LGBTI-hostile countries to their governments. (Ultimately the conference continued at a different Beirut venue.) The DGS implemented a continuing travel ban on foreign attendees of NEDWA, including Human Rights Watch's regional LGBTI researcher and other nationals of Canada, Egypt, and Iraq.

The government did not collect information on official or private discrimination in employment, occupation, housing, statelessness, or lack of access to education or health care based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Individuals who faced problems were reluctant to report incidents due to fear of additional discrimination or reprisal. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination.

### **HIV and AIDS Social Stigma**

HIV/AIDS is stigmatized due to sensitivities about extramarital relations and LGBTI 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/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 of Public Health before any treatment can begin. The law requires the government to provide treatment to all HIV-positive citizens and to Palestinian and Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. Nonetheless, treatment was only available at one hospital in Beirut, making it difficult for patients outside of Beirut to receive treatment easily.

## **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. 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. Unions have the right to strike after providing advance notice to and 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.

There are significant restrictions on the right to strike. The labor law excludes public-sector employees, domestic workers, and agricultural workers. Therefore, they have neither the right to strike nor to join and establish unions. The law prohibits public-sector employees from any kind of union activity, including striking, organizing collective petitions, or joining professional organizations.

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. The Association of Banks in Lebanon renewed the collective sectoral agreement with the Federation of Lebanese Bank Employees Unions on December 6 after nearly three months of mediation between the two parties led by the minister of labor. The Association of Banks in Lebanon had initially refused to renew the agreement.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination. Under the law, when employers misuse or abuse their right to terminate a union member's contract, including for union activity, the worker is entitled to compensation and legal indemnity and may institute proceedings before a conciliation board. The board adjudicates the case, after which an employer may be compelled to reinstate the worker, although this protection was available 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. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the most flagrant abuses

occurred in banking, private schools, retail businesses, daily and occasional workers, and the civil service. Prime Minister Hariri warned civil servants in May against striking or expressing their opinion about the national budget discussions.

By law foreigners with legal resident status may join trade unions. According to the ILO, however, in practice most unions do not encourage or accept the participation of foreign workers. The migrant 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 as they may neither vote in trade union elections nor run for union office. Certain sectors of migrant workers, such as migrant domestic workers, challenged the binding laws supported by some unions by forming their own autonomous structures that acted as unions, although the Ministry of Labor has not approved them.

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

The government's enforcement of applicable laws was weak, including with regard to prohibitions on antiunion discrimination.

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining were not always respected. The government and other political actors interfered with the functioning of worker organizations, particularly the main federation, the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL). The CGTL is the only national confederation recognized by the government, although several unions boycotted and unofficially or officially broke from the CGTL and no longer recognized it as an independent and nonpartisan representative of workers. Since 2012 the Union Coordination Committee (UCC), a grouping of public and private teachers as well as civil servants, played a major role in pushing the government to pass a promised revised salary scale, largely overshadowing the CGTL. While the UCC is not formally recognized by any government body, it acts as an umbrella organization and guides several recognized leagues of workers in demonstrating and in negotiating demands. During the 2019 national budget debate, both CGTL and UCC failed to successfully take leadership of worker protest actions or to coherently voice the demands and aspirations of working people. CGTL was further weakened when in January union president Antoine Bechara was interrogated by the ISF Anti-Cybercrime Bureau over a complaint filed by Minister

of Economy Raed Khoury. In May, Bechara was arrested and pressured to resign after a video was leaked showing him insulting and making offensive comments against the late Maronite patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir. The National Federation of Workers and Employees in Lebanon emerged as another alternative to represent the independent trade union movement.

On April 30, health workers at Saida Public Hospital began a strike that lasted four days, demanding payment of overdue salaries and denouncing the lack of basic materials in the facility. Police used force to end the strike and arrested the leaders of the trade union committee. 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.

There was widespread anecdotal evidence of arbitrary dismissals of Lebanese, and their replacement by non-Lebanese, across economic and productive sectors. This action was mainly in the form of Syrian refugees allegedly replacing Lebanese in some sectors. There were no official statistics to quantify the scale of these dismissals.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, but there is no legislative provision that provides criminal penalties for those employing forced labor. The government did not effectively enforce the law, although the government made some efforts to prevent or eliminate forced labor. The law does not criminally prohibit debt bondage.

Children, foreign workers employed as domestic workers, and other foreign workers sometimes worked under forced labor conditions. The law provides protection for domestic workers against forced labor, but domestic work is excluded from protections under the labor law and vulnerable to exploitation. In violation of the law, employment agencies and employers routinely withheld foreign workers' passports, especially in the case of domestic workers, sometimes for years. According to NGOs assisting migrant workers, in some instances employers withheld salaries for the duration of the contract, which was usually two years.

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**

Child labor occurred, including in its worst forms. While up-to-date statistics on child labor were unavailable, anecdotal evidence and the accounts of NGOs suggested the number of child workers may have risen during the year and that more children worked in the informal sector. UNHCR noted that commercial, sexual exploitation of refugee children continued to occur.

The minimum age for employment is 14, and the law prescribes the occupations that are legal for juveniles, defined as children between ages 14 and 18. The law requires juveniles to undergo a medical exam by a doctor certified by the Ministry of Public Health to assure they are physically fit for the type of work employers ask them to perform. The law prohibits employment of juveniles for more than seven hours per day or between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., and it requires one hour of rest for work lasting more than four hours. The law prohibits specific types of labor for juveniles, including informal “street labor.” It also lists types of labor that, by their nature or the circumstances in which they are carried out, are likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children younger than 16, as well as types of labor that are allowed for children older than 16, provided they are offered full protection and adequate training.

Overall, the government did not enforce child labor laws effectively, in part due to inadequate resources. Advocacy groups did not consider penalties for those who violate laws on the worst forms of child labor as sufficient deterrents.

Child labor, including among refugee children, was predominantly concentrated in the informal sector, including in small family enterprises, mechanical workshops, carpentry, construction, manufacturing, industrial sites, welding, agriculture, and fisheries. UN agencies and NGOs reported that Syrian refugee children were vulnerable to child labor and exploitation. According to the ILO, child labor rates have at least doubled since the Syrian refugee influx. The ILO reported that instances of child labor strongly correlated with a Syrian refugee presence. The ILO equally highlighted that the majority of Syrian children involved in the worst forms of child labor--especially forced labor--worked primarily in agriculture in the Bekaa and Akkar regions and on the streets of major urban areas (Beirut and Tripoli). Anecdotal evidence also indicated child labor was prevalent within Palestinian refugee camps.

The Ministry of Labor is responsible for enforcing child labor requirements through its Child Labor Unit. Additionally, the law charges the Ministry of Justice, the ISF, and the Higher Council for Childhood (HCC) with enforcing laws related to child trafficking, including commercial sexual exploitation of children and the use of children in illicit activities. The HCC is also responsible for referring children held in protective custody to appropriate NGOs to find safe living arrangements.

A Ministry of Labor unit responsible for inspections of all potential labor violations also investigates child labor issues when a specific complaint is reported or found in the course of their other inspection.

The Ministry of Labor's Child Labor Unit acts as the government's focal point for child labor issues, and it oversees and implements the ministry's national strategy to tackle child labor. The National Steering Committee on Child Labor is the main interministerial body coordinating on child labor across the government.

Also 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> and the Department of Labor's *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods>.

#### **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 sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV status, or other communicable diseases. Although the government generally respected these provisions, they were not enforced in some areas, and aspects of the law and traditional beliefs discriminated against women. Discrimination in employment and occupation occurred with respect to women, persons with disabilities, foreign domestic workers, and LGBTI and HIV-positive persons (see section 6).

The law does not distinguish between women and men in employment, and it provides for equal pay for men and women. On wage equality for similar work, the 2018 World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report* indicates that the overall situation in the country remained largely unchanged, despite slight progress on the ratio of women in parliament.

According to the UN Population Fund, the labor law does not explicitly prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace; it merely gives an employee the right to resign without prior notice in the event that the employer or representative committed an indecent offense towards the employee or a family member. There are, however, no legal consequences for the perpetrator.

Employment law defines a “disability” as a physical, sight, hearing, or mental disability. The law stipulates that persons with disabilities fill at least 3 percent of all government and private-sector positions, provided such persons 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 no otherwise qualified person with disabilities applied for employment within three months of advertisement.

Migrant workers and domestic workers faced employment hurdles that amounted to discrimination (see section 7.e.).

#### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

The legal minimum wage was last raised in 2012. There was no official minimum wage for domestic workers. Observers concluded that the minimum wage is lower than unofficial estimates of the poverty income level. Official contracts stipulated monthly wages for domestic workers, depending on the nationality of the worker. A unified standard contract, which was registered with the DGS for the worker to obtain residency, granted migrant domestic workers some labor protections. The standard contract covered uniform terms and conditions of employment, but not wages.

The law prescribes a standard 48-hour workweek with a weekly rest period that must not be less than 36 consecutive hours. The law stipulates 48 hours work as the maximum per week in most corporations except agricultural enterprises. The law permits a 12-hour day under certain conditions, including a stipulation that overtime pay is 50 percent higher than pay for normal hours. The law does not set limits on compulsory overtime. The law includes specific occupational health and safety regulations and requires employers to take adequate precautions for employee safety.

Domestic workers are not covered under the labor law or other laws related to acceptable conditions of work. Such laws also 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.

The Ministry of Labor is responsible for enforcing regulations related to acceptable conditions of work, but it did so inconsistently. The ministry's enforcement team handled all inspections of potential labor violations, but suffered from a lack of staff, resources, legal tools, and political support for its work. Interference with inspectors affected the quality of inspections and issuance of fines for violators was common. The law stipulates that 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.

Workers in the industrial sector worked an average of 35 hours per week, while workers in other sectors worked an average of 32 hours per week. These averages, however, were derived from figures which included part-time work, including for employees who desired full-time work. 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 (NSSF).

Some companies did not respect legal provisions governing occupational health and safety in specific sectors, such as the construction industry. Workers could report violations to the CGTL, Ministry of Labor, NSSF, or through their respective unions. In most cases they preferred to remain silent due to fear of dismissal.

Violations of wage, overtime, and occupational health and safety standards were most common in the construction industry and among migrant workers, particularly with foreign domestic workers.

Foreign migrant workers arrived in the country through local recruitment agencies and source-country recruitment agencies. Although the law requires recruitment agencies to have a license from the Ministry of Labor, the government did not adequately monitor their activities. A sponsorship system tied foreign workers' legal residency to a specific employer, making it difficult for foreign workers to change employers. If employment was terminated, a worker lost residency. This circumstance made many foreign migrant workers reluctant to file complaints to avoid losing their legal status.

Some employers mistreated, abused, and raped foreign domestic workers, who were mostly of Asian and African origin. Domestic workers often worked long hours and, in many cases, did not receive vacations or holidays. Victims of abuse may 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 solution that usually included monetary compensation and repatriation. In a typical example, one victim explained that, when she escaped from an employer who was withholding her wages, an NGO helped her file charges against her employer. Authorities reached an administrative settlement with her employer to pay back wages and finance return to her home country but did not seek criminal prosecution of her employer.

Authorities typically did not prosecute perpetrators of abuse against foreign domestic workers for a number of reasons, including the victims' refusal to press charges and lack of evidence. Authorities settled an unknown number of cases of nonpayment of wages through negotiation. According to source-country embassies and consulates, many workers did not report violations of their labor contracts until after they returned to their home countries, since they preferred not to stay in the country for a lengthy judicial process.

While licensed businesses and factories strove to meet international standards for working conditions with respect to occupational safety and health, conditions in informal factories and businesses were poorly regulated and often did not meet these standards. The Ministry of Industry is responsible for enforcing regulations to improve safety in the workplace. The regulations require industries to have three types of insurance (fire, third party, and workers' policies) and to implement proper safety measures. The ministry has the authority to revoke a company's license if its inspectors find a company noncompliant, but there was no evidence this occurred.

The law requires businesses to adhere to safety standards, but authorities poorly enforced the law, and it did not explicitly permit workers to remove themselves from dangerous conditions without jeopardy to their continued employment. Workers may ask to change their job or be removed from an unsafe job without being affected, as per the labor code. The government only weakly implemented the law due to lack of governance, the weak role of the trade union movement, corruption, and lack of trade union rights.