



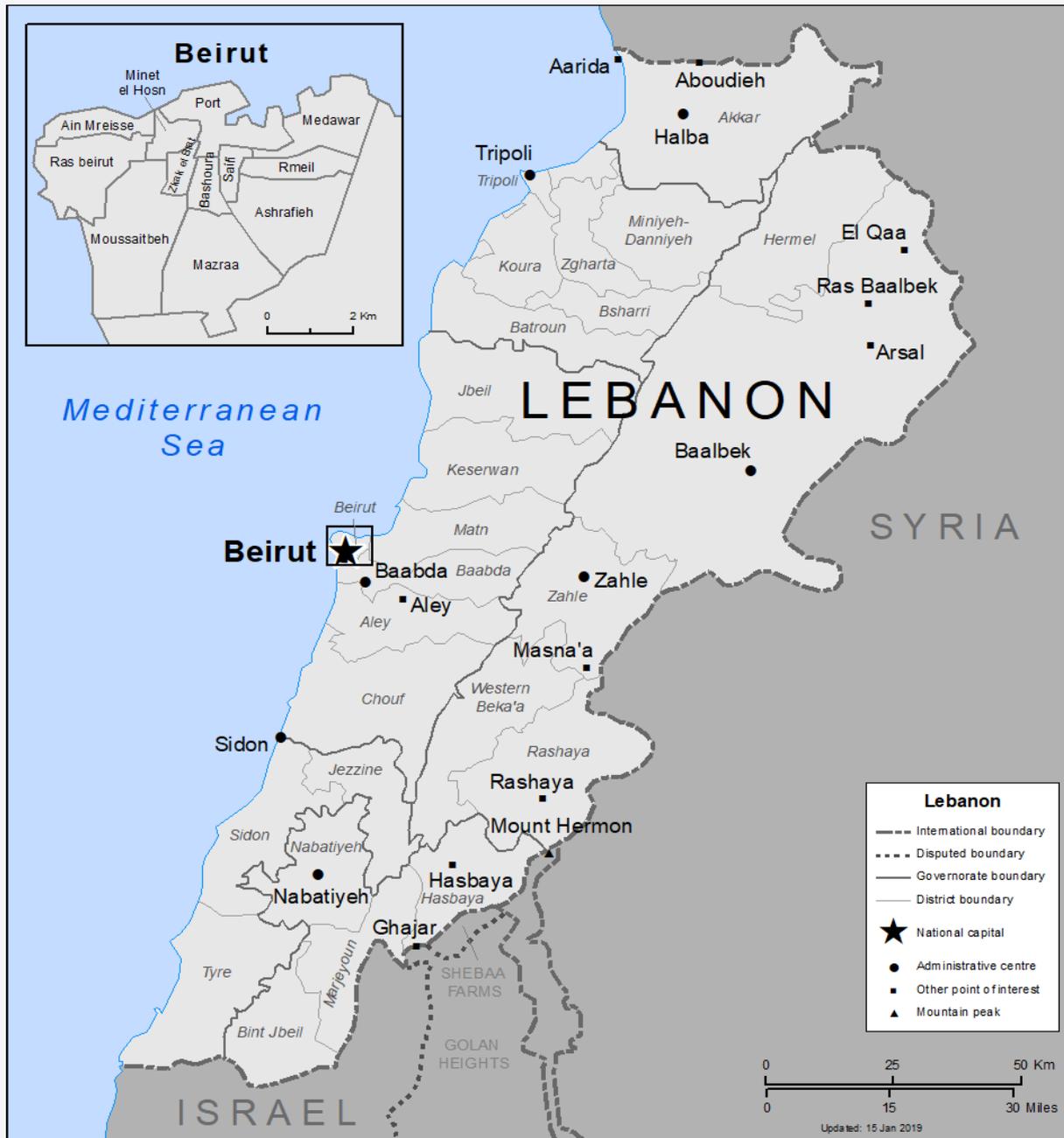
Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



DFAT COUNTRY INFORMATION REPORT LEBANON

26 JUNE 2023

MAP



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ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DGGS	Directorate General of General Security
DGPS	Directorate General for Personal Status
DRA	Directorate of Refugee Affairs
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISF	Internal Security Forces
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
LBP	Lebanese Pound (also known as Lebanese Lira)
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or intersex
LIC	Lebanese Identity Card
MoIM	Ministry of Interior and Municipalities
NGO(s)	Non-government organisation(s)
NID	National Identity Card
PRL	Palestinian resident in Lebanon
PRS	Palestinian resident in Syria
PSR	Personal Status Record
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WEF	World Economic Forum

GLOSSARY

<i>mukhtar</i>	Local mayor
<i>sharia</i>	Islamic law
<i>wasta</i>	Connections with powerful or influential people

Terms used in this report

high risk	DFAT is aware of a strong pattern of incidents
moderate risk	DFAT is aware of sufficient incidents to suggest a pattern of behaviour
low risk	DFAT is aware of incidents but has insufficient evidence to conclude they form a pattern

official discrimination

- legal or regulatory measures applying to a particular group that impede access to state protection or services that are available to other sections of the population (examples might include but are not limited to difficulties in obtaining personal registrations or identity papers, difficulties in having papers recognised, arbitrary arrest and detention)
- behaviour by state employees towards a particular group that impedes access to state protection or services otherwise available, including by failure to implement legislative or administrative measures

societal discrimination

- behaviour by members of society (including family members, employers or service providers) that impedes access by a particular group to goods or services normally available to other sections of society (examples could include but are not limited to refusal to rent property, refusal to sell goods or services, or employment discrimination)
- ostracism or exclusion by members of society (including family, acquaintances, employers, colleagues or service providers)

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 This Country Information Report has been prepared by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for protection status determination purposes only. It provides DFAT's best judgement and assessment at time of writing and is distinct from Australian Government policy with respect to Lebanon.

1.2 The report provides a general, rather than an exhaustive, country overview. It has been prepared with regard to the current caseload for decision makers in Australia without reference to individual applications for protection visas. The report does not contain policy guidance for decision makers.

1.3 Ministerial Direction Number 84 of 24 June 2019, issued under s 499 of the *Migration Act 1958*, states that:

Where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared [a] country information assessment expressly for protection status determination purposes, and that assessment is available to the decision maker, the decision maker must take into account that assessment, where relevant, in making their decision. The decision maker is not precluded from considering other relevant information about the country.

1.4 This report draws upon DFAT's on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Lebanon and elsewhere. It takes into account relevant information from government and non-government sources, including (but not limited to) those produced by the United Nations and its agencies, the United States Department of State, the World Bank, Transparency International, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and local and international media. Where DFAT does not refer to a specific source of a report or allegation, this may be to protect the source.

1.5 This updated Country Information Report replaces the previous DFAT report on Lebanon published on 19 March 2019.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

RECENT HISTORY

2.1 Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War One, the League of Nations mandated the provinces that comprise present day Lebanon to the direct control of France. Lebanon's constitution, drawn up in 1926 and still in use, specified a balance of power between the various religious groups; while a 1932 census was used to justify dividing parliamentary seats according to a ratio that favoured the Christian community. Lebanon became independent in November 1943 and the last French troops left in 1946. Aside from a 1958 political crisis fuelled by regional tensions, Lebanon enjoyed general peace and prosperity during its first decades of independence.

2.2 Tensions between pro- and anti- Palestinian factions, fuelled by sectarian disputes between the large Christian and Muslim communities, led to a civil war in Lebanon in 1975. After the Arab League brokered the National Reconciliation Document (also called the Taef Accord) in 1989, fighting mostly ceased in 1990. The Taef Accord created new power-sharing agreements between Christian and Muslim communities and called for the disarmament of various militias, with the exception of Hezbollah, which remained armed in its capacity as a 'resistance force' against occupying Israeli forces in southern Lebanon. Israel withdrew its forces in 2000, but still occupied some disputed lands along the border.

2.3 Since the end of the civil war, Lebanon's recent history has been characterised by instability and economic and political crises, including assassination of political rivals, most notably that of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005. Syrian forces, which first entered Lebanon in 1976, remained as an occupying force until 2005, departing following a series of protests surrounding Hariri's assassination. Other crises included an Israeli invasion and conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, and a Hezbollah takeover of west Beirut in 2008. Frustration with tax increases, corruption and sectarian rule led to mass protests in 2019. The civil war in neighbouring Syria that commenced in 2011 drove 1.5 million refugees into Lebanon, which Lebanon has struggled to absorb.

2.4 A large-scale chemical explosion in August 2020 destroyed the Port of Beirut when a fire in an adjacent warehouse ignited nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrate. Two-hundred and twenty people died and more than 6,500 were injured. Many Lebanese blamed the explosion on political dysfunction. Mass protests broke out and then-Prime Minister Hassan Diab and his entire cabinet resigned.

2.5 Since 2020, Lebanon has experienced a severe economic crisis (see [Economic Overview](#)). On 31 October 2022, President Michael Aoun left office at the end of his presidential term. As at publication, the country's parliamentarians, divided along sectarian lines, have failed to elect Aoun's successor, despite 10 rounds of voting.

DEMOGRAPHY

2.6 Lebanon has not conducted a census since 1932. According to the CIA World Factbook, the population of Lebanon is approximately 5.3 million citizens, and up to 6.7 million people in total, including refugees.

However, estimates of the population vary considerably, chiefly due to uncertainty around the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The CIA World Fact Book estimates there are 830,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, while the Lebanese Government estimates there are two million 'displaced Syrians' (a broader category than just refugees). Ninety-five per cent of the population is Arab (noting many Lebanese Christians do not identify as Arab, but as Phoenician). The remaining 5 per cent are mainly Armenian. The majority of people live in and around the Mediterranean coast, especially Beirut, which has a population of 2.4 million people. Ninety per cent of the population is urban.

ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

2.7 Lebanon is experiencing severe economic depression. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) peaked in 2019 at USD54.9 billion then fell sharply to USD23.1 billion in 2021, according to World Bank figures. Those using US-dollar denominated accounts have had their savings locked or devalued, alongside a severe devaluation in the Lebanese Pound (LBP). Long-running public debt has become unsustainable.

2.8 Some analysts have claimed that the cause of the debt is overly generous and unsustainable interest payments from the central bank to foreign investors, which, according to the *New York Times*, amounted to a form of 'Ponzi scheme'. The currency has been sharply devalued, inflation is very high (over 150 per cent in 2021) and some people have been unable to access savings or afford basic goods and services.

2.9 Supply of basic goods including medicines, food and fuel is unpredictable, and they are sometimes rationed. Subsidies that were applied to these goods were mostly lifted as the economic crisis deepened and many Lebanese who relied on subsidies have been left without access to these goods.

2.10 Poverty rates have doubled since 2019, affecting 82 per cent of the population, according to a UN study, although the World Bank believes this figure is exaggerated and it is now conducting its own study which it believes will show a figure around 50 per cent. There is little in the way of social welfare. The UN has scaled up humanitarian assistance in response to the economic crisis. It is providing limited payments to over 1 million Syrian refugees and 660,000 Lebanese, funded by donor governments and the World Bank. Remittances from the Lebanese diaspora contribute to over 50 per cent of the country's GDP. However, the great majority of Lebanese living in poverty lack support.

Employment

2.11 According to International Labour Organization (ILO) data, the official unemployment rate was 12.5 per cent in 2021 and has been rising sharply each year from a low of 6.3 per cent in 2009. The youth unemployment rate (people aged 15 to 24 years old) followed the same trend and was 25 per cent in 2021, according to the ILO. International media reports estimate that about a third of the labour force is unemployed. In-country sources told DFAT that significant competition between Lebanese and Syrian refugees, even for unskilled jobs, has heightened tensions between the two communities.

2.12 High levels of unemployment stem from the wider economic crisis. Some firms have stopped trading, and the public sector has been hit by austerity measures which have reduced jobs. Power cuts and a lack of fuel have meant that some businesses cannot operate or have had to scale back operations. State-supplied power is sporadic and often doesn't exceed two hours per day, leaving much of the population reliant on privately-owned diesel backup generators to make up the shortfall.

Corruption

2.13 Lebanon has a comprehensive legislative framework against corruption. Nevertheless, corruption is widespread and often occurs with impunity. Lebanon ranked 150th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index. Bertelsmann Stiftung, a German thinktank, called corruption in Lebanon 'endemic' in its 2022 Country Report, noting widespread corruption in the judiciary, land administration and public services, and a lack of initiative to combat or punish corruption.

2.14 Entrenched patronage networks monopolise the economy and public service, and municipalities are sometimes unable to enforce regulations due to political interference. Bribes and irregular payments are often exchanged when applying for public utilities, and the use of connections (*wasta*) is a common way to navigate the public administration. A survey of youth in 2020 found corruption affected nearly 'every aspect of daily life, including health care,' with one respondent stating: 'if I want to go to proper hospital, I need *wasta*'.

Health

2.15 The Lebanese health system is a mix of private and public services. The system has been badly affected by the recent economic crisis. International media reported that it was 'on the brink of collapse' in January 2022, noting an outflux of doctors and nurses, as well as widespread corruption. Because of the economic crisis, many Lebanese who previously had private health insurance can no longer afford it and are relying on the public system. The economic crisis has affected supply chains for pharmaceuticals and basic medical supplies, which are often unavailable. According to Bertelsmann Stiftung, about half of the Lebanese population cannot access healthcare. Even those who can access healthcare are not always able to access medicines, which are either unavailable or very expensive.

2.16 In Lebanon, the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) is a form of mandatory insurance which covers formal employees and their dependents and is intended to meet the bulk of health expenses of the roughly 25 per cent of Lebanese who are covered by it. However, the NSSF has come under increasing pressure as Lebanon experiences its economic crisis; from 2020, it is increasingly unable to meet its commitments. In July 2022 local media reported that, on the assumption that the NSSF will never pay, hospitals are refusing to treat NSSF subscribers, unless they are willing to pay out of pocket, at market rates.

Mental Health

2.17 Mental illnesses, including anxiety, depression and PTSD, are common in Lebanon, and have reportedly worsened as a result of multiple nationwide crises. Mental health services are scarce, especially outside Beirut. The economic crisis has led to a mass exodus of mental health professionals from Lebanon. In-country sources report that people with a mental illness have traditionally been subject to considerable stigma, especially those with more noticeable symptoms, who are perceived as 'incompetent, aggressive, violent' and unable to participate in the community. In-country sources told DFAT there is a widespread belief that the mentally ill should simply 'snap out of it,' however, also reported that the considerable stresses of the August 2020 port blast had led to an increased openness around mental illness, especially anxiety and depression.

Drug abuse and treatment

2.18 Drug abuse is reportedly common in Lebanon and has worsened in recent years. Research in 2021 by the American University of Beirut found that the combination of political and economic crises, and an 'overloaded, underfunded mental health system' had led to an increase in Lebanese with mental health support needs self-medicating with alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and psychoactive prescription drugs. Other commonly abused substances include Ketamine, amphetamines and salvia (a herbal hallucinogenic).

2.19 Possession of illegal drugs is usually punished with a jail sentence ranging from 3 months to 3 years. Under Drug Law 673 of 1991, judges are 'requested' to offer enrolment in a treatment program as an alternative to imprisonment, however, in reality, very few drug users are enrolled in these programs. There are a number of rehabilitation services in Beirut, however very few elsewhere in the country. Wealthier drug users are reportedly much more likely to be able to access these services than poorer people, who are more likely to go to jail.

Education

2.20 Children start school at six years of age, and may go on to middle school, high school and higher education. Formal education is compulsory until year six (about age 12). Literacy rates are approximately 95 per cent, according to the CIA World Factbook.

2.21 The economic situation of the country has immense consequences for children, including child protection concerns including child labour, early marriage, school dropout and an increase in psychosocial distress and negative coping mechanisms. According to analysis by French news agency, France 24, more than 90,000 students were withdrawn from private schooling between 2019 and 2021 due to the financial crisis; parents could no longer afford private schools, forcing the closure of 5 per cent of private schools. An estimated 55,000 students moved from private to public schools in the 2020-21 school year. This has put extra strain on an overstretched and underfunded public education system, which was already struggling to accommodate Syrian refugees. A lack of public school funding delayed the start of the 2022-23 school year by one month. The deteriorating economic situation has also forced large numbers of children to drop out of school, due to costs (including of transport and school supplies) or being required to work or care for younger siblings. Teachers have staged strikes over insufficient salaries and health services.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

2.22 Lebanon is a democratic parliamentary republic which seeks to maintain equilibrium and stability through the allocation of parliamentary seats, ministerial posts and key offices of state among the various religious communities. The 'National Pact' adopted at independence in 1943 stipulated an understanding, based in part on the constitution, that the office of President would be reserved for a Maronite Christian, the office of Prime Minister for a Sunni Muslim, and the office of Speaker of the House for a Shi'a Muslim. After the signing of the Taef Accord (see [Recent History](#)) in 1989, the Preamble of the Constitution was amended to envisage the long-term abolition of political confessionalism (the proportional distribution of power along religious lines) in accordance with a national plan. As at publication, this had not yet eventuated.

2.23 The head of state is the President. There is a unicameral parliament, the National Assembly, made up of 128 deputies, with equal representation for Muslims and Christians. National Assembly deputies are elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms. The President is elected by the National Assembly for a six-year term. The Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister are appointed by the President in consultation with the National Assembly. The Council of Ministers is the equivalent of Cabinet within the executive branch of the Lebanese Government and is chaired by the Prime Minister. The country is divided into governorates, analogous to states. Some communities have municipal government or a village or town council of elders.

2.24 On 31 October 2022, President Michael Aoun completed his presidential term. As at publication, the country's parliamentarians, divided along sectarian lines, had failed to elect Aoun's successor, despite 10 rounds of voting (as at January 2023).

2.25 The most recent parliamentary election was held in May 2022. Former Prime Minister Najib Mikati was reappointed as Prime Minister-designate in June 2022 and tasked to form a Cabinet, which required the President's approval. This did not occur before the end of President Aoun's term, and as at publication, Lebanon remains under a caretaker government.

2.26 Formal and informal alliances within Lebanese politics often exist across the religious divide. Two major blocs have dominated Lebanese politics for nearly two decades. The March 8 Alliance is a coalition whose two leading parties are Shi'a Muslim (Hezbollah) and Christian (Free Patriotic Movement). They are opposed by the March 14 Alliance, a group dominated by Sunni Muslim and Maronite Christian parties. However, in the past year, the importance of these coalitions has lessened, partly due to an increase in the number of independents and 'Change' MPs (a bloc of 13 MPs voted into parliament in May 2022).

2.27 The August 2020 port explosion has had lasting social and political consequences. Many Lebanese saw the apparent negligence in allowing the unsafe storage of massive amounts of dangerous chemicals as symptomatic of Lebanon's corrupt and fractious political settlement. Immediately after the blast, the government promised that those responsible would be swiftly brought to justice, however the investigation remains stalled. An investigation led by judge Tarek Bitar into alleged complicity by politicians and senior officials has been met by criticism and obstruction by sections of Lebanon's elite. In-country sources told DFAT that the blast and its consequences had been the 'last straw' for many Lebanese already dealing with widespread corruption and an economic crisis, causing them to lose hope of prospects for reform and increasing their appetite for migration. The blast, destroying one of Lebanon's two major ports (the other being Tripoli), exacerbated the country's economic crisis by weakening supply chains at a time of turbulence in global wheat markets. Storage capacity for wheat, a staple food in Lebanon, has been greatly diminished while wheat prices have skyrocketed and supplies from Ukraine – traditionally a major source for Lebanon – have reduced due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

2.28 Lebanon has signed, ratified or acceded to most of the major international human rights instruments, including: the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and its Optional Protocol; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (and its Optional Protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography); and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It has not signed or ratified: the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR aiming for the abolition of the death penalty; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, or the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming for the abolition of the death penalty.

2.29 Chapter Two of the Constitution of Lebanon guarantees many fundamental rights, including to equality (Article 7), individual liberty (Article 8), freedom of conscience and religion (Article 8), and freedoms of expression, the press, assembly and association (Article 13).

National Human Rights Institution

2.30 Parliament established a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in October 2016, which incorporated a National Prevention Mechanism against Torture. On 21 May 2018, the Lebanese Government

formally appointed the NHRC's 10 members, although it is unclear whether the appointments were published in the official government gazette (which formalises appointments). The NHRC can review laws, decrees and administrative decisions based on complaints, but the institute does not have a budget and does not undertake any work, according to the 2022 US Department of State Human Rights Report. The Lebanese body is not presently a member of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and thus has no accreditation.

SECURITY SITUATION

2.31 Lebanon's security situation is uncertain due to conflict in neighbouring Syria, tensions between Hezbollah (which is part of the Lebanese Government) and Israel, terrorist threats from internal and external actors, and, occasionally, communal violence.

2.32 A maritime border dispute with Israel has been a recent source of tensions, with Hezbollah drones shot down by Israeli forces in July 2022, however tensions eased following a United States-brokered maritime border demarcation deal signed separately by Lebanon and Israel on 27 October 2022.

2.33 Terrorist cells have been uncovered by security forces in Lebanon in recent years, including in September 2021 and February 2022. In February 2022, international media reported that 48 young men left Tripoli to join ISIS in Iraq. The security forces operate checkpoints throughout the country that target security threats and are used to control crime. However, the state's capacity to control security threats is negatively impacted by the ongoing economic crisis (see [State Protection](#)). For example, in June 2021 international media reported that soldiers were 'suffering and hungry'. Like other members of the public sector, the security forces are paid in Lebanese Pounds which, following that currency's collapse, no longer provides a living wage. However, LAF wages are currently being supplemented by Qatar (and may be further supplemented by the US).

2.34 Relatively low-level and localised violence occurs between communal groups (such as between Alawites and Sunnis in Tripoli, or Shi'a Hezbollah and Sunni or Christian groups in Beirut). In October 2021, for example, supporters of Shi'a organisations Hezbollah and Amal protested in a Beirut Christian neighbourhood, sparking a deadly battle with gunmen suspected to be from the (Maronite) Lebanese Forces. In-country sources report regular armed clashes in Tripoli between rival families and crime gangs. However, in-country sources also reported in December 2022 that the situation in Tripoli has improved following a targeted recruitment campaign designed to broaden LAF's representation and improve local confidence in the LAF; reportedly, 1000 young men have recently been recruited from Tripoli and Akkar which has helped calm the situation in Tripoli.

2.35 UN Sources report that intercommunal tensions between Lebanese and Syrians are rising as the economic crisis continues. While there are presently few violent clashes between communities, in July 2022 UN sources reported that the situation was worsening, with an increase of vigilantism. In a 2019 survey by the UN, only 4 per cent of Lebanese saw relations with Syrian refugees as negative; in 2022, that number rose to 51 per cent. However, sources expressed the view that the situation would not break into open violence without 'political instigation'.

2.36 For security in Palestinian refugee camps, see [Palestinians](#).

3. REFUGEE CONVENTION CLAIMS

RACE/NATIONALITY

3.1 Lebanon's population is overwhelmingly ethnic Arab (95 per cent) across religious communities (although some within the Christian population reportedly identify as Phoenician). Approximately 4 per cent of the population are ethnically Armenian, with the remainder consisting of small communities from a range of ethnic backgrounds. DFAT is not aware of any reports of systematic discrimination or violence perpetrated against any groups with Lebanese citizenship on the basis of race or nationality.

Syrians

3.2 Since 2011, when the Syrian civil war began, some 1.5 million Syrians have sought refuge in Lebanon. This is a significant number, considering there are only around 5 million Lebanese citizens, which causes an enormous strain on the Lebanese state and its people. After 2015, the Lebanese Government stopped registering Syrians as refugees. Only Syrian refugees with a legal right of residency (an '*iqama*') are able to move about Lebanon freely. The proportion of Syrian refugees with the right of residency has decreased, year on year. In 2019, only 22 per cent had legal residency, which decreased to 16 per cent in 2021. Syrian refugees can lose the right of residency, for example, if they briefly return to Syria to collect paperwork. A Syrian refugee without residency who is picked up by authorities may face legal difficulties. Local media sources report that many Syrian refugees rely on motorcycles for transport, but only Syrians with an *iqama* may legally register a motorcycle. Syrians caught by the Internal Security Forces (ISF) riding an unregistered vehicle will typically lose that vehicle.

3.3 According to the UNHCR, an estimated 90 per cent of Syrian refugee households live in extreme poverty, up from 55 per cent in early 2019. Unlike the situation with [Palestinian refugees](#), there are no formal refugee camps for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. As a result, Syrians are scattered throughout urban and rural communities and locations, often sharing basic lodgings with other families in overcrowded conditions. Most refugee households are unable to power electric appliances such as fridges, washing machines, and water heaters, which becomes especially challenging during the summer months. Syrian refugees can access healthcare through UNHCR-subsidised hospital services, however will typically face a 25 per cent co-payment which, together with the transport costs of getting to hospital, is a barrier to accessing services.

3.4 Refugees have limited work rights. They may only legally work in a few sectors: cleaning, garbage collection, construction and agriculture. Many Syrians also work in the informal sector, where they are often subject to exploitation. Sources report that many Syrian refugees lost their jobs in the COVID-19 pandemic and have not been able to find work since. Because of difficult economic conditions, many Syrian children work, with children as young as six working on farms and streets in harsh conditions, and unable to attend school.

3.5 In-country sources note there has been a marked increase in anti-refugee rhetoric by Lebanese politicians since mid-2022, partly driven by the ongoing economic crisis. Political messaging has fed wider ill-feeling and discrimination against Syrians and inflamed tensions. There are many widely held (but incorrect)

beliefs among Lebanese that Syrians are ‘exploiting’ their position as refugees: being paid in US dollars, travelling back and forth between Lebanon and Syria at will, and even ‘buying up all the bread’. As a result, Syrian communities face an increasingly difficult time, with many facing individual or collective threats of eviction from their Lebanese hosts and existing under some form of curfew in over 80 per cent of Lebanese municipalities.

3.6 Some Lebanese people fear that 1.5 million Syrian refugees may follow the trajectory of Palestinian refugees and never return to their country of origin. On 4 July 2022, Lebanon’s Minister for the Displaced, Issam Charafeddine, announced ambitious plans to return 15,000 Syrian refugees to Syria each month. Returns on that scale, and on a set monthly timeframe, would almost certainly be involuntary, and are opposed by the UNHCR and the international community. In-country sources suggest the Lebanese Government lacks the capacity to operationalise such a plan without international support. On 26 October 2022, the Lebanese Government resumed its plan for facilitated voluntary refugee returns to Syria, under the coordination of General Security. As at May 2023, only two return operations are known to DFAT, in October and November 2022; in the October operation, 751 refugees registered their interest in returning, but only 511 refugees ultimately did return, while in the November operation, 353 individuals registered their interest in returning but only 172 returned. DFAT is unaware of any further return operations as at the time of publication. The facilitated returns process was established in 2018, however paused in 2020 due to COVID-19-related travel restrictions.

3.7 DFAT assesses that Syrian refugees in Lebanon face a high risk of official and societal discrimination and are frequently unable to access the public services and employment opportunities required to secure a livelihood for themselves and their families.

Palestinians

3.8 The Palestinian community in Lebanon is divided into several different categories. The first is Palestinians resident in Lebanon (PRL), whose normal place of residence during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 was Palestine, and who lost both home and livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. The descendants of Palestinian refugee males, including legally adopted children, are also included in this category. The second category is Palestinians resident in Syria (PRS), comprising Palestinian refugees who fled Syria due to the Syrian civil war. This group comprises an estimated 32,000 people. The third category is a group of between 3,000 to 5,000 Palestinians who arrived in Lebanon with the Palestine Liberation Organization after its defeat in the Black September conflict in Jordan. This group is effectively stateless: they are not registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); they are spread across the country; and they do not have any designated advocates. This section of the report focuses on PRLs. Even later arrivals, such as PRSs who came after 2016, cannot get residency in Lebanon at all.

3.9 The number of PRLs remaining in Lebanon is unclear and subject to dispute. Some 450,000 Palestinians are registered with UNRWA in Lebanon. However, UN sources report that they only provide services to around 180,000 Palestinians. The difference in numbers is attributed to large-scale emigration of Palestinians from Lebanon, chiefly to Europe and the Gulf States. UNRWA does not keep track of Palestinians who leave the country and does not conduct head counts of those within the camps.

3.10 Between half and two-thirds of PRLs reside in 12 officially designated camps and 156 informal settlements dispersed throughout Lebanon. These camps are overcrowded, and the people living in them suffer from poverty and decaying infrastructure. Under arrangements with the Lebanese Government, Palestinian authorities have responsibility for the camps, including security, and administration is left to competing Palestinian political factions. Violent conflict between factions is common in some camps. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) are not permitted to enter the camps.

3.11 For political reasons, both Lebanese authorities and the PRLs themselves have long opposed moves to naturalise PRLs. Accordingly, despite their longstanding presence in Lebanon, PRLs remain excluded from key aspects of social, political, and economic life. While free to move throughout the country, PRLs often face entry and exit controls to the camps, which authorities often tighten due to security concerns. They are prohibited from legally acquiring, transferring, or inheriting property, and cannot bring building materials into camps to repair their homes. PRLs are unable to access Lebanese public education, health or social services, and are generally dependent on UNRWA and NGOs for most aspects of their lives.

3.12 PRLs are prohibited from working in the Lebanese public sector and in thirty-six specified professions, including medicine, law and engineering; and skilled and semi-skilled jobs such as fishery and public transportation (although they are free to pursue these professions inside the camps). PRLs are permitted to work formally in other professions, however, require an annual work permit and an employment contract to do so. While free of charge, obtaining a work permit from the Ministry of Labour involves a lengthy administrative process, and often depends on the goodwill of the employer. Very few PRLs have either a work permit or an employment contract.

3.13 These work restrictions have contributed to a low PRL participation rate in the formal economy. Over 85 per cent of the PRL workforce works in the informal sector, with most in menial, low-paying jobs concentrated in commerce and construction, or in occupations such as agricultural labourers, sales, service workers, and cleaners. Informal labour renders PRLs more vulnerable to exploitative working conditions: most receive no health coverage, paid holidays, or sick leave, and do not have any pension entitlements. In general, PRLs do not receive the same remuneration as their Lebanese counterparts for equivalent work. The Syrian conflict and the economic crisis have significantly increased competition for jobs in the informal sector, which has disproportionately affected PRLs. In 2022, the UN estimated the poverty level among PRLs to be 86 per cent. Furthermore, the recent presence of large numbers of Syrian refugees has led some Lebanese to become simultaneously less tolerant towards the long-standing Palestinian refugee community.

3.14 DFAT assesses that PRLs face a high risk of official and societal discrimination as they are unable to access public services and employment opportunities available to Lebanese and foreigners of other nationalities, and are unable to participate fully in social, political, and economic life.

RELIGION

3.15 Lebanon officially recognises 18 religious groups. These include four Muslim groups (Shi'a, Sunni, Alawites, and Ismailis); 12 Christian groups (Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, Nestorian Assyrians, Chaldeans, Copts, Latin [Roman] Catholics, and Evangelicals); Druze (a religion that combines traditional Islamic teachings with certain philosophical ideas and mystic practices); and Jews. Unrecognised groups include Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Ahmadis, Zoroastrians, Jehovah's Witnesses and several other Protestant groups, including Mormons. Human rights groups report that unrecognised religious groups can legally own property, and are able to assemble for worship and perform their religious rites freely.

3.16 Jehovah's Witnesses have been present in Lebanon since the 1920s though it is difficult to estimate their number, due to the underground nature of their faith. Many Jehovah's Witnesses reportedly disguise themselves as 'Protestants'. In-country sources told DFAT that recognised Christian churches tend to be antagonistic towards Jehovah's Witnesses (and also towards Protestant churches, such as Baptists, Pentecostals, Quakers and others). Such antagonism has focused on proselytising and conversion, reportedly because it has implications for church revenue generation. In-country sources told DFAT this hostility has reduced in recent years.

3.17 There are an estimated 10,000 or fewer Baha'is living in the community, unrecognised by law and unknown to most ordinary Lebanese. According to sources, Baha'is face social exclusion but not, in recent years, physical abuse. Such social exclusion might include refusal of accommodation, if a prospective landlord recognises a person as Baha'i, or exclusion from private education.

3.18 Lebanon has not conducted a census since 1932, therefore no current official statistics are available on the country's religious communities. In-country sources suggest this lack of data is a deliberate attempt to protect the political status quo from the consequences of demographic change. Unofficial estimates of the size of religious communities vary, but interlocutors agree that the combined Muslim communities now outnumber the combined Christian communities. Estimates endorsed by the US Department of State are that 69.3 per cent of the citizen population is Muslim (31.2 per cent Sunni, 32 per cent Shi'a, and a small percentage are Alawites and Ismailis); 30.7 per cent of the population is Christian; and 5.5 per cent of the population is Druze. The remainder consists of small communities of other faiths. Within the Christian community, Maronite Catholics are the largest group (52.5 per cent), followed by Greek Orthodox (25 per cent), and other smaller Christian groups (including Greek Catholics (Melkites), Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, Assyrians, Chaldean Catholics, Copts, Protestants (including Presbyterians, Baptists, and Seventh-day Adventists), Roman (Latin) Catholics, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ)).

3.19 With the exception of Beirut, most cities do not contain communities from all major religions. Different religious groups tend to be concentrated in particular areas:

- Most Sunnis are concentrated in West Beirut, and the governorates of North Lebanon and South Lebanon. North Lebanon is majority Sunni with a substantial Christian population in the south and east. There is also a small Shi'a population in the north-east of the governorate, contiguous with the northern part of Beka'a governorate.
- The Shi'a community is concentrated in southern Lebanon, Beirut's southern suburbs, and the northern half of the Beka'a governorate. Beka'a governorate is approximately half Shi'a, with a substantial Christian population in the capital, Zahle, and smaller populations of Sunnis in the north-east and Druze in the south.
- Maronite Christians are concentrated in Mount Lebanon governorate, and in Beirut and its surrounds. Beirut governorate has substantial Christian, Sunni, and Shi'a populations. The city has both mixed suburbs and religiously-based enclaves.
- South Lebanon governorate and Nabatiyeh governorate are both majority Shi'a, but have a mixed population that includes Sunnis, Christians, and Druze.
- Large Druze communities are concentrated around Mount Hermon in Nabatiyeh governorate, and in the area known as 'Old Chouf' at the southern end of the Mount Lebanon ranges. Druze are also concentrated in Baabda and Aley (Mount Lebanon governorate), Hasbaya (Nabatiyeh governorate) and Rashaya (Beka'a governorate).
- The majority of Lebanon's small Alawite population resides in Tripoli and Akkar in the North governorate.

3.20 Unlike in most other Arab countries, Lebanese can legally change their religious affiliation, converting not only from Christianity to Islam, but also from Islam to Christianity. Conversions also take place between different Christian denominations and (more rarely) between followers of different branches of Islam. To convert to a different religion, a local senior official of the religious group the person wishes to join must approve the change, and the newly joined religious group must issue a document confirming the convert's new religion. The convert can then register their new religion with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM) Personal Status Directorate. The new religion is included thereafter on government-issued civil registration documents, along with mention of the original religion. Sources report that religious affiliation is no longer printed on National ID cards but is still recorded by the government on a person's Personal Status

Record (PSR) which governs access to a number of important services. ‘Secular’ is not available as a category; in-country sources report that those who have attempted to be listed as secular can have their sect left blank on a print-out of their PSR but their original sect affiliation will be unchanged in government records.

3.21 Mixed marriages between Christians and Muslims, or between those from different Christian denominations or schools of Islam, sometimes occur in Lebanon, resulting in some religious pluralism within family life, though not without tension. For example, a mixed couple may be ostracised by some members of the extended family. Children of mixed marriages officially take the father’s religion. DFAT is not aware of any reports to suggest that either converts or those involved in mixed marriages are subject to any official discrimination. In cases where converts or those involved in mixed marriages have experienced societal discrimination in the form of harassment or ostracism, this is most likely to be the result of specific localised factors (such as a family’s socioeconomic standing or level of social/religious conservatism) rather than being systemic in nature.

3.22 Human rights observers report that relationships between religious groups in Lebanon are generally peaceful. Interreligious dialogue between religious leaders and communities occurs. Religious leaders have regularly condemned extremism and violence perpetrated in the name of religion following terrorist attacks in the region against religious targets. Violent clashes with religious overtones have been less common in Lebanon in recent years. Where violence has occurred between communal groups (such as between Alawites and Sunnis in Tripoli, or Shi’a and Sunni or Christian groups in Beirut), it has generally been relatively low-level and localised in nature, with political rather than religious motivations (see [Security Situation](#)). Lebanese authorities are generally committed to preventing violence between religious communities.

3.23 DFAT assesses that members of recognised religious groups do not face official discrimination on religious grounds. Members of recognised religious groups who reside in areas where they are a minority may face low-level societal discrimination, however this is unlikely to include violence. Members of unrecognised religious groups may also face low- to medium-level societal discrimination and harassment. Such discrimination is unlikely to include violence, as members of unrecognised religious groups are typically protected to some degree by their relative anonymity.

Personal Status Laws

3.24 In Lebanon, issues of personal status – such as marriage, divorce, custody of children, or inheritance – are addressed in religious courts and are based on religious laws, which are independent of, but recognised by, the state. Lebanon does not formally allow civil marriage or divorce. There is no explicit civil law option for personal status matters. However, media sources report that civil marriage has occurred in Lebanon between two people who had their sects removed from their ID cards but that such marriages are exceedingly rare and face considerable bureaucratic difficulties (such as being denied ID documents).

3.25 While all 18 officially recognised religious denominations are empowered to apply their own laws and maintain their own judicial systems in relation to personal status matters, not all do: international observers report that Lebanon has 15 separate personal status law codes. There is limited government oversight over religious courts. Unrecognised religious groups cannot perform legally recognised marriage or divorce proceedings, and do not have standing to determine inheritance issues. They can, however, legally own property. Human rights observers have reported that some members of unregistered religious groups, including Baha’i and unrecognised Protestant denominations, list themselves as belonging to recognised religious groups in government records in order to ensure their marriage and other personal status documents remain valid.

3.26 Lebanese who do not wish to undergo a religious marriage sometimes choose a civil marriage ceremony abroad (particularly in nearby Cyprus) and are able to register their marriage on return to Lebanon.

Such couples are issued with a ‘family civil certificate’, rather than with any proof of marriage. Couples who undertake civil marriages abroad (and even online from within Lebanon) are typically governed by the laws of the jurisdiction where the marriage took place.

3.27 Human rights groups have long criticised the religious-based personal status laws as discriminatory towards women and have called for the introduction of an optional civil code (see also [Women](#)). None of the personal status codes recognise a wife’s economic and non-economic contributions to a marriage, including the value of unpaid labour or the concept of marital property. In addition, cultural, religious, and traditional expectations and norms can undermine a woman’s economic independence and contribute to her financial dependence on her husband.

3.28 Under the Shi’a, Sunni, and Druze personal status laws, men can demand a divorce at any time, unilaterally, and without cause, while a woman’s ability to access divorce is limited, and often at great cost and after lengthy court proceedings. In principle, these laws allow women to have an explicit clause inserted into the marriage contract stating that husbands and wives have an equal right to unilateral divorce. However, DFAT cannot confirm the degree to which this right is exercised. While Christian men can convert to Islam and remarry without divorcing – Muslim men are legally allowed up to four wives – a Christian woman may not enter a new marriage without terminating her first marriage. Many Lebanese women from various religious backgrounds do not approach religious courts for a divorce, either because they cannot afford the costs of court proceedings, or because they fear losing primary care responsibility for their children. The personal status codes vary regarding children’s rights, including on custody issues. Religious courts do not recognise joint custody of children – they will usually grant custody to the woman until the children reach a certain age, after which time the father typically gets custody. The various religious personal status laws typically include the presumption that fathers should be given custody of children above the age of approximately 8, so that it is difficult for a woman to get custody of older children which can be a significant disincentive to divorce.

3.29 Human rights observers have also expressed concern that some of the personal status codes allow for the marriage of girls under the age of 15. In-country sources report that very early marriage does occur, including as a precursor to trafficking (some girls are married to foreigners who remove them from the country). Lebanon is party to a number of international conventions that explicitly prohibit or have been interpreted to prohibit child marriage, including CEDAW and CRC (see [Human Rights Framework](#)).

3.30 DFAT assesses there is a moderate risk of official discrimination against members of unrecognised religious groups and non-religious individuals in that personal status laws restrict access to marriage, divorce, or inheritance available to other Lebanese. DFAT assesses that the absence of civil law options for personal status matters has a particularly negative impact on women from all religious backgrounds, which represents a moderate risk of official discrimination and societal harassment against them (see also [Women](#)).

Blasphemy/Defamation of Religion

3.31 The Lebanese Criminal Code provides for a maximum penalty of one year’s imprisonment for blaspheming or otherwise insulting a religion, along with laws against defamation and contempt for religion which stipulate a maximum prison term of three years. While uncommon, authorities and individuals occasionally bring lawsuits against individuals in relation to these offences. These offences also cover insulting religious leaders. According to the NGO Freethought Lebanon, between 2018 and 2020 there were ‘over 16 reported cases of individuals prosecuted for blasphemy or provoking “confessional strife.”’ DFAT is not aware of any prosecutions resulting in a conviction. However, in 2019, the popular rock band Mashrou’ Leila was charged with insulting religious rituals and inciting sectarian tensions; following a six-hour interrogation, the band pledged to remove ‘offensive’ language from their Facebook page and issued a public apology.

POLITICAL OPINION (ACTUAL OR IMPUTED)

3.32 Lebanon has a diverse political landscape with a wide range of views reflected in its parliament and at other levels of government and society. While its political system ensures representation for its many sectarian communities, it effectively elevates communities over individuals, and communal leaders over state institutions. NGO Freedom House noted this system ‘impedes the rise of cross-communal or civic parties’. Human rights observers have reported that political interference, including by powerful non-state actors, undermines the rule of law. In its 2021 Democracy Index, the Economist Intelligence Unit classified Lebanon as an authoritarian state, for the first time, due to sharp deteriorations in political freedoms. In-country sources told DFAT Lebanon is not an authoritarian state but, rather, one that allows more powerful individuals to use the law to their advantage.

3.33 Authorities have tended to respect the constitutionally-guaranteed freedom of assembly, although protesters are required to apply for a permit ahead of demonstrations. However, authorities responded harshly to the protest movement that began in October 2019, sparked by the so-called ‘WhatsApp tax’ which sought to raise revenue by taxing calls on the popular messaging service. Those protests led to the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri and his cabinet on 26 October 2019. According to Amnesty International’s 2020/21 Lebanon Report, between 17 October 2019 and 15 March 2020, security forces arbitrarily arrested 967 peaceful protesters, often without a warrant, and subjected them to severe beatings and blindfolding, in addition to torture and other ill-treatment in custody.

3.34 As Lebanon’s political and economic crisis has continued, some protests have been met with violence and harassment. Following the Beirut port explosion in August 2020, thousands of protesters filled Martyrs’ Square in Beirut to call for accountability for those responsible for the blast. Amnesty International’s 2020/21 Lebanon Report stated that the army and security forces used force against unarmed protesters, recklessly firing tear gas, rubber bullets and pellets, and injuring more than 230 people. According to the US Department of State 2021 human rights report on Lebanon, members of the Parliamentary Police Force (see [State Protection](#)) were recorded beating protesters in 2020, ‘with no known repercussions’.

Critics of Hezbollah

3.35 Hezbollah is a prominent Lebanese Shi’a organisation comprising political and social elements, as well as a military wing. Hezbollah is listed as a terrorist organisation by a number of nations, including Australia. While its primary support base is overwhelmingly in the Shi’a community, Hezbollah has a strong national presence (though its bloc lost its majority in the 2022 parliamentary elections). Unlike the majority of other armed groups, Hezbollah did not disarm following the 1989 Taef Accord. It maintains an armed wing with military strength believed to exceed that of the Lebanese Armed Forces (see [Lebanese Armed Forces \(LAF\)](#)). Supported by Iran, the organisation draws much of its popular support from its opposition to Israel: Hezbollah and Israel fought a month-long war in Lebanon in 2006 (see [Recent History](#)). Hezbollah runs its own economic, financial, and social services institutions; and has its own judicial and internal security structures, including detention centres (see [Detention and Prison](#)). It is a powerful player in Lebanon’s economy, politics, and media.

3.36 Hezbollah exercises effective control over parts of Lebanese territory, particularly in South Lebanon, southern Beirut, and parts of the Beka’a Valley: interlocutors have reported that, in these areas, Hezbollah’s influence and control exceeds that of the Lebanese state. According to in-country sources, Hezbollah works to prevent the emergence of sources of power within the Shi’a community outside of the Hezbollah-Amal duopoly, which might represent a threat to its control. In addition to political activists, perceived adversaries include journalists seeking to report on ‘red line’ topics, including: Hezbollah’s weapons; Hezbollah’s relationship with security authorities; its role in politically-motivated assassinations; and its role in the Syrian civil war (see also [Media](#)). In-country sources report that Hezbollah is particularly attuned to and oppressive

of critics within the Shi'a community, its support base. Hezbollah allows adherents of non-Shi'a religions to worship freely in the areas under its control.

3.37 According to the US Department of State, Hezbollah uses various methods to obtain information regarding its perceived adversaries, including informer networks and telephone monitoring. Independent NGOs working in Hezbollah-controlled areas have reported harassment and intimidation, including social, political, and financial pressures. According to in-country sources, Hezbollah may first subject critics to societal pressure or persuasion, such as accusations on social media. The individual may subsequently be socially marginalised by being excluded from Hezbollah-provided services, including health and education, or economically marginalised, such as by having their business 'blacklisted'. Hezbollah activists will only revert to direct threats, including of violence, if they feel their power is genuinely threatened.

3.38 DFAT is aware of cases of violence and threats against Shi'a critics of Hezbollah (non-Shi'a criticism of Hizballah is tolerated and criticism by non-Shi'a journalists continues). Recent incidents include:

- The apparent assassination of Lokman Slim, a prominent Shi'a political activist and vocal Hezbollah critic, on 4 February 2021, in Southern Lebanon. As at publication, no one had been held accountable for his murder.
- Threats by members of Hezbollah through social media against their opponents in the 2022 parliamentary election. International media reports Hezbollah has substantial 'electronic armies' who target critics but most especially target female Shi'a journalists.

3.39 DFAT understands that the ability of an individual within the Shi'a community to criticise Hezbollah depends to a large degree on the extent of the individual's connections (*wasta*) with powerful or influential people. DFAT assesses that those within the Shi'a community without *wasta* who criticise Hezbollah face a high risk of societal discrimination, harassment and violence by state or non-state forces.

GROUPS OF INTEREST

Civil Society Activists

3.40 According to the US Department of State, no prior authorisation is required to form an association, however organisers must notify the MoIM to obtain legal recognition, and the ministry must verify that the organisation respects 'public order, public morals, and state security.' In some cases, the ministry has sent an NGO's notification papers to the security forces to initiate enquiries about an organisation's founding members. Organisations 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 organisation.

3.41 According to the 2022 US Department of State Human Rights Report, International and domestic observers report that civil society associations and NGOs focusing on human rights are generally able to conduct their activities: a number of domestic and international organisations investigate and regularly publish their findings on human rights cases. Some exceptions apply, however. Associations working on women's issues have reported they often receive telephone calls threatening violence. While some NGOs advocate for LGBTI rights, they generally keep a low profile in order to avoid negative attention such as intimidation against their employees and clients, and vandalism of their facilities. For example, in September 2022, according to international media reports, the LGBTI NGO Helem postponed a planned protest due to death threats and calls for counter-demonstrations. (See [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#).)

3.42 While civil society activists are generally able to criticise the government and security apparatus, in some cases this has not been permitted. According to Freedom House, NGOs sometimes face bureaucratic obstruction or intimidation by security services; groups that focus on Syria-related matters or are led and staffed by Syrian refugees are especially prone to scrutiny and interference. In July 2020, a coalition of 14 domestic and international NGOs formed the Coalition to Defend Freedom of Expression in Lebanon, to oppose the Lebanese authorities' 'attempts to stifle free speech and opinion in the country'. As discussed in Critics of Hezbollah, NGOs working in Hezbollah-controlled areas have reported being harassed and intimidated.

3.43 DFAT assesses that civil society activists face a low risk of official discrimination in the form of burdensome and inconsistently applied restrictions that affect their ability to carry out their activities. Activists working on sensitive human rights issues (including, but not limited to, women's issues, LGBTI issues, or issues involving the security forces), or those attempting to conduct activities in Hezbollah-controlled areas, face a moderate risk of discrimination and harassment, which may include the risk of physical assault.

Media

3.44 Lebanon's media scene is developed, lively, and diverse, and reflects the country's pluralism. Lebanon was the first Arab country to permit private radio and television stations, and it is a regional media hub. Almost all television and radio stations are privately-owned, and many are affiliated with political groups. Reporters without Borders ranked Lebanon as the 119 least free media environment, out of 180 countries in 2022, representing a significant decline in recent years.

3.45 The *Publications Law* (1962) regulates the print media and holds journalists responsible for: erroneous or false news; threats or blackmail; insult, defamation, and contempt; causing prejudice to the Lebanese President's dignity; insulting the President or the president of a foreign country; instigation to commit a crime through a publication; and sectarian provocation.

3.46 To broadcast direct and indirect political news and programs, media outlets must receive a license from the Council of Ministers, based on a recommendation by the Minister of Information. According to the US Department of State, the law governing audio-visual media bans live broadcasts of unauthorised political gatherings and certain religious events, and prohibits the 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'. Authorities from any of the officially recognised religious groups may request that the General Security ban any published material they find offensive. Such cases are prosecuted in the Publications Court, along with other breaches of media law. In 2022, international media reported that 45 complaints for media violations registered since the last election in 2018 by Lebanon's Supervisory Commission for Elections were still pending before the Publications Court. However, a number of cases against journalists and media outlets have been brought in other courts, including military courts.

3.47 In 2022, Human Rights Watch reported international observers had expressed concern about an increase in judicial proceedings against media outlets critical of senior political figures, political parties, well-connected individuals, or the security forces. The appeals process is often drawn out and highly politicised. In practice, DFAT understands most accused individuals are released quickly, or cases are dropped due to public or political pressure, though typically any offending content must be deleted. Some prominent recent cases against the media or media figures include:

- On 26 November 2021, the Permanent Military Court in Beirut sentenced Radwan Mortada, a reporter for the local daily *Al-Akhbar* and the news website *The Cradle*, to 13 months' imprisonment for allegedly insulting the military. The charges stemmed from an interview Mortada gave to the local

broadcaster *Al-Jadeed*, in which he criticised Lebanese authorities' handling of the Beirut port explosion and criticised the army for failing to prevent it.

- The Office of Cybercrime charged comedian Shaden Fakih in May 2021 in a military court following a complaint by the ISF about a comedic call she made to its hotline during the COVID-19 lockdown. Fakih was charged with 'mockery of the security forces' and tried by the military court on 24 June 2022. She was fined LBP1,800,000, the maximum possible for this offence.

3.48 Journalists occasionally face intimidation, harassment, and political interference, leading some journalists to practise self-censorship. Political tensions have reportedly led some media outlets to remove their branding and logos before entering certain 'politically classified' areas. Media outlets seeking to report in areas under Hezbollah control must obtain special permission to do so from Hezbollah (see also [Critics of Hezbollah](#)).

3.49 Journalists in Lebanon continue to face violence. According to Reporters without Borders, there were 28 acts of violence or serious threats against journalists between October 2019 and February 2022. These include the apparent assassination of journalist and political activist Lokman Slim in February 2021 (see [Critics of Hezbollah](#)); and the murder of photographer Joseph Bejjani in December 2020.

3.50 The World Bank reported that in 2020, the latest year for which data is available, 84 per cent of Lebanese used the internet. Lebanese internet users have some of the slowest internet speeds in the world, particularly in rural areas. The telecommunications industry is largely government-owned and is tightly regulated. According to Freedom House, since 2019 Lebanon has 'started to block more content, often failing to provide transparency about its decisions and inadvertently blocking additional content. Previously blocked content was limited to sites related to gambling, pornography, and Israel, but the government has recently started to block content outside of those parameters.' Websites are blocked by court order. Although website owners are not notified that their sites have been blocked, they are required to appeal the blocking within 48 hours to have it overturned.

3.51 While individuals are rarely sentenced to prison for online speech, several social media users have been charged under defamation and libel laws. In 2021, Freedom House reported violence in retaliation for online speech is uncommon, but bloggers and social media users operate in a politically fraught context (see also [Critics of Hezbollah](#)). According to Amnesty International, in June 2020, the State Prosecutor ordered Lebanon's Central Criminal Investigation Bureau to investigate and identify people who posted on social media statements or photoshopped images considered offensive to the President, and to prosecute them for defamation, slander, libel, insult and for making those posts public. DFAT is not aware of any convictions.

3.52 DFAT assesses that both journalists and social media users who criticise senior political figures, political parties, well-connected individuals, or the security forces face a moderate risk of official discrimination in the form of detention and prosecution on defamation charges. They also face a moderate risk of intimidation, harassment, and possible violence from both security forces and groups connected to political parties.

Women

3.53 Lebanon acceded to CEDAW in 1997 but maintains reservations on several articles relating to personal status issues. Human Rights Watch reports that women continue to face discrimination under 15 distinct religion-based personal status laws. Discrimination in this fashion includes inequality in access to divorce, child custody, inheritance, and property rights.

3.54 No legal restrictions limit women's engagement in income-generating activities. The law does not distinguish between women and men in employment, and it provides for equal pay for women and men. Since 2014, Lebanese women have had access to 10 weeks' maternity leave at full pay in both the public and private

sectors. In practice, however, women face considerable societal obstacles to gaining employment. Men sometimes exercise control over female relatives, including restricting their activities outside the home. Despite legal provisions providing for equal pay for similar work for men and women, the World Economic Forum (WEF's) 2022 Global Gender Report indicated a considerable difference between the income earned by men and women in Lebanon. Women's economic participation remains low: the WEF report found that only 20.75 per cent of eligible women participated in the labour force (compared with 64.33 per cent of men). Overall, the report ranked Lebanon 119rd out of 146 countries worldwide in terms of economic participation and opportunity for women. Female political participation is also low.

3.55 The *Law on Protection of Women and Family Members from Domestic Violence* (2014) (the domestic violence law) 'established important protection measures and related policing and court reforms', according to Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch labelled the law, which includes a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison for battery, 'good, but incomplete'. The law does not criminalise marital rape, and personal laws administered by religious courts discriminate against women in matters like divorce and child custody. The domestic violence law was further amended in 2020, to provide for protection for women against ex-spouses (as well as against current spouses). The amended law also allows a judge to include children up to age 13 in the protection decision filed by a mother, so that if a mother decides to flee the house she can take her children, regardless of the status law her sect follows.

3.56 While sources report the law is being implemented to an extent, the intersection of civil rights with religious courts remains a challenge. Differing provisions on divorce, custody of children and property can make it difficult for women to leave abusive relationships. In-country sources report that many police still regard domestic violence as a family matter, with municipal police, in particular, reluctant to investigate. Women exposed to domestic violence may seek a protection order from the courts; in-country sources described this as 'difficult but doable' with courts being 'very responsive' during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even during the economic crisis and the substantial limitations placed upon the operation of the courts (including judicial strikes), the Extraordinary Measures Court has preserved the capacity to obtain protection orders even as other functions have suffered.

3.57 Women's NGOs report that there have been some improvements in protection of women by security forces. For example, the ISF now operates an emergency national hotline for women. The NGOs report that the state has only limited involvement in service provision (beyond policing) for protection of women threatened by domestic violence; however, the Ministry of Social Affairs runs some women's shelters, as do NGOs.

3.58 Rape is a crime punishable with a minimum sentence of five years' imprisonment, or seven years in the case of rape of a minor. The 2014 domestic violence law criminalises the use of threats and violence to claim a 'marital right to intercourse', although marital rape is not specifically criminalised. Human rights activists have expressed concern that the 2014 domestic violence law left open a loophole for cases concerning sex with children aged 15-17, and 'seducing' a virgin girl into having sex with the promise of marriage. These loopholes reportedly still exist as at publication.

3.59 In-country sources report that the marriage of girls, legal under various personal status laws, was sometimes used for the purposes of trafficking, with the girl typically removed from Lebanon by her foreign 'husband.' In-country sources reported increased trafficking and sexual exploitation of Lebanese women because of the effects of the economic crisis, alongside existing high-levels of trafficking of Syrian women. While a breakthrough prosecution of a trafficking ring occurred in 2016, there have been few since, according to the US Department of State.

3.60 Sexual harassment is a widespread problem, both in the workplace and in wider society. In December 2020, Lebanon's parliament passed a landmark law on sexual harassment. Under the law, perpetrators can be sentenced to up to 1 year in prison, or 4 years in certain contexts (such as harassing a subordinate). Maximum

penalties are reserved for harassment in the workplace, public institutions or educational facilities. However, in-country sources reported that the law is vague on what constitutes 'sexual harassment'. It is unknown at the time of publication if any prosecutions have occurred. Many women, especially prominent professional women such as journalists, face considerable online harassment and cyber-bullying (see also [Critics of Hezbollah](#)).

3.61 In-country sources confirm that so-called 'honour killings' of women (the murder of a woman or girl by male family members, due to the perpetrators' belief that the victim has brought dishonour or shame upon the family) occur in Lebanon but are not common, with very few such killings reportedly occurring in the last few years. However, killings of women, frequently by partners or family members (but not honour killings) are more common. In-country sources reported that eight femicides had occurred in the three months, prior to August 2022. These sources also told DFAT that Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) does not occur in Lebanon.

3.62 DFAT assesses that Lebanese women face a moderate risk of official discrimination as the lack of a civil code for personal status issues means that women from of all religions are forced to abide by personal status codes that discriminate against them. Women also face a moderate risk of official discrimination in that inadequate legislation, lack of enforcement, and long-standing traditional values and gender roles continue to restrict their full participation in the workforce and community, particularly for women from rural and socially conservative communities. DFAT further assesses that women in Lebanon face a moderate risk of family and sexual violence; this risk increases for members of vulnerable communities including those in rural areas, conservative religious groups and in Syrian refugee communities.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

3.63 Beirut is a relatively open environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex (LGBTI) individuals, who are able to maintain a degree of anonymity impossible in more conservative parts of Lebanon. Gay bars exist, along with specific support groups for LGBTI individuals, although these generally keep a low-profile in an effort to avoid negative attention (see also [Civil Society Activists](#)). Opposition to LGBTI issues and individuals, however, remains prevalent across Lebanese society, particularly among men. Some LGBTI individuals report being unable to access medical care on occasions as some doctors will refuse to see patients they believe to be LGBTI based on their appearance.

3.64 In-country sources report considerable societal discrimination and harassment of LGBTI individuals. LGBTI people can be ostracised, harassed, fired from work, and kicked out of housing. According to a survey of LGBTI people by the NGO, Legal Action Worldwide, in Lebanon, many had experienced discrimination (for example, 35 per cent had faced discrimination accessing housing, and 25 per cent had faced discrimination in the retail/hospitality sector), while only 10 per cent reported facing no discrimination. Forty five per cent of respondents said they had experienced physical violence 'very often'.

3.65 In 2022, the Soldiers of God, a right-wing Christian group, hung homophobic posters and harassed people on the street who they perceived to be gay or transgender. Transgender people are typically unable to find work because they are visibly trans or because they must show their ID cards, which record their birth sex. For this reason, many trans women engage in sex work, during which they are often abused by clients. In-country sources told DFAT that, in these circumstances, trans women are unable to protect themselves by calling the police, who are unsympathetic or liable to charge them for sex work. In-country sources also reported that, because lesbian sexual activity has been viewed as less clearly illegal by authorities, lesbians were in a comparatively better position than other members of the LGBTI community; reportedly they are typically not subject to the kind of physical harassment in the street as transwomen and effeminate men. However, lesbians remained subject to discrimination and cyber-bullying.

3.66 Article 534 of the Criminal Code states that ‘Any sexual intercourse contrary to the order of nature is punishable by up to one year in prison’. However, recent court cases have found that same-sex sexual activity does not fall foul of this provision. In-country sources report that they have no record of anyone in Lebanon being prosecuted under Article 534 since 2017. On 24 June 2022, Interior Minister Bassam al-Mawlawi sent a letter to the directorates of Internal Security and General Security instructing them to ban any gatherings aimed at ‘promoting sexual perversion’. The letter cited no legal basis but was followed by a wave of anti-LGBTI postings on social media. In-country sources report that the sending of the letter may have been tied to proposals to permit same-sex marriage, something which is resisted by conservatives for its own sake but also because same-sex marriage may open the door for civil heterosexual marriage, and thus undermine religious personal status laws.

3.67 While enforcement of Article 534 has varied throughout the country, human rights observers report that authorities have at times used it to crack down on visible and vulnerable groups, particularly transgender women and Syrian refugees. These crackdowns have generally occurred after religious groups have pressured police into taking action. Such targeting has generally involved arbitrary arrest. Human rights observers have reported cases of detained LGBTI individuals being subjected to physical abuse in some police stations, including being raped. Victims of such abuse are generally reluctant to make a formal complaint due to a fear of additional stigmatisation. A survey by an NGO in 2022 found that 80 per cent of LGBTI respondents said they had, on at least one occasion, not sought legal help following discrimination and/or abuse. According to the US Department of State 2022 human rights report on Lebanon, forced anal examinations by police of men suspected of same-sex sexual activity have been banned in Beirut police stations, but were carried out in Tripoli and other cities. In-country sources reported that doctors who perform such anal ‘virginity’ examinations could now lose their medical licences. In addition, the Lebanese psychiatrists association had banned its members from conducting ‘conversion therapy’. LGBTI advocates report cases in which police have ordered LGBTI individuals to unlock their mobile phones and have then summoned their contacts for questioning, most likely as a means of blackmail. In-country sources report that trans men who are detained have been held in male cells and been attacked and humiliated by other prisoners. Authorities have sometimes prevented LGBTI organisations from holding public events.

3.68 In-country sources suggest that many LGBTI individuals either do not openly identify as LGBTI, or keep a low profile in order to avoid societal and official discrimination and, potentially, violence. While in-country sources noted that individuals can move to other areas – particularly to Beirut – in order to seek safety, it was largely dependent on the individual’s financial ability to move from one area to another; and on the willingness of the receiving areas to accept them.

3.69 DFAT assesses that LGBTI individuals face a moderate risk of societal and official discrimination and violence. This risk is likely higher if the individual is visibly identifiable as LGBTI, particularly in the case of transgender women, or if they have other vulnerabilities (such as being poor, a refugee, or living in a socially conservative area). Beirut is a more permissive environment for LGBTI people than are other parts of the country, and LGBTI individuals can generally live openly there.

4. COMPLEMENTARY PROTECTION CLAIMS

ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE

Extrajudicial Killings

4.1 In 2021, the US Department of State reported that Islamic extremist groups had committed numerous unlawful killings in Lebanon. In 2022, Amnesty International and other human rights monitoring organizations reported that Syrian citizen Bashar Abdel Saud died after reportedly being tortured in a detention centre run by the DGSS. On 29 November 2022, the alleged perpetrators of Abdel Saud's death were referred to a military court for trial. DFAT is unaware of any other reports of recent extrajudicial killings within Lebanon.

Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

4.2 The majority of historical cases of enforced or involuntary disappearance occurred during the civil war or prior to Syria's 2005 withdrawal. Human Rights Watch estimates that 17,000 Lebanese were kidnapped or disappeared during the civil war, and that a number of Palestinians were kidnapped or disappeared prior to the withdrawal of Syrian forces. The families of those who disappeared during this time have criticised attempts to investigate such disappearances as incomplete and too narrowly focused.

4.3 In its May 2018 concluding observations on the third periodic report of Lebanon, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern about: the thousands of unresolved cases of disappeared and missing persons during the civil war and the absence of any prosecutions for such acts; and the absence of comprehensive legislation on disappeared and missing persons and of an independent national body mandated to search for such persons. The International Committee of the Red Cross reported that, in November 2018, the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared Person Law (Law 105) was promulgated and, in June 2020, the independent National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared was established to 'clarify the fate and whereabouts of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons'. However, the Law has reportedly not yet been fully implemented and the National Commission has not yet been fully operationalised: as at the time of publication, it lacks sustainable funding, has not been provided with a headquarters and members who have resigned since their initial appointment have not been replaced.

Deaths in Custody

4.4 In-country sources cited by the US Department of State in 2021 reported that custodial deaths in Lebanon are generally attributable to illness or environmental issues rather than negligence or ill-treatment. Overcrowding in prisons is a serious problem. In mid-2022, five prisoners died in two months in the Roumieh Prison for health reasons, according to authorities. In its concluding observations on the third periodic report of Lebanon in March 2018, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern that there had been 81 deaths

in prison between 2012 and 2016, and regretted the lack of information into investigations into these deaths, which the government had attributed to natural causes.

DEATH PENALTY

4.5 Lebanon has not signed the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR on the Abolition of the Death Penalty. The Criminal Code permits the use of the death penalty for 11 serious crimes, including murder, treason, espionage, and terrorism. These crimes do not include drug-related or sexual violence offences. Several of the crimes that are eligible for use of the death penalty are for offences not resulting in death. Executions are carried out by hanging for civilian crimes and by firing squad for sentences handed down by military courts. Observers report that death sentences require the approval of all three of the President, Prime Minister, and Justice Minister. The President has the power to grant clemency.

4.6 Lebanon has maintained a de facto moratorium on executions since 2010. The last executions took place in 2004. Judges continue to hand down death sentences: according to international observers, 82 people remained on death row as at August 2021.

TORTURE

4.7 Lebanon is a state party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Other Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol. Torture is a crime under the *Law Aiming to Punish Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (2017). The government denies the systematic use of torture, although authorities acknowledge violent abuse sometimes occurs during pretrial detention at police stations or military installations where officials interrogate suspects without an attorney present. Human rights organisations have continued to raise serious concerns regarding the abuse of detainees, alleging that the security services routinely resort to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment during interrogations. For example, in 2021 Amnesty International alleged that 26 Syrian refugees detained on terrorism allegations, including some children, were tortured. There had not, at the time of the Amnesty report, been any investigations into the alleged torture.

CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

Arbitrary Arrest and Detention

4.8 NGOs and civil society groups allege the government sometimes arbitrarily arrests and detains individuals, particularly protesters, refugees, and migrant workers. Typically, these detentions are for short periods and relate to administrative questions associated with the residency or work status of these populations, often lasting between several hours and one or more days. Authorities often fail to observe many provisions of the law, and government security forces as well as armed non-state actors such as Hezbollah continue the practice of extrajudicial arrest and detention, including incommunicado detention.

5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

STATE PROTECTION

5.1 The ability of authorities to provide state protection depends to a large degree on geographic area: several areas of Lebanon are not under the complete control of the state. Government forces are less able to enforce the law in areas where Hezbollah operates (southern suburbs of Beirut, parts of the Bekaa Valley and southern Lebanon), and they do not typically enter Palestinian refugee camps (see [Palestinians](#)). However, it is not possible to say State security agencies are unable, in all circumstances, to enforce the law in these areas. Civilian authorities maintain effective control over the armed forces and other security forces.

5.2 Lebanon's economic crisis has meant that members of the security forces have suffered the same slump in real income as have other civil servants, affecting their ability to support themselves and their families. Security forces have been 'struggling to manage the consequences of compounding crises, with LAF officers and soldiers needing to increase and intensify operations across Lebanon since 2019, despite a more limited resource environment and increasing desertions. According to military sources cited in international media, desertions from the LAF since 2019 may be as high as 5,000. In-country sources report that members of the security forces have been among those who attempted irregular migration from Lebanon.

5.3 Security forces in Lebanon are factionalised and often fail to coordinate effectively, sometimes competing openly and even clashing within and across units and services. Private security firms are reportedly on the rise in Lebanon, and are typically affiliated with powerful political figures, acting with some level of impunity. Sources suggest that some businesses do not find the police to be reliable in protecting them.

Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)

5.4 The LAF, comprising an army, air force, and navy, is responsible for territorial defence, maintaining internal stability and security, and undertaking relief operations in coordination with public and humanitarian institutions. The LAF reportedly consists of 96,000 active personnel and 20,000 reserve personnel. The LAF has traditionally been a non-sectarian organisation, respected by all faiths and normally above sectarian conflicts. Some in-country sources report that in incidents in 2021 in Tripoli and Baalbek, groups attacked the LAF, thereby breaking the traditional 'red line' (the notion that communal groups might fight each other but do not engage the LAF). However, more recent reports have suggested that a recruitment drive of young men in Tripoli by the LAF has strengthened its credibility.

5.5 International media sources report that the salary of a junior officer in the LAF in July 2021 was worth about 7.5 per cent of what it was a year earlier and that many soldiers had resorted to growing their own food due to supply limitations. The LAF is reportedly worried that soldiers will go absent without leave (AWOL) in order to support themselves and their families. DFAT has no information about recent punishment for being

AWOL. In-country sources report that end-of-service pensions, normally an incentive for long-term loyal service, are effectively worthless due to the currency devaluation and that some LAF are joining other Lebanese and Syrian refugees in exploring migration options, including irregular migration. In September 2022, retired servicemen clashed violently with security forces outside Parliament as a protest against their financial situation.

Internal Security Forces (ISF)

5.6 The ISF (also known as the 'darak') is Lebanon's police and security body, tasked with maintaining public order and countering terrorism. It has approximately 40,000 active personnel. While nominally a non-sectarian organisation, the ISF is headed by a Sunni, as part of Lebanon's confessional system. According to an academic researcher, each of Lebanon's major sects supports a portion of the ISF, which it guards intensely and seldom shares with other groups. International observers have reported concerns that the ISF has threatened and mistreated drug users, persons involved in prostitution, and LGBTI persons in their custody. The economic crisis has caused serious difficulties for the ISF and its personnel. Far fewer people have confidence in the ISF than the LAF, and many towns have created their own local patrols or neighbourhood watches to maintain law and order. The impact of the currency devaluation on ISF personnel has also been highly deleterious and led to desertions, with many ISF officers moonlighting in more lucrative roles. As a consequence, ISF command unofficially allows officers to serve only two to three days a week and to take an additional job. Some personnel are reportedly unable to reach their duty stations due to fuel shortages and the rise in transportation costs.

Municipal Police

5.7 The UNDP reports that Lebanon's Municipal Police, who answer to local mayors, are 'known to be the weakest link among Lebanon's security agencies, and to command little authority and respect. They are considered to play a minimal role in ensuring security in cities, towns or municipalities.' Municipal police are expected to ask for the support of the ISF 'in the event of any crime or any disturbance of the public security'. They have been hit especially hard by the economic crisis. Municipalities' sources of income are tax collection (which has been reduced significantly by the crisis), and central government funding (which, as of July 2022, had not been paid for two years). Sources report that, as at July 2022, most municipal police had not been paid for a year. Many municipalities have laid off police and sources report that their role has, to some degree, been replaced by vigilantism.

Judiciary

5.8 Courts in Lebanon contend with huge backlogs, and judicial procedures suffer from long delays. During the economic crisis, judges have joined other employees in striking for better pay and conditions. Since August 2022, 400 out of around 600 judges – some from the nation's highest courts – have suspended all judicial work, including for urgent judiciary matters. Before the economic crisis, a mid-level judge, paid in Lebanese pounds, received the equivalent of USD4,000 a month; that salary, as at January 2023, is equal to USD200. Media reports suggest that some women seeking protection orders from abusive partners have been unable to obtain them from the court system while a women's NGO described the courts as 'surprisingly responsive' on protection matters during the COVID pandemic.

5.9 International observers report that petty corruption is widespread in the judiciary. Bribes and irregular payments are often exchanged to obtain favourable judicial decisions, while the performance and

independence of the courts is often subject to political interference (see also [Corruption](#)). In its March 2018 report, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern about reports of political pressure exerted on the judiciary, particularly in the appointment of key prosecutors and investigating magistrates, and about allegations that politicians used their influence to protect supporters from prosecution. It regretted the lack of comprehensive information on the procedures and criteria for the selection, appointment, promotion, suspension, disciplining, and removal of judges. In-country sources report that this continues. In July 2022, attempts by an investigating judge to arrest the Lebanese Central Bank's Governor were stymied, with one judicial authority revoking the warrant issued by another, and security forces loyal to the Governor refusing to permit the arrest.

5.10 Article 20 of the Constitution guarantees the independence of the judiciary. The *Judicial Organisation Law* (1961) governs the judiciary's structure and function. The judiciary is divided into four main court systems: judicial, administrative, military (see [Military Courts](#)), and religious (see [Personal Status Laws](#)**Error! Reference source not found.**). Each has independently appointed judges and appellate courts. The judicial court system is composed of civil and criminal courts of general jurisdiction at first instances, courts of appeal, and the Court of Cassation. This body, also known as the Supreme Court, hears appeals from the lower courts, and adjudicates disputes between exceptional and ordinary courts (or between two types of exceptional courts). There are also specialised tribunals, such as the Judicial Council, which deals with cases of sensitive criminal offences of a political nature; and the Constitutional Council, established under the Taef Accord, which judges the constitutionality of laws and adjudicates election disputes but is not empowered to receive or adjudicate on individual petitions.

5.11 The rule against double jeopardy is respected under Lebanese law, under Article 27 of the Lebanese Criminal Code. The only exceptions to this are crimes involving national security and specific types of counterfeiting and forgery. Lebanon has also acceded to the ICCPR which includes double jeopardy provisions. Legal analysts in Lebanon have confirmed that double jeopardy may be raised by a defendant. However, DFAT has no recent information on whether legal double jeopardy protections are upheld in practice.

5.12 Hezbollah and Palestinian camp authorities run autonomous, informal legal systems in areas under their control (see relevant sections). DFAT does not have any specific information in relation to the independence, legitimacy, or equity of legal processes under these systems.

Military Courts

5.13 The military court system is an exceptional judicial system that falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence. Military judges are appointed by the Minister for Defence, are not required to have a law degree or legal training and remain subordinate to the Minister during their tenure. Access to military court proceedings is restricted, meaning human rights organisations and journalists are not able to freely monitor trials. NGO sources suggest referral of certain matters to military courts (such as alleged torture of Syrian refugees by the military, or the sinking of a migrant boat in April 2022 with potentially dozens of lives lost) is a means of avoiding accountability.

5.14 The system also has broad jurisdiction over civilians, including in cases involving espionage, treason, unlawful contact with 'the enemy' (Israel), or weapons possession; crimes that harm the interest of the military, the Internal Security Forces, or general security; as well as any conflict between civilians and military or security personnel or the civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence, army, security services, or military courts. This broad jurisdiction means that civilians can be brought before military courts for any interaction or altercation with security services or their employees. For example, in June 2022, a comedian, Shaden Fakih, was charged with 'insulting and harming the reputation of the Internal Security Forces'. In 2020, an activist Hassan Yassine, was charged before a military court for 'forcefully resisting security forces' during a protest in

which he was beaten by the ISF. NGOs have suggested that military courts lack conventional legal protections for the accused while the US Department of State has suggested that the use of military courts allows for impunity for the military.

Detention and Prison

5.15 As of October 2022 (most recent data) the Lebanese prison system consisted of 21 adult prisons and one juvenile facility, and held a prison population of 9,500, an occupancy level of 271 per cent given the official capacity of 3,500. Pre-trial detainees are often held with convicted prisoners. Some segregation of prisoners occurs by sect; for example, Christians are separated from Muslims in some prisons. Authorities reportedly keep Islamist prisoners strictly separate from the rest of the prison population, though interaction is often still possible.

5.16 Human rights observers have reported that conditions in prisons and detention centres are poor, largely due to overcrowding, exacerbated in 2022 by an on-going judicial strike which lengthened trials leaving prisoners on remand. In Roumieh Prison, for example, prisoners often sleep 10 to a room originally built to accommodate two. Parliament has been considering a bill to further reduce the 'prison year' used to calculate sentences to six months in order to effect the early release of a large number of prisoners. Most prisons lack adequate sanitation, ventilation, and lighting, and can be uncomfortably hot or cold. Prisoners lack consistent access to drinking water. The provision of basic medical care is constrained by inadequate staffing, poor working conditions, and overcrowded medical facilities. Conditions in police stations are reportedly worse than those in regular prisons. Non-governmental entities, including Hezbollah and Palestinian non-state militias, also reportedly operate unofficial detention facilities, but DFAT does not have any information about these facilities.

INTERNAL RELOCATION

5.17 The government does not impose any limitations on the freedom of movement of its citizens. All Lebanese can legally relocate to, and resettle in, any part of the country. In most cases, Lebanese relocating internally will seek to move either to an area in which their religious group is in the majority, or to a mixed area. This generally means relocating to a major city, particularly Beirut, which also offers more opportunities for employment, access to services, and a greater degree of state protection than other areas of Lebanon. The large-scale influx of Syrian refugees has, however, placed significant pressure in Beirut and elsewhere on the availability and cost of rental accommodation and other services, including employment (see [Employment](#)). Rental prices across Lebanon have soared during the economic crisis, exacerbated by the effects of the Beirut blast that destroyed a number of neighbourhoods, with some tenants having to move or pay a bigger proportion of income to stay in their homes.

5.18 While political parties may offer financial or social assistance and other services to members of their communities seeking to relocate, they do not generally actively encourage internal relocation. In particular, Christian parties and the Maronite patriarchate have encouraged Christians in rural areas to remain in their towns and villages and have discouraged them from selling their properties to non-Christians.

5.19 DFAT assesses that the ease with which an individual can relocate internally depends to a large degree on their individual circumstances, including whether they have family or community connections in the intended area of relocation, and their financial situation. Internal relocation is generally easier for men and family groups. Single women, particularly those fleeing family violence, are less likely to have access to sufficient support services and are likely to face societal discrimination in the form of harassment, particularly in rural and more conservative areas. LGBTI individuals are also less likely to be able to escape official and

societal discrimination through relocation, although Beirut offers the best possibilities. Shi'a individuals identified as being opposed to Hezbollah or Amal are unlikely to be able to escape societal discrimination through internal relocation.

TREATMENT OF RETURNEES

Exit and Entry Procedures

5.20 Many expatriate Lebanese maintain close family or business relationships within Lebanon and return to the country frequently, entering and exiting without difficulty. Lebanese citizens and residents require a Lebanese passport, individual civil status record certificate, or residency card to enter Lebanon. A passport or National ID Card (NID) is required to exit Lebanon, along with a valid visa for the intended destination (if applicable).

5.21 Lebanese border authorities maintain a database of 'border alerts' or 'stop orders', against which they check all travellers' names on arrival and departure. Border alerts are raised when there are pending court cases or warrants for those wanted for, or convicted of, offences in Lebanon. Lebanese citizens returning from overseas are highly likely to be arrested and detained on return should they have an existing stop order against them. DFAT is aware of cases where people facing criminal charges have been stopped before departure and barred from leaving the country: in one such case, an Australian woman of Lebanese background was prevented from leaving Lebanon after her ex-husband's family accused her of adultery in a complaint to Lebanese authorities. In addition, the husbands of married women and fathers of unmarried women and underage children can request travel bans against their dependants without significant difficulty: these are done through a court order (civil or religious courts). Appeals against these travel bans are possible, however they are rarely successful.

5.22 Beirut-Rafik Hariri International Airport is the only operational commercial airport in Lebanon. Along with the Port of Beirut, it is the main entry point into the country. Authorities perform biometric checks (photograph and fingerprinting) at the airport. The airport is located in an area of southern Beirut in which Hezbollah has considerable influence, and the organisation exercises a high degree of influence (but not control) over the airport, both in terms of airport operations (by controlling key official positions connected with the airport) and its ability to close off access to the airport by shutting down the airport road.

5.23 There are four official border crossing points from Lebanon to Syria: Arida, north of Tripoli along the coast; Aboudieh, north-east of Tripoli; el-Qaa, on the northern edge of the Beka'a Valley; and Masna'a, in the east along the international highway. With the exception of the Arida checkpoint, the official checkpoints on the Lebanese side of the border are located some distance from the actual border. There are also several non-official crossing points and, prior to the start of the Syrian civil war, observers described the border region as 'notoriously porous'. As late as 2015, Lebanese citizens did not require a visa or even a passport to enter Syria. DFAT understands the border is more tightly controlled than it was prior to the Syrian crisis. It is unlikely, however, that the standard of exit and entry formalities (including access to the online database) at the majority of official land border crossing points would be on par with that of the airport or Port of Beirut.

5.24 There are no official land crossing points to Israel, and it is illegal to travel there. Citizens of Lebanon (and other Arab countries) are likely to be arrested and detained if authorities in Lebanon find evidence that they have travelled (or intend to travel) to Israel. Such evidence could include Israeli exit or entry stamps in their passport, Egyptian or Jordanian stamps from border crossings with Israel, or travel itineraries or tickets that include Israel as a destination. International travellers, including Australians, holding evidence (such as a passport stamp) that they have travelled to Israel, will be denied entry to Lebanon.

5.25 DFAT assesses that the effectiveness of the border alert database would make it difficult for a person under a stop order to enter or exit the country through the international airport or port without being stopped and detained. It may, however, be possible to leave Lebanon via a land crossing point without coming to official attention.

Conditions for Returnees

5.26 DFAT understands it is not a crime for Lebanese citizens to seek asylum abroad. Information on conditions for failed asylum seekers who have returned to Lebanon is limited. DFAT understands, however, that no significant stigma attaches to this group and has no evidence to suggest they are subject to any particular type of official or societal discrimination. However, in-country sources report that Lebanese authorities may administratively delay the return of deportees and failed asylum seekers from other countries where their cooperation is required. On return, a failed asylum seeker would only come to the attention of authorities if they had an existing stop order against them (see [Exit and Entry Procedures](#)), or if they had committed a crime abroad of sufficient gravity for authorities to request an accompanied transfer. However, in 2022, with the sharp increase in irregular migration from Lebanon to Cyprus and elsewhere, international media sources suggested that Lebanese authorities' previous apparent tolerance of such migration was decreasing and they were forcibly returning Lebanese who attempted such departure. International media sources also report that authorities have deported Syrians who attempted irregular migration from Lebanon back to Syria.

5.27 A returnee would generally return to their home community or resettle in Beirut or another major city. Although Lebanese authorities do not provide support for resettlement, several NGOs do, including the Caritas Lebanon Migrants Centre, the Afro-Asian Migrant Centre, and the International Organization for Migration.

DOCUMENTATION

5.28 All Lebanese citizens over the age of 15 and habitually resident in Lebanon must carry either a National ID card (NID, sometimes referred to as a Lebanese ID Card (LIC)) or passport at all times. Police officers and security officials have a right to demand to see identity documents.

5.29 Personal status records for Lebanese nationals are kept at the personal status register in the various districts of the Directorate General for Personal Status (DGPS) at MoIM. They are organised according to family: each family holds a unique serial number for all its descendants, known as the register number. These records provide the proof of Lebanese citizenship necessary to obtain identification papers. The personal status record for an individual includes information such as the person's full name, sex, parents' names, place and date of birth, marital status, religion, and register number.

Birth Certificates and Registration

5.30 The DGPS issues birth certificates, which follow a common template and include a government stamp as well as the execution date and number in the bottom left-hand corner. Information on the certificate includes: the names of parents and their register number; name and sex of the newborn; place and date of birth; signature of the hospital, doctor, or legal midwife who assisted the birth; position and signature of the person preparing the document; signature of *mukhtar* (local mayor) and witnesses; date of submission to the personal status departments; and the incoming and execution serial numbers.

5.31 Birth declarations must be submitted within 30 days of birth to the Civil Status Officer at the place of birth: declarations following this deadline, up to one year from the date of birth, attract a fine of LBP1,000 (AUD0.90). In the event of delaying a birth declaration for more than a year from the date of birth, registration in civil status records is only possible through a court order: parents or guardians must file a voluntary lawsuit before a civil judge and obtain a judicial decision to execute the registration. Proof of birth in wedlock is required: couples whose marriage is not registered in Lebanon may face difficulties in registering their children. Unregistered children are effectively stateless and are unable to access many basic and fundamental rights, such as education, health, and employment. They are also unable to register their marriages and are thus unable to register their own children.

5.32 Article 1 of the *Nationality Law* (1925) states that a person is considered Lebanese if they were born of a Lebanese father; or were born in Lebanon and did not acquire a foreign nationality upon birth by affiliation; or were born in Lebanon of unknown parents or parents of unknown nationality. A child born of a Lebanese father outside Lebanon can obtain a Lebanese birth certificate through a Lebanese diplomatic mission, provided the parents' marriage is registered either in Lebanon or abroad. A child born of a foreign father can obtain a birth certificate, however the birth will be registered in the DGPS' Foreigner Events Department, even if the mother is Lebanese. Lebanese women cannot pass on citizenship by descent.

Marriage Certificates

5.33 The act of marriage is not officially recognised until it is correctly registered with the competent authorities at MoIM's General Directorate of Civil Status. Registration of a marriage with the presiding religious authorities alone does not make it official. Following the marriage ceremony, the religious authority that contracted the marriage provides a marriage contract or attestation of marriage, which indicates the agreement between the two parties made in the presence of the marrying authority and witnesses. It contains the signatures of the two parties, proving their consent, and the signature of two witnesses. The (religious) marriage contract is the primary document required for registering a marriage: other necessary documents for Lebanese citizens are a recently issued individual civil status extract, a family civil status extract, and the NID for both parties. Registered Palestinian refugees are required to provide their Palestinian refugee ID. Unregistered Palestinians must show a valid passport issued by the Palestinian Authority and an Attestation of Nationality issued by the Directorate General of Palestinian Refugee Affairs, or a valid laissez-passer issued by any foreign country and an entry stamp showing the date of entry into Lebanon. In the absence of a comprehensive legal framework for civil marriage, such marriages are treated as civil contracts under the *Law of Obligations and Contracts* (1932).

5.34 Lebanese citizens and registered Palestinian refugees who conclude their marriages outside Lebanon can register them through Lebanese consulates. The spouses must present the official marriage certificate issued by the competent authorities in the foreign country to the Lebanese consulate, along with all other required documents as listed earlier. The consulate will then authenticate the marriage certificate, register it, and give it a number, and send it to the Lebanese Foreign Ministry. Once in Lebanon, the foreign ministry will transfer the certificate to the General Directorate of Civil Status, who will conduct the process of registration and execution as previously described. The certificate will ultimately be sent to the civil status officer of the district where the husband has his civil status records; or to the Directorate of Refugee Affairs if the husband is a registered Palestinian refugee.

5.35 Lebanon does not recognise same-sex marriage. See also [Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#).

National ID Card (NID)

5.36 MoIM issues National ID Cards (NIDs) (also referred to as Lebanese Identity Cards (LICs)), which are the primary form of identification for Lebanese citizens. NIDs are used to obtain a wide range of services, including healthcare, banking and financial services, education, employment, travel (when validating the traveller's passport or for travel to Syria and Jordan), obtaining other documents (such as driver's licences) and insurance claims.

5.37 NIDs are standardised throughout the country. They are white and pink in colour with a picture of two cedars in the background and contain the following information: holder's full name; father's given name; mother's full name; place of birth; date of birth; cardholder's signature; passport-sized photograph; national identity number; sex; marital status; date of issue; registry number; village; province; district; and name, signature and seal of registry officer.

Passports

5.38 The Directorate General of General Security (DGGS) issues passports, which can also be issued outside Lebanon through diplomatic missions. The *Passports Act* (2005) gives the Minister for Foreign Affairs the power to refuse, cancel or suspend a passport on a number of grounds, including national security or health. The DGGS will not issue a passport to a person under arrest for criminal offence, or to those who appear as 'dangerous' in accordance with the International Police Agreement (1920). Those who owe LBP3,800,000 (approximately AUD3,600) or more in child support will also not be granted a passport.

5.39 Since August 2016, all Lebanese passports issued by the DGGS have been biometric, although non-biometric passports remain valid until their expiry date. The new biometric passports are navy blue, with the Lebanese Cedar emblazoned in the centre of the front cover. 'The Lebanese Republic, Passport' is written on the cover page in Arabic, English, and French. The passports include the following data: photograph of the holder, full name, date of birth, sex, place of birth, date of issue, authority, and holder's signature. Passports are issued for five or ten years, depending on the applicant's preference.

Individual and Family Registry Documents

5.40 The DGPS issues Individual Civil Extracts and Family Civil Extracts (Registry Documents). These are proof of identity documents that may be used for processes such as the issuance of Lebanese citizenship, school registration, employment, requests for Police Certificates, university registrations, issuance of driver's licences, marriages, and divorces.

5.41 Registry Documents follow a standard format throughout the country. They are handwritten rather than electronically printed, and therefore do not all have the same handwriting. Information on the Individual Civil Extract includes the district, quarter, or village of residence and register number, as well as the individual's full name, father's given name, mother's full name, place and date of birth, religion (optional), family status, and sex. Information on the Family Civil Extract includes the district, place of the register, number of the register, and each family member's full name, father's name, mother's name, place and date of birth, religion, sex, and marital status. Photographs appear on Individual Civil Extracts but not on Family Civil Extracts.

Identity Documents for Palestinians

5.42 Palestinian refugee records are kept at the Directorate of Refugee Affairs (DRA) at MoIM's General Directorate of Political and Refugee Affairs. They form the legal basis for Palestinian refugees to enjoy legal residency in Lebanon and obtain IDs issued by Lebanese authorities.

5.43 The DRA's Events Registration Department has adopted special procedures for registering children born of Palestinian fathers registered in Lebanon. To organise a birth certificate, parents or guardians must provide the DRA with a birth attestation from the doctor or midwife who assisted the birth; the father's Palestinian refugee card; a copy of the parents' marriage certificate; and an extract of the father's Palestinian refugee family register. Once the birth certificate is in hand, parents or guardians must submit it to the DRA, along with an extract of the family personal status register for registered Palestinian refugees; a request by the *mukhtar* of the place of residence; a copy of the father's Palestinian refugee card; and two photographs of the child. If the declaration is made through a guardian, a copy of the guardianship decision must be presented; if it is made through someone delegated by the family, a copy of the delegation through a notary public must be provided.

5.44 As per General Security regulations, Palestinians registered with UNRWA are entitled to travel documents valid for either one or five years. Palestinians who are not registered with UNRWA can obtain travel documents valid for either one or three years. Fees payable are similar to those paid by Lebanese. In 2016, biometric passports replaced handwritten travel documents. Passports can be renewed in diplomatic missions abroad.

PREVALENCE OF FRAUD

5.45 Counterfeit or fraudulent identity documents are rare in Lebanon. Since the end of the civil war, authorities have issued core identity documents (including passports, NIDs, Registry Documents, and birth certificates) in a nationally consistent format. Records have been maintained, although sometimes in a limited capacity. Identity fraud is taken seriously by authorities, and those convicted may be incarcerated for several months.

5.46 It is reportedly very common for official documents of all kinds to contain errors. Most documents are handwritten on non-secure paper, and usually have no security features. Inconsistencies with spelling and incorrect dates may occur and may then be reproduced and often compounded in subsequent documents. Transliteration variances from Arabic to English can cause variations in names and many other inconsistencies, which may raise concerns about the integrity of documents.

5.47 Diplomatic missions in Beirut advise that the bulk of their documentation-related work is now conducted electronically. Most documents submitted for visa and citizenship purposes are scans or copies of documents rather than originals. When the validity and/or the genuineness of submitted documents is in question, diplomatic missions will request the original of the document and make assessments between the two. Diplomatic sources reported an increase in fraudulent bank statements and employment reference letters being submitted as part of visa applications in 2022. Copies and scans of Marriage and Birth Certificates are commonly presented for visa and citizenship purposes. On occasions where diplomatic missions have had reason to verify submitted documents, Marriage and Birth Certificates have proven to be reliable, consistent with other documents submitted, in line with claims and circumstances, and genuinely issued by authorities. Court documents are submitted on limited occasions, usually for the purposes of travel for children, or verification of marriage, divorce, or settlement. On occasions where diplomatic missions have had reason to verify submitted documents, court documents have proven to be reliable, consistent with other documents submitted, in line with claims and circumstances, and genuinely issued by authorities. Driver's licences are



rarely submitted for documentation-related purposes as any information contained in these is more readily (and reliably) obtained in travel documents, NIDs, and Registry Documents.