

# Human Rights Watch

## Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/lebanon>

### Annual reports

Events of 2019

Anti-government protesters wave Lebanese flags during ongoing anti-government protests, in Beirut, Lebanon, November 10, 2019. The Arabic on the fist reads "Revolution."

2019 AP Photo/Bilal Hussein

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The rights situation in Lebanon deteriorated in 2019, culminating in widespread anti-government protests that began on October 17. Security forces at times used excessive and unnecessary force against protesters and on several occasions failed to stop attacks on demonstrators.

Lebanese authorities have prosecuted individuals for peaceful speech, and security agencies interrogating these individuals have in some cases subjected them to abuse and detained them pretrial. Accountability for torture remains elusive, despite the passage of an anti-torture law.

Women still face discrimination under 15 separate religion-based personal status laws and both child marriage and marital rape remain legal. Unlike men, women cannot pass their citizenship to their children and foreign spouses.

Although Lebanon passed a law banning the open burning of waste, the practice is still widespread, endangering the health of residents.

There are approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon; 73 percent lack legal status. Authorities forcibly deported over 2,500 refugees.

Anti-government protests began on October 17 prompted by the announcement of new taxes. The protests quickly devolved into anger against the entire political establishment, whom protesters blame for corruption and the country's dire economic situation. Prime Minister Said Hariri resigned on October 29 in response to the mass protests.

On October 18, security forces fired [tear gas and rubber bullets](#) at thousands of largely peaceful protesters in downtown Beirut. Security forces on several occasions failed to stop attacks on peaceful demonstrators and occasionally used excessive force to disperse protesters and clear roadblocks by beating protesters with batons and rifle butts.

In 2019, authorities continued to detain and charge individuals for speech critical of government officials, especially in relation to corruption allegations, and religious institutions. Lawyers also used defamation laws to file complaints against individuals and publications expressing concern about the [country's economic situation](#).

Security agencies, including the Internal Security Forces cybercrimes bureau, have summoned activists for interrogation over peaceful speech, in some cases subjecting them to abuse, violating their privacy, detaining them pretrial, and compelling them to sign commitments to cease their criticisms.

Defaming or criticizing the Lebanese president or army is a criminal offense carrying penalties of up to two and three years in prison, respectively. The Lebanese penal code criminalizes libel and defamation, authorizing imprisonment of up to three months, and up to one year in the case of public officials.

Despite parliament passing an [anti-torture law](#) in 2017, torture by security forces persists, judicial authorities continue to ignore the laws provisions, and accountability for torture remains elusive.

Judicial authorities [failed to investigate](#) torture allegations by Hassan al-Dika, arrested on drug-related charges, against members of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) prior to his death in custody on May 11.

Ziad Itani, a prominent actor falsely accused of spying for Israel, alleged that State Security officers [tortured him](#) in 2017. Despite his filing a lawsuit against his alleged torturers in November 2018, the judiciary has taken no substantive action on his case.

On March 7, Lebanon's Council of Ministers [appointed the five members](#) of the national preventative mechanism to monitor and investigate the use of torture, but it has still not allocated funding for the mechanism.

Lebanon continues to try civilians, including children, in [military courts](#), in violation of their due process rights and international law.

On March 7, military courts sentenced two journalists to [three months imprisonment](#) in absentia for allegedly insulting a security agency on Facebook. On appeal in April, the military court declared [lack of jurisdiction](#) and referred the case back to the military prosecutor.

Women, who have played a [leading role](#) in the protests that began on October 17, [continue to face discrimination](#) under 15 distinct religion-based personal status laws. Discrimination includes inequality in access to divorce, child custody, and inheritance and property rights. Unlike men, Lebanese women also [cannot pass on their nationality](#) to foreign husbands and children.

Lebanon has no minimum age for marriage, and some religious courts allow girls younger than 15 to marry. Parliament [failed to take up draft bills](#) that would set the age of marriage at 18.

In 2017, Lebanon's parliament repealed [article 522](#), which had allowed rapists to escape prosecution by marrying the victim, but left a loophole with regard to offences relating to sex with children aged 15-17 and sex with virgin girls with promises of marriage.

A [2014 Law on the Protection of Women and Family from Domestic Violence](#) established important protection measures and introduced policing and court reforms but failed to criminalize all forms of domestic violence, including marital rape.

Article 534 of [the penal code punishes](#) any sexual intercourse contrary to the order of nature with up to one year in prison. In March, the top military prosecutor [acquitted four military personnel](#) accused of sodomy and ruled that homosexuality is not a crime. This follows a district court of appeals [similar groundbreaking ruling](#) in July 2018, and [four judgments](#) from lower courts declining to convict gay and transgender people under article 534 since 2007.

General Security banned entry to at least six individuals after they participated in a gender and sexuality conference in September 2018, which it [attempted to shut down](#).

Transgender women in Lebanon face [systemic violence and discrimination](#) in accessing basic services, including employment, health care, and housing.

An estimated 250,000 migrant domestic workers, primarily from Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Nepal, and Bangladesh, are excluded from labor law protections.

The kafala (sponsorship) system subjects them to restrictive immigration rules under which they cannot leave or change employers without permission of their employer, placing them at risk of exploitation and abuse.

Civil society organizations [documented frequent complaints](#) of non-payment or delayed payment of wages, forced confinement, refusal to provide time off, and verbal and physical abuse. Migrant domestic workers seeking accountability for abuse face legal obstacles and inadequate investigations.

On May 5, migrant domestic workers [organized a protest](#) in Beirut demanding better working conditions and the abolishment of the kafala system.

A former minister of labor [created a committee](#) to reform Lebanon's labor law and break the kafala system, but no reforms have been announced yet.

Nearly 1 million Syrian refugees are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon. The government estimates the true number of Syrians in the country to be [1.5 million](#).

Lebanon's [residency policy](#) makes it difficult for Syrians to maintain legal status, heightening risks of exploitation and abuse and restricting refugees access to work, education, and healthcare. [Seventy-three percent](#) of Syrians in Lebanon now lack legal residency and risk detention for unlawful presence in the country.

The Higher Defense Council took several decisions that increased pressure on Syrian refugees in Lebanon, including the [deportation of Syrians](#) who enter Lebanon illegally, the [demolition of refugee shelters](#), and a crackdown on [Syrians working without authorization](#). On August 26, General Security said it [deported 2,731 Syrians](#) since May 21, placing them at risk of arbitrary detention and torture. These coercive measures come amid xenophobic rhetoric from leading politicians calling for the return of Syrian refugees.

General Security estimates that over [170,000 Syrians returned](#) to their country from Lebanon between December 2017 and March 2019. Syrians said they are returning because of [harsh policies and deteriorating conditions](#) in Lebanon, not because they think Syria is safe.

According to the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, there are approximately [174,000 Palestinian](#) refugees living in Lebanon, where they continue to face restrictions, including on their right to work and own property. In addition, approximately [30,000 Palestinians from Syria](#) have sought refuge in Lebanon.

More than 300,000 school-age Syrian children were [out of school](#) during the 2017-2018 school year, largely due to parents inability to pay for transport, child labor, school directors imposing arbitrary enrollment requirements, and lack of language support. As of mid-October 2019, Syrian students had not begun afternoon shifts at public schools. The Education Ministry blamed a shortfall in donor funding.

Children with disabilities are often [denied admission](#) to schools and for those who manage to enroll, most schools do not take reasonable steps to provide them with a quality education.

Although Lebanon has banned [corporal punishment in schools](#), the ban is often disregarded, largely due to a lack of accountability for abusers.

Despite the passage of a [solid waste management law](#) in 2018 banning the open burning of waste, municipalities still [engage in the practice](#), posing health risks to residents, especially children and older persons. Open burning is more common in poor areas of the country.

On August 27, the cabinet [endorsed the Environment Ministrys roadmap](#) to create 25 sanitary landfills and three waste incinerators. However, the cabinet did not agree on how to tackle Beiruts looming trash crisis as both major [landfills reach capacity](#).

An estimated 17,000 Lebanese were kidnapped or disappeared during the 1975-1990 civil war. On November 12, 2018, parliament passed a [landmark law](#) creating an independent national commission to investigate the fate of the disappeared.

On August 29, the Justice Ministry [nominated 10 individuals](#) to serve on the committee. Their nominations must be approved by Cabinet.

Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia maintain a strong influence on Lebanese politics through local allies.

Tensions between Hezbollah and Israel increased following the [crash of two Israeli drones](#) in Beiruts southern suburbs on August 25.

The international community has [given](#) Lebanon extensive, albeit [insufficient](#), support to help it cope with the Syrian refugee crisis and to bolster security amid spillover violence.

Lebanese armed forces and police receive assistance from a range of international donors, including the United States, European Union, United Kingdom, France, and Saudi Arabia.

Human Rights Watch defends the rights of people in 90 countries worldwide, spotlighting abuses and bringing perpetrators to justice

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