



Human Rights Violations Report 2022

Background

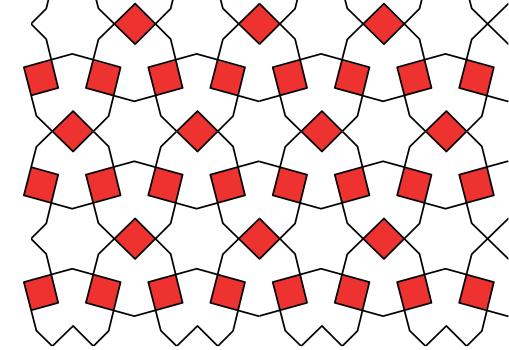
While the world is recovering from COVID-19, lifting lockdowns, and re-opening borders, Lebanon is still struggling with one of the worst human-made economic crises in modern history for the fourth consecutive year. The devaluation of the Lebanese Lira severely impacted governance, further weakening already fragile public institutions, suspending the already frail judiciary, dramatically disrupting healthcare and education, and leading to prolonged periods of political and security unrest. As members of a socially marginalized group in Lebanon, LGBTQIA+¹ people, particularly those who are economically less privileged, felt the impact of these crises much more acutely. Not only did levels of stigma and discrimination based on their SOGIESC² continue, it was exacerbated by deteriorating levels of availability of basic needs such as housing, employment, and healthcare.

The LGBTQIA+ community faces these challenges along with the rest of Lebanese society, albeit with much more limited legal and social protections. The first parliamentary elections in May 2022, following the mass protests that took the streets in October 2019, were marred by serious violations, including vote-buying, violence, incitement, and abuse of power by political parties. Despite the election of 13 independent reformist candidates, the results did not bring about any meaningful shift in the political status quo, and Lebanon's established political parties failed to make any public commitments to strengthen human rights protections (HRW, 2022).

Compounding these political and economic challenges, Lebanon's healthcare system is crumbling amid a shortage of medical supplies and personnel, as thousands of doctors and nurses have left the country (Reuters, 2022). The National Social Security Fund (NSSF), which is the largest employment-based provider of social services, is on the brink of bankruptcy and has failed to reimburse subscribers for their medical bills.

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other individuals with non-normative sexualities, to which we will be referring in the text as LGBTQIA+ or LGBTQ+.

² Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sexual Characteristics.



This has left many LGBTQIA+ individuals without access to critical medical care and medication in the already limited number of healthcare facilities they would be safe to access (UNICEF/ILO, 2021). Additionally, food prices increased dramatically by 483% in January 2022 compared to the year before, remaining at 332% as of June 2022 (WB, 2021). This, coupled with soaring national unemployment levels at 40% and rising, has left many LGBTQIA+ individuals struggling to make ends meet, especially when they lack support from their families. The situation is particularly dire for transgender women, who face systemic violence and discrimination in addition to the challenges already mentioned.

Amidst these challenging circumstances, 2022 registered a sharp rise in systematic discrimination and scapegoating of LGBTQIA+ communities in Lebanon by authorities and various hate groups. The government attempted to shut down peaceful gatherings of LGBTQIA+ people unlawfully in June 2022 (HRW, 2023), joining forces with religious leaders and non-state extremists to launch a large intimidation campaign aimed at demonizing queer people as foreign agents and corruptors of Lebanese society. This did not happen in a silo, as many other individuals such as journalists, academics, and activists critical of the ruling class and its policies have also faced harassment, legal threats, and detention – especially if they expressed solidarity or allyship with the LGBTQIA+ community which further restricted the community's ability to effectively counter the harmful public narratives deployed against it.

This report will examine the human rights violations against the LGBTQIA+ community in Lebanon recorded in 2022. It will particularly focus on the impact of the economic and political crisis on LGBTQIA+ well-being and rights, analyzing the legal and social barriers that continue to marginalize them. It will present the political and social context under which these violations were recorded, and highlight the urgent need for stronger legal protections and social support to address these violations. By shedding light on the ongoing situation, this report aims to raise awareness of the ongoing violations against the LGBTQIA+ community in Lebanon and advocate for change, protection, equality, and justice.

Glossary Terms

- **Cis man:** A man who identifies as a man and was assigned male at birth.
- **Cisgender:** A person whose gender aligns with their assigned sex at birth.
- **Cis hetero:** A person who identifies both as cisgender and heterosexual
- **Cis woman:** A woman who identifies as a woman and was assigned female at birth.
- **Gay:** A person sexually and/or romantically attracted to a member of the same sex and/or gender, typically a man.
- **LGBTQIA+:** An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer, intersex, asexual, and other non-normative and/or non-conforming orientations and identities.
- **Non-binary:** An umbrella term for gender identities outside the binary of man and woman. Non-binary can be genderfluid, agender, genderqueer, or another gender identity.
- **Queer:** Originally a derogatory term, it was reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ community as an umbrella term for persons with some or all of their SOGIESC as non-normative or non-conforming with societal expectations. Also, an umbrella term for LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- **SOGIESC:** An acronym denoting sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics.
- **Trans man:** A transgender person who identifies as a man regardless of their sex/gender assigned at birth.
- **Trans woman:** A transgender person who identifies as a woman regardless of their sex/gender assigned at birth.

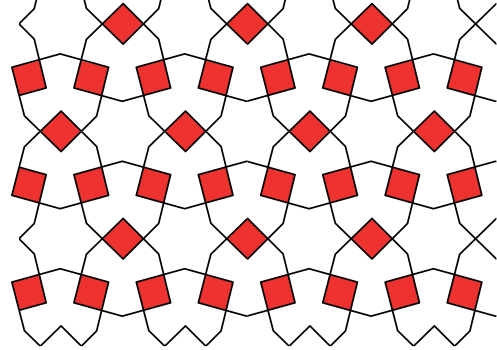
About Helem

Helem (or “Dream” in Arabic), is the first queer rights organization in the Arab world, officially established in Beirut, Lebanon in 2001. Its mission is to lead a peaceful struggle for the liberation of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, intersex, transgendered, queer, and other persons with non-conforming sexualities and/or gender identities (LGBTQ+) in Lebanon and the MENA region from all sorts of violations of their individual and collective civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Helem is fueled by its mission to empower young LGBTQ+ leaders to advocate for their own liberation. It seeks to create a supportive environment where our community can leverage diversity as a strength. In order to do this, we seek to protect queer individuals from various threats such as arrests, homophobia, and transphobia and mitigate their harmful impact on their well-being. We empower them through education and community building, and we mobilize them to change the policies and practices that deny them full equality and downgrade their quality of life.


About this Report

This report is designed to present the findings of Helem’s LGBTQIA+ human rights violations documentation initiative. It seeks to contextualize the findings by highlighting some of the major and most impactful incidents affecting the lives of queer people in Lebanon, as well as analyze the type, number, and frequency of the violations recorded. It then seeks to present concrete recommendations to a range of stakeholders using the data as evidence-based advocacy.

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1- Nationwide 2022 in Review: Nationwide Violations Against LGBTQIA+ People in Lebanon

The year 2022 marked a disturbing escalation of human rights violations targeting the LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon.

Over the course of the year, Lebanon witnessed a series of discriminatory actions and hate speech targeting the LGBTQ+ community. The situation illustrates a concerning trend of government bans, extremist threats, and incitement to hate, creating an environment of fear and oppression for LGBTQ+ individuals and their allies.

In June 2022, the Lebanese authorities made headlines by banning the movie “Lightyear” due to a lesbian kiss scene, followed by Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi’s decision to ban LGBTQ+ activities and gatherings. This move was reinforced by the support of religious figures such as Dar al Fatwa and Bishop Audi, who actively propagated messages of hate against homosexuality. Concurrently, extremist groups like “Jnoud El-Rabb” resorted to physical violence, attacking billboards displaying symbols of LGBTQ+ pride.

The month of July saw another movie ban, “Minions: The Rise of Gru”, for depicting a same-sex kiss. This was accompanied by public protests against homosexuality and civil marriage, fueled by incendiary speeches from figures like Nasrallah, further contributing to the hostile atmosphere.

In August 2022, the situation escalated with the launch of the “Abnormal” campaign by Islamic groups, advocating against homosexuality through billboard advertisements and recommendations. These actions not only perpetuated discrimination but also amplified societal division.

However, amidst this wave of intolerance, there were glimmers of hope. Legal organizations like Helem and Legal Agenda challenged discriminatory decisions through legal avenues, leading to the suspension of the Interior Minister's ban on queer gatherings. Nevertheless, the struggle persisted, as evidenced by the subsequent ban on a capacity-building activity organized by Helem.

According to various experts, Lebanon wasted a lot of precious time in dealing with the economic and financial crisis that plunged the residents into misery. Authorities have failed to address deteriorating key economic and social rights. No one has been held accountable for the man-made economic crisis or the Beirut blast that killed more than 220 and injured thousands. According to UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier de Shutter (Ohchr, 2022):

“Political leadership is completely out of touch with reality, including with the desperation they’ve created by destroying people’s lives. Lebanon is also one of the most unequal countries in the world, yet leadership seems unaware of this at best, and comfortable with it at worst.”

Yet, there is one area where the authorities seem resolved to take action and that is in restricting freedom and violating the rights of the LGBTQIA+ and other vulnerable communities in Lebanon. In fact, 2022 witnessed a surge in hate campaigns and efforts to erase queer identities, spanning across regions and groups with total impunity, often accompanied by hate speech and acts from various religious and political officials.

The Minister of Interior Attempts to Cancel Pride Month

During the globally celebrated Pride Month in June, many Arab authorities attempted to identify and dismantle any form of support for the LGBTQIA+ community. Similarly, in Lebanon on the 24th of June 2022, Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi dispatched a letter just a week before the pride month, asking the Lebanese security forces to dismantle any event that may “promote” homosexuality (CBS News, 2022). Many religious and political leaders acted as gatekeepers for this movement, as Malawi prohibited gatherings and meetings by the LGBTQIA+ community asserting they are incommensurate with social mores and the tenets of the religions (Middle East Eye, 2022). This decision precipitated the annulment of scheduled events and meetings by the queer community during the summer of 2022. It also triggered a surge of vitriolic hate speech waves and provocations directed at queer individuals and organizations (Ibid).

The letter, labeled “very urgent,” stated that “after the spread of calls on social media to organize parties and events promoting homosexuality in Lebanon... and considering the negative consequences brought by this phenomenon on individuals and society” police and internal security forces must “take the necessary measures to ban any celebrations, meetings or gatherings aiming to promote this phenomenon and to report the results back.”

This decision manifestly violates the fundamental right of assembly guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Lebanon is an acceding party (ICCPR, 1966). Yet, what is particularly perplexing is the minister's decision to prioritize stopping queer events, portraying them as the paramount threat to national security. This occurs in a country whose citizens are deprived of fundamental amenities such as electricity, medical care, clean water, education, and social security, and where a staggering 30% of the population remains unemployed. However, a thorough analysis of the situation indicates that provoking moral panic around sexual matters and singling out LGBTQIA+ individuals for persecution, while being an outdated and shallow approach, is a practice employed by failed regimes as a diversionary tactic to deflect attention from pressing economic and political crises, such as the one Lebanon has been grappling with since 2019.

This assault on the queer community coincides with ongoing systematic repressions of freedom of expression for multiple individuals and communities, including but not limited to comedians, journalists, and activists. These groups serve as spaces of resistance and critique against the oppressive patriarchal social order and its norms, which underpin Lebanon's sectarian political model and its elite. Following the mass protests of October 2019, which significantly undermined the sacralization of leadership figures opening up spaces of freedom to marginalized groups, it becomes imperative for the political establishment to contain and suppress spaces and communities that might challenge their positions.

However, the Mawlawi measure, despite going into effect, was not implemented for long. On 1/11/2022, Lebanon's highest administrative court, the State Council, issued a decision suspending the execution of the Minister's previous decision. This verdict came after The Legal Agenda and Helem filed a lawsuit in August 2022, contesting the Minister's decision for violating constitutional rights and inciting violence and hatred against vulnerable communities deserving state protection. The State Council's ruling denotes a provisional suspension of Mawlawi's ruling until a final verdict on the lawsuit is pronounced. (The Legal Agenda, 2022).

In this context, the judicial decision marks a positive step forward in safeguarding disenfranchised communities in Lebanon. It aligns with precedents wherein the State Council reinforces the civil liberties of marginalized groups, including their freedom of expression and participation in public discourse concerning queerness. As a result, security agencies are now prohibited from relying on the Minister's ruling to proscribe meetings or gatherings, conferences addressing queer issues, or to curtail the operations of organizations advocating for LGBTQIA+ persons' rights.

Even though the decision was clear in showcasing the State Council's position on the matter, and despite the ongoing deliberations of the State Council, Mawlawi still directed law enforcement to prohibit two events organized by the LGBTQ+ community, one scheduled for November 18-19 and another for November 23-24, in clear defiance of the interim court ruling (Al Monitor, 2022). In response, the Religious Reporting Authority of the Supreme Shiite Islamic Council praised Mawlawi's action as "a brave step that should be emulated ... especially after the wrong and even erroneous decision issued by the State Consultative Council."

The Assaults of "Jnoud El Rabb" (Soldiers of God) Against the LGBTQIA+ Community

While the repressive actions of the minister of interior reflect some of the establishments' attitudes towards the queer community in Lebanon, other societal groups were also disturbed by the visibility of the community. In late June, a viral video captured an act of vandalism against a floral installation (picture below) in Beirut in observance of Pride Month.³ The group responsible for this heinous act self-identified as the "Soldiers of God" or "Jnoud El Rabb", claiming to combat civil marriages and alleged "misdeeds" attributed to the LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon.

In a video posted on the same afternoon, individuals identifying as "Soldiers of God" issued threats against the community and accused them of promoting "satanic" intentions. They clearly proclaimed: "We do not accept the flag of homosexuals in our neighborhoods" and warned families to be cautious, claiming that LGBTQ+ individuals "kidnap" children (The Observers, 2022).

“Jnoud el-Rabb” or “Soldiers of God” post frequently on social media. Their videos depict hypermasculine men on motorbikes, wearing black T-shirts emblazoned with the group’s “coat of arms”: A shield with white wings adorned with red moline crosses in front of an open Bible. These posts are often accompanied by quotations from the Old Testament (Beirut Today, 2022). Originating from Achrafieh, this ultraconservative group played a role in canceling a 2019 concert by the Lebanese group Machrou Leila, whose lead singer, Hamed Sinno, is openly gay (ibid).

These individuals present themselves as defenders of God and view their religious beliefs, as well as themselves, to be under threat or persecution in Lebanon. They consider themselves to be persecuted by their detractors who label them as the Christian equivalent of Daesh (ISIS). However, despite claiming to be persecuted, they remain well protected and were never held accountable for any of their acts of violence or hate speech. In response to the country’s relative secularization, the group reverts to the outdated fundamentals of religious culture and transposes forgotten ideals and cultural practices to contemporary society. The group is incapable of acculturation, and the more society rejects their assertions, the more likely they are to lean toward extremism.

³ Instagram: @Beirutpride;
https://www.instagram.com/p/CfM4IYMAKb/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=5c82040e-1b88-4506-8d18-df5b3b91f804; June 2022.

The “Not Normal” Campaign in Saida

In August 2022, an event scheduled on the seafront of the southern Lebanese city of Saida by the World of Business Company became the focus of a religious and “electronic” campaign targeting the LGBTQIA+ community. The campaign, launched under the slogan “not normal”, continued for approximately two weeks following a conference held in the city’s municipal hall under the same name. Furthermore, the imams in the city played a significant role in the campaign against the event, using a unified language in their Friday prayer speeches. They expressed concern that the event would promote debauchery and undermine the values of the city (Al-Hurra, August 2022).

One of the imams stated in his sermon: “It is still the only city in Lebanon where there is no mixed swimming pool between men and women, no nightclubs like other cities, and where alcohol is not sold publicly. Its people are still owners of honor, pride, and jealousy who are not satisfied with the appearance of evil...” The Municipality of Saida withdrew its sponsorship of the event after the Friday prayer sermons, citing technical and logistical reasons for the change.

From the minister of interior to extremist Christian groups, the Shia party of Hezbollah, and the minister of culture, to the “Not-Normal” campaign, hate speech and violence incitement against the community escalated significantly since June 2022. Additionally, it occurs within the broader context of attacking and targeting the LGBTQIA+ community in Lebanon. These acts of violence go beyond the cancellation of queer events and threaten the lives of LGBTQIA+ persons residing in Lebanon. They constitute an attempt at erasing the queer community, which is an integral part of the country’s social fabric, exacerbating the economic and social precarity many members of the community are harshly enduring as a result of the economic collapse, being part of a vulnerable and marginalized group.

The reasons behind these systematic attacks on the queer community are diverse and interconnected. On one hand, the campaigns aim to divert attention from the dire economic situation engineered by the corrupt ruling coalition which includes the religious, business, and political elite. On the other hand, they seek to restore their legitimacy as moral gatekeepers of society. Moreover, queer spaces pose a threat to the patriarchal oppressive social order by existing as a non-normative sphere outside of the established norms and structures underpinning the political sectarian model in Lebanon.

The Conversion Therapy Battle Settled

The event of Saida went beyond the cancellation of the event, and revived the question of conversion therapy as a supposedly “cure for homosexuality.” (Sidonianews, August 2002). This conference, as a part of the “not normal” campaign, sparked a nationwide discussion on conversion therapy.

However, the debate ended quickly, when Dr. Leila Akuri Derani, the head of the Union of Psychologists in Lebanon issued a union circular on mental health and the societal view of homosexuality, after consulting with the union council members (Al Nahar, July 2022).

The statement (LPS, 2022) emphasized the need “to ensure respect for the laws in force” and pointed to “the importance of developing these laws to suit scientific development on the one hand, and to protect marginalized groups from the psychological effects of bullying, on the other hand.” Furthermore, the statement stressed they “respect the multiple societal and religious beliefs and traditions - which constitute the richness and splendor of our environment.” It highlighted the importance of not being dragged behind some beliefs that are still in circulation referring to “useless transformational treatments that have been proven incorrect and inaccurate based on science.”

Accordingly, it emphasized the importance of “avoiding inaccurate stigmas for some social phenomena, and refraining from giving advice that lacks scientific proof.” Adding that “this is to prevent further marginalization of the already marginalized groups, who may sometimes engage in activities that may be considered “provocative” by many members of our diverse and respectful society, in an attempt to assert their existence.”

This is a win for the community and must be seen as a promising step towards abolishing the practice of conversion therapy in Lebanon.

2- Segmentation According to Documented Violations and Gaps in Basic Needs

In 2022, Helem recorded more than 3699 cases of human rights violations by documenting the experiences of more than 1886 individual visits by LGBTQ+ individuals to its services and protection department. The department processed the entirety of these cases through a specialized case management system which mostly provided free mental health support, emergency intervention and response, and cash-based assistance programming as well as a referral system for other services given by other institutions with LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and procedures. The data in this report is unique as established capacity and programming on human rights violations documentation for LGBTQ+ rights is very limited throughout the MENA region. The Helem team has worked on documenting the cases it has received, filtering them by category and dividing them, for reporting purposes, into different categories of human rights violations and humanitarian/protection needs which are based on already existing rights enshrined by domestic or international law but also violations that are not yet recognized by existing legal bodies but are necessary for LGBTQ+ individuals to fully achieve equality and justice.

Total Number of Cases	3699
Total Number of Individual Visits	1886
Total Number of Violations	1665
Total Number of Assistance	1944
Other	134

Violation	Description	2022 Num-ber	Percentage of Total
SOGIESC Based Violations			
Physical and Domestic Violence	Any physical and aggressive behavior exerted on another person inside or outside the domestic sphere.	193	5,22%
Sexual Harassment	Any form of inappropriate action of a sexual or suggestive nature undesired by the recipient.	46	1,24%
Rape\Sexual Assault	Any action involving non-consensual sexual conduct against another person.	29	0,78%
Child Abuse	Any form of violent treatment, whether physical or otherwise, inflicted on a minor.	8	0,22%
Forced Confinement	Any act involving the denial of another person's physical freedom.	14	0,38%
Kidnapping	Any act involving detaining a person against their will and holding them in captivity, for the purpose of ransom or extortion, or to achieve some other objective, such as political or personal gain.	15	0,41%

Self-Inflicted Harm and Suicide	Self-Inflicted Harm: Any act or attempt to cause self-injury. Suicide: Any attempt aimed at ending one's life. In this report, this includes suicidal ideation and thoughts of self-harm.	46	1,24%
Death Threats, Verbal Violence, and Blackmail	Death Threats: Any expressed intent to end another person's life whether made in person, online, or through other means of communication. Verbal Violence: Any expressed verbal attack whether made in person, online, or otherwise with the intent to intimidate or discriminate against another person. Blackmail: Any attempt to force another person to unwillingly give up information or resources under threat of exposure, violence, or other forms of coercion.	614	16,61%

Sex Trafficking	Any act involving the abduction, transportation, and/or recruitment of individuals for the purposes of sexual exploitation.	6	0,16%
Forced Marriage and Risk of Forced Marriage	Any attempt or act that involves forcing a person to get married against their will, typically using coercion, threats, or pressure from family members or other sources.	8	0,21%
Lack of Access to Primary Rights			
Homelessness and Eviction	A situation in which a person lacks a stable, safe, and decent place to live. In this report, this includes sleeping on the streets, staying in emergency shelters or temporary accommodations, or residing in inadequate or overcrowded housing.	331	8,95%
Inability to afford food, water, and medication	A situation in which a person is unable to provide primary necessities such as food, water, and medication. This results in issues such as starvation, malnutrition, and lack of access to hygienic and sanitary needs, all of which are included in this report.	296	8,33

Arrest and Detention			
Arrest	The act of taking a person into custody by a law enforcement officer, typically as a result of suspicion or evidence that the person has committed a crime.	5	0,14%
Detention	The act of confining a person to a particular location, usually for a limited period of time and for a specific purpose, such as questioning, investigation, or punishment.	5	0,14%
Labor and Workplace Violations			
Work-Related Discrimination	Any form of unjust treatment of an employee or worker based on their SOGIESC or other identities.	28	0,76%
Arbitrary Dismissal	The act of terminating the employment of a person without sufficient cause.	9	0,24%
Sexual Harassment in the Workplace	Any form of unwelcomed and inappropriate action with a sexual connotation occurring in the workplace.	6	0,16%
Needs of Assistance			
Legal Assistance	Provision of legal aid, advice, or representation in court for individuals facing discrimination based on their SOGIESC.	71	1,92%

Psychological Health Care	Provision of necessary mental and psychological care for individuals.	292	7,89%
Shelter	Provision of shelter and/or housing for homeless individuals or those under risk of eviction.	35	0,95%
Cash Assistance	Provision of emergency cash assistance for various urgent needs including housing, health, food security, and other basic and primary needs.	880	23,79%
Medical Assistance	Provision of assistance for medication, surgery, testing, examination, and other healthcare needs.	135	3,65%
Asylum Assistance	Provision of information regarding standard legal procedures to apply for asylum due to serious threats.	138	3,73%

Helem’s Protection and Services Department is an entity dedicated to providing the necessary protection, mental health support, and assistance to members of the community in need. This department provides members of the LGBTQ+ community with pro bono legal representation and aid with regard to any form of discrimination they encounter based on their SOGIESC.

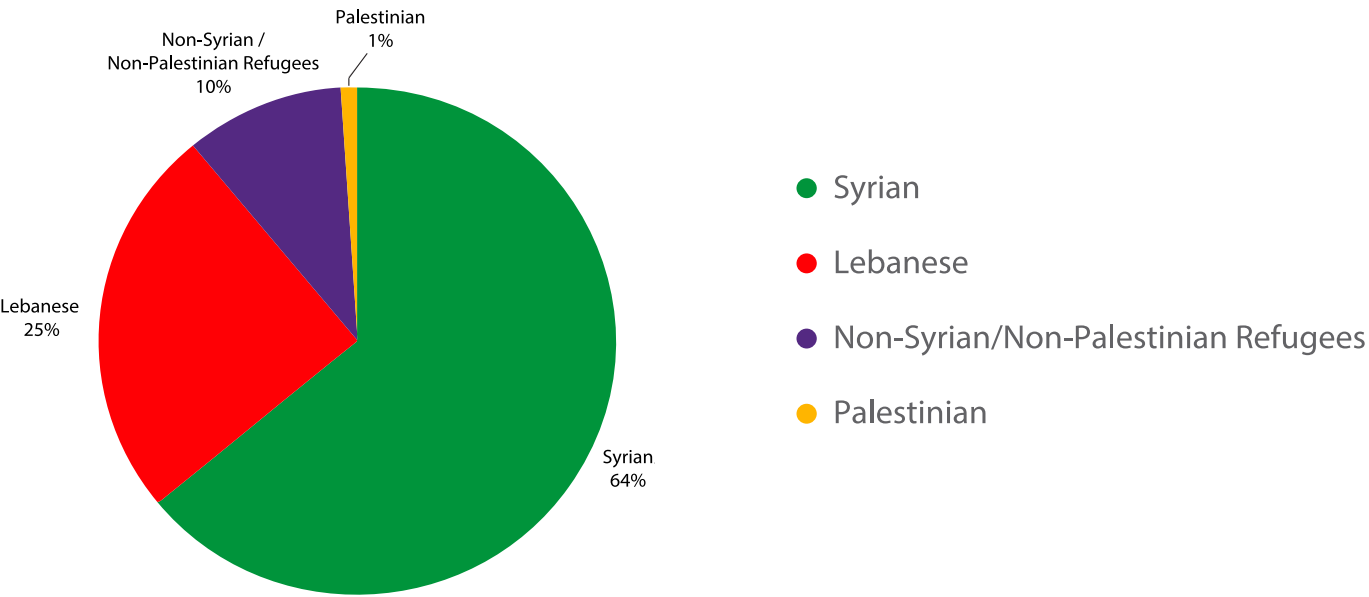
This department provides members of the LGBTQ+ community with pro bono legal representation and aid with regard to any form of discrimination they encounter based on their SOGIESC. The department also refers individuals to Helem’s mental health support program which provides members of the community with a set number of free mental health sessions with professionals specialized in LGBTQ+ mental healthcare - after which they are referred to other organizations or private clinics able to support their wellbeing in the longer term. The department receives calls through its 24/7 emergency helpline which individuals can securely contact and take appointments. The department also receives claims and assistance calls through referrals from other organizations, Helem’s community center, and/or online engagement in response to the organization’s public advertisement of their work.

All incidents are processed through Helem’s case management system and all violations are documented according to a set of indicators. All persons reporting incidents are asked to provide basic and anonymous demographic information in order to better segregate the data and understand its prevalence and impact.

Helem anonymously records demographic information for all reported incidents referred to its Protection and Services Department. Below are the main demographic segmentation results including nationality, age, and gender.

Nationality

Table 1: Case by Nationality



3- Demographic and Gender Segmentation

Table 1 displays the results of demographic and gender segmentation by nationality, for the persons who reached out to Helem for assistance. Syrian nationals accounted for the majority of applicants, accounting for approximately 64% of the total number. The remaining cases were distributed among Lebanese nationals constituting 25% of the total figure, while non-Syrian or Palestinian refugees accounted for 10% of the total. Palestinian nationals represented approximately 1% of the cases. 2022 was the last year through which Helem had an active partnership with UNHCR for receiving all registered LGBTQ+ identifying cases of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in Lebanon before Helem ended all services and case management programs with UNHCR and other service providers. This partially explains the numbers in Table 1, the other being that Syrian refugees often deal with overlapping and compounded vulnerabilities, especially with access to protection and basic needs, and are thus over-represented in the data.

Gender

Table 2: Case by Gender

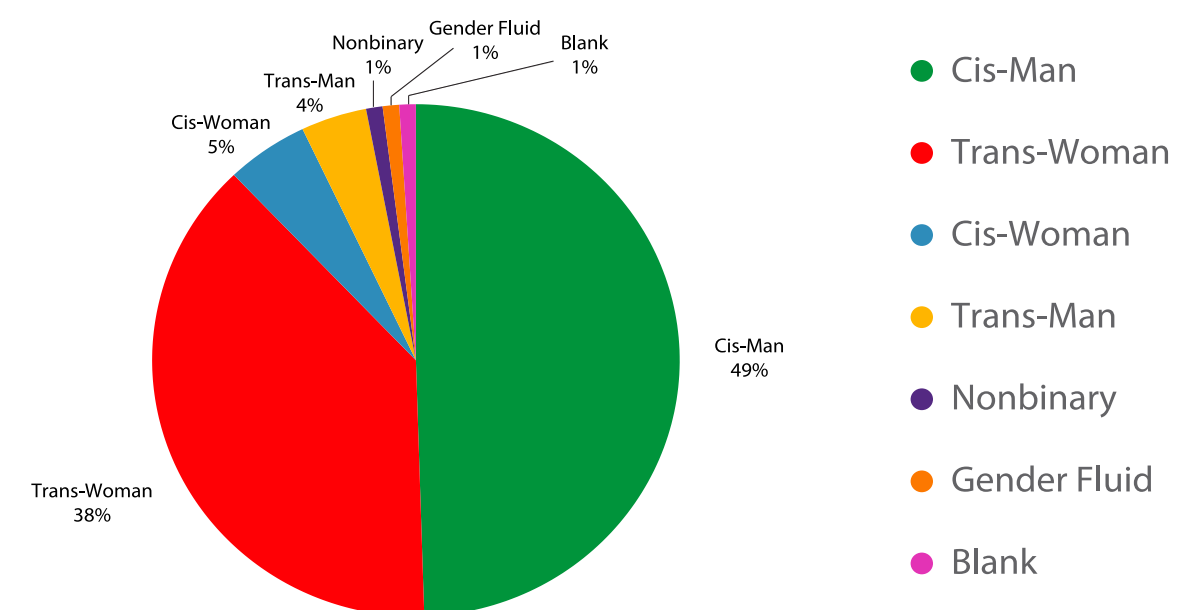


Table 2 presents the gender distribution of the documented cases. Almost half of the applicants at Helem identified as cis men, accounting for 49% of the cases while the remaining 51% identified as follows: trans women, representing 38% of the cases, cis women representing 5% of cases, and trans men representing 4%. The remaining 4% of the cases consisted of individuals who identified as non-binary, gender-fluid or did not disclose their gender. Gay men and transgender women are the recipients of the most prevalent forms of state and

non-state-sponsored oppression, often resulting in physical violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, and denial from basic services. Both groups are actively barred from accessing resources by both mainstream service providers as well as those targeting women. Another reason could be that gay cis-men and trans women constitute the larger bulk of individuals who sought humanitarian or financial assistance from Helem in 2022, considering the lack of services available to them specifically and the availability of at least some other service options for cis-women and trans-men.

Age

Table 3: Case by Age

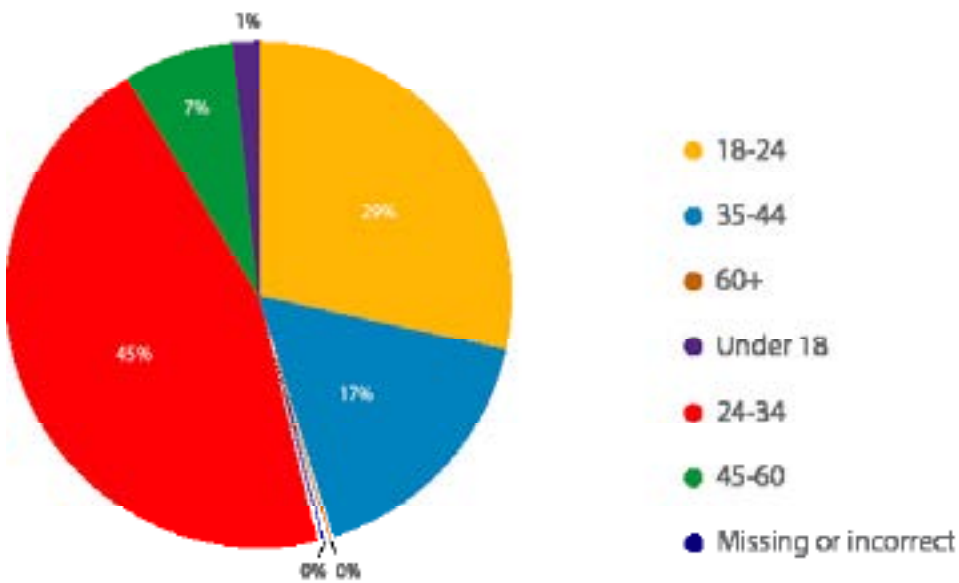


Table 3 provides an overview of the distribution of cases by age group, as recorded by Helem in 2022. Notably, the largest age demographic served by Helem comprised early adulthood age groups, with the age ranges of 18-24 and 24-34 accounting for approximately 29% and 40% of the cases, respectively. In contrast, older age groups account for lower recorded cases, with the age ranges of 35-44, 45-60, and 60+ accounting for approximately 17%, 7%, and 0% of the total cases, respectively. It is worth mentioning that the under-18 age group has a relatively low percentage of reported cases, approximately 1%, which is attributable to the fact that Helem does not provide any services or programs for minors and refers such cases to partner organizations that specialize in protection and services to minors. Lastly, approximately 1% of the cases recorded either did not identify with any of the above-mentioned age groups or their ages were not recorded.

4- Documentation of Violations: Main Findings

SOGIESC-Based Violence

Physical and Domestic Violence

Physical and Domestic violence refers to all violent acts inflicted upon a person, whether in the intimacy of the home or in the public sphere, such as parks, workplace, restaurants, or streets among other places.

Concerning domestic violence also referred to as domestic abuse or intimate partner violence, it encompasses a range of behaviors used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner through the exercise of various forms of harm. Such abusive conduct can take various forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats to that effect. In Lebanon, since late 2020, the parliament has passed a new law (LAW. No. 204) amending the previous laws on the matter, aiming to “protect women and other family members from domestic violence.”⁴ Among the most prominent amendments are the following (CVAW, 2021):

- Tougher penalties for perpetrators of domestic violence;
- Broader definition of domestic violence including criminal practices occurring during or because of marital life and economic violence:
- Establishing a special bureau in the Minister of Social Affairs to help victims of Domestic violence;
- Inclusion of children aged 13 and under in the protection order and granting minors the right to seek protection order without their guardian.

However, according to Helem’s Human Rights Violations Report (2021) this law’s definition of domestic remains narrow and limited, as it does not offer sufficient protection against all forms of abuse on one hand, and does not explicitly offer any protection for LGBTQIA+ persons, maintaining a traditional understanding of gender as binary. Especially since LGBTQIA+ individuals are often victims of

⁴ To read the Law 204/2020, please go to KAFA
<https://kafa.org.lb/sites/default/files/2021-10/law-204-english.pdf>

domestic and physical violence and face threats and vulnerabilities similar to those experienced by women, including violence perpetrated by their spouses, families, and/or extended familial and social networks. Moreover, the law does not include assault and threats as crimes under domestic violence, although they are already criminalized under the Lebanese Penal Code. Interestingly, the law does include a mechanism under the Ministry of Social Affairs that purports to offer support and protection for victims of domestic and physical violence under this law until their case is processed before a court. While this can be seen as a positive development, the reality is that this measure has not yet been applied, which discourages many victims under imminent threats from reporting their cases and seeking protection (NOW Lebanon, July 2022). It is also unclear how this mechanism, or the law in its entirety, will be interpreted and implemented by the judges presiding over Lebanese criminal courts when a victim’s sexual orientation is part of a claim. Particularly, as judges have been known to arrest and detain LGBTQIA+ victims and witnesses of crimes when their SOGIESC is revealed as part of court proceedings.

Similarly, to 2021, the findings from 2022 indicate a concerning prevalence of physical violence against the community, with 193 reported cases of physical violence, inflicted upon LGBTQIA+ persons in one year alone. Out of these cases, Syrian refugees were the most affected, accounting for 72.5% of the total cases. It is worth noting that LGBTQIA+ refugees, in particular, face additional violence and discrimination due to institutionalized homophobia and transphobia from both Syrian refugees and host Lebanese communities and institutions.

According to a report by Human Rights Watch’s World Report (2022), a mere 20% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon possess legal residency status, leaving the majority of them susceptible to discrimination and unreported violence, whether in the domestic or the public sphere, in addition to their already precarious living conditions and lack of sustainable access to basic needs. Furthermore, the Lebanese government continues to pursue policies and adopt political rhet-

oric that scapegoats Syrian refugees and blames them for Lebanon’s economic and political troubles, exacerbating their already precarious situation. The current economic crisis and soaring inflation have made it increasingly difficult for refugees to afford even the most basic necessities, with 90% of Syrian families in Lebanon now living in extreme poverty and relying on mounting levels of debt to meet their basic needs.

Physical violence is a prevalent issue in cases of domestic and intimate partner violence. Unfortunately, as previously stated, these crimes are often underreported and neglected due to the perception of being private matters. Therefore, gaining insight into their causes, prevalence, and impact is more difficult. Additionally, the deteriorating economic situation in 2022 which exacerbated the housing crisis, has further compounded the issue. Many LGBTQ+ individuals found themselves unable to afford rent and compelled to relocate back to family homes where cases of domestic violence are more likely to occur. Moving out from the relative safety and anonymity of densely populated areas back to family homes not only threatens the safety but also restricts the freedom of the persons concerned.

In cases of physical violence, both domestic and public, the main concern remains unresponsiveness and the failure of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) and the judiciary to promptly address calls for assistance (The National News, September 2022), the former due to the devaluation of their salaries, reaching 20-30\$ low in 2022 (The Arab Weekly, September 2022) and the latter due to a prolonged strike since the end of 2021. Along with prevalent homophobia in police stations, this makes it more difficult than ever for LGBTQ+ already-hesitant individuals to report cases of physical violence, in fear of being exposed to further state-related violence.

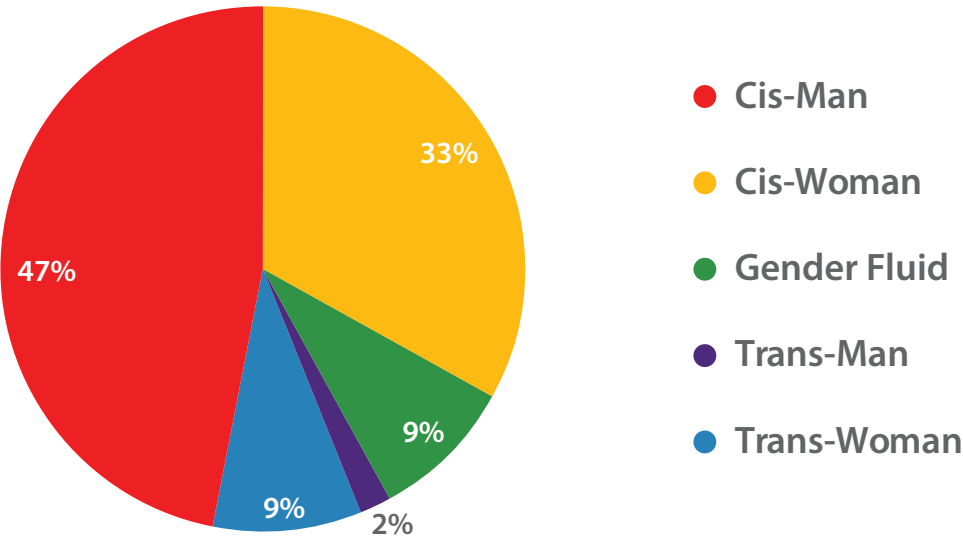
The recorded number of 193 cases of physical violence against the LGBTQIA+ community, as documented by Helem, underscores the persistent vulnerability

of marginalized individuals in Lebanon. From a human rights perspective, this high prevalence of violence raises serious concerns about the state’s obligation to protect the fundamental rights of all citizens. It highlights a clear violation of the right to life, liberty, and security of a person, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Moreover, the disproportionate impact on Syrian LGBTQIA+ refugees underscores the intersecting vulnerabilities faced by marginalized groups. Discrimination and persecution against refugees, coupled with institutionalized homophobia and transphobia, create a hostile environment where LGBTQIA+ individuals are at heightened risk. The failure of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to effectively respond further exacerbates these human rights violations, reflecting broader shortcomings in Lebanon’s legal and institutional frameworks for protecting human rights.

Therefore, to improve the protection of LGBTQ+ persons and curb violence, Lebanon needs comprehensive legal reforms as well as enforcement and reporting mechanisms. This includes enacting anti-discrimination laws that explicitly protect individuals based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, there should be specialized training programs for security and judiciary agencies to sensitively and swiftly handle cases involving LGBTQ+ individuals.

Sexual Harassment

Table 4: Sexual Harassment by Gender



In December 2020, Lebanon made a significant stride in its effort to address sexual harassment when it criminalized sexual harassment via the passage of law Number 205.⁵ The law defines sexual harassment as any repeated improper behavior that is undesired by the victim and carries a sexual connotation, violating their moral and physical well-being.⁶ Nonetheless, despite being long overdue, the law's efficacy is still insufficient and under severe criticism as it lacks prevention measures, labor law reforms, and monitoring mechanisms (HRW, March 2021). According to the same source, the law remains below the required standards of the Violence and Harassment Convention, which puts governments at the forefront of addressing violence and harassment at work through an "inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach." It is widely considered inadequate in deterring sexual harassment against women and even more inadequate in protecting gender non-conforming individuals, particularly trans and non-binary women.

Moreover, there is a significant limitation to the law's punitive measures, with Article 2 allowing harassers to be convicted with a misdemeanor instead of a felony. The violation of this law carries a punishment of imprisonment ranging from one month to one year, and a fine ranging from three to ten times the minimum wage. Other limitations within the law include the difficulty of proving that sexual harassment really occurred.

Additionally, cases of harassment fall under the Lebanese penal code and are handled by Lebanese courts. This means the process can be long (between two to three years which impedes the law's effectiveness, according to Karim Namour from Legal Agenda (HRW, March 2021). Also, the cases undergo public hearings, which is another factor that deters reporting out of fear of retaliation and shame. This is especially dangerous for LGBTIQ+ persons, who risk having their sexual orientation or gender identity discussed or even revealed as part of court proceedings or as retaliation from defendants accused of harassment and where punitive action by the courts can be enacted against them

⁵ Law 205/2020: Criminalization of Sexual Harassment and Rehabilitation of Victims: <https://lebanon.saderlex.com/category/2020>; (-قانون-رقم 205): إخبار-قانونية/11511/نص-قانون-تجريم-التحرش-الجنسي-وتأهيل-ضحايا-قانون-رقم 205

by sharing them with violating Article 534 of the penal code should evidence of their sexuality be presented. In addition, victims of sexual harassment need to report at police stations where Internal Security Forces remain untrained and un-equipped to deal with cases of harassment, often dismissing them or, in some reported cases, blaming victims dress or conduct as probably cause for the harassment to have occurred in the first place. LGBTIQ individuals, especially gender non-conforming individuals, find this process intimidating, if not impossible, given the levels of discrimination and violence that members of the police have inflicted, and continue to inflict, upon queer individuals. There are no mechanisms with which to report this sort of discrimination and a culture of impunity permeates any serious attempts to leverage the protection provided by this law. While Article 3 in Law 205, calls for the protection of the victim during investigation and prosecution, it is vague in its explanation. This is especially troubling when it comes to gender non-conforming persons and those with non-conforming sexual orientations since it does not explicitly mention SOGI-ESC as a protected status, nor do any other articles in the entire Lebanese body of law. LGBTQ+ survivors of sexual harassment, therefore, face the risk of re-traumatization, persecution, violence, and stigmatization when seeking legal redress and mostly choose not to pursue justice for the violations they experience.

⁶ Article 1 of law number 205/2020: "Sexual harassment is any repeated, out of the ordinary, unwanted behavior from the victim, with a sexual connotation, that constitutes a violation of the body, privacy, or feelings of the victim wherever it is found, through sexual or pornographic words, actions, signs, suggestions, or insinuations by any means including electronic means.

Forces remain untrained and un-equipped to deal with cases of harassment, often dismissing them or, in some reported cases, blaming victims dress or conduct as probably cause for the harassment to have occurred in the first place. LGBTQI individuals, especially gender non-conforming individuals, find this process intimidating, if not impossible, given the levels of discrimination and violence that members of the police have inflicted, and continue to inflict, upon queer individuals. There are no mechanisms with which to report this sort of discrimination and a culture of impunity permeates any serious attempts to leverage the protection provided by this law. While Article 3 in Law 205, calls for the protection of the victim during investigation and prosecution, it is vague in its explanation. This is especially troubling when it comes to gender non-conforming persons and those with non-conforming sexual orientations since it does not explicitly mention SOGIESC as a protected status, nor do any other articles in the entire Lebanese body of law. LGBTQ+ survivors of sexual harassment, therefore, face the risk of re-traumatization, persecution, violence, and stigmatization when seeking legal redress and mostly choose not to pursue justice for the violations they experience.

With regards to cases of sexual harassment, Helem documented a total of 46 cases reported to its Services and Protection Department, 47% of which identified as trans women, 33% as cis men, and 9% as cis women. Trans women in Lebanon, particularly refugees, sex workers, and migrant workers face multiple barriers in accessing basic services due to systemic discrimination and the inability to get identification that accurately reflects their gender identity and expression. Deprived of access to basic services and rights in a country with a deeply entrenched culture of homophobia and xenophobia, they become the target of sexual violence perpetrated by traffickers and other criminals. According to the Human Rights Watch report, “Lebanon: End Systemic Violence Against Transgender Women” (2019), trans-women do not feel safe in their own families, in public spaces, and when seeking basic services. Furthermore, they face police harassment on checkpoints, arbitrary detention with charges of

“violating public morality” and “incitement to debauchery”, physical violence, and forced eviction, among other systemic police repression practices. These harsh experiences obviously deter them from reporting or seeking police protection.

Trans women, particularly those with the intersecting vulnerabilities mentioned above were disproportionately affected by sexual violence perpetrated by traffickers due to a prevailing culture of impunity when it comes to seeking justice or protection from traffickers. Many trans-women who have spoken to Helem have indicated that their traffickers often have agreements or personal relationships with police officers, and can negotiate or bribe their release from detention should they ever be caught engaging in sex work. This, according to their testimonies, discourages them from seeking refuge or protection in police stations or with government officials. While no hard evidence was provided by these testimonies it remains a common practice for trafficked trans-women not to go to the police for protection and instead to rely on other actors including but not limited to civil society organizations. In addition, due to the shortage of resources and capacity building of law enforcement agencies, including the effects of the ongoing economic crisis, police officers are even less likely to follow protocol and not engage in human rights abuses against vulnerable queer individuals.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the overall figure number of cases is similar to the one recorded in 2021, with 50 cases of sexual harassment reported at Helem in 2021 (HELEM, HRV, 2021). The similarity in figures may confirm the inefficiency of Law 205 in deterring sexual harassment.

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Rape

Article 503 of the Lebanese penal code defines rape as “the act where the abuser forces any individual, other than his spouse, through the use of violence or threats to sexual intercourse,”⁷ and is considered a felony under current Lebanese law. The severity of the sentence varies according to the specific circumstances of each case. For example, if the victim is below the age of 15, the sentence cannot be less than seven years of hard labor. Articles 503 through 506 of the same law outline the different punishable situations and corresponding penalties, taking into account the age and resistance of the victim. While the recent abolition of article 522, which used to allow rapists to avoid charges by marrying their victims, was a positive step; concerns remain regarding articles 505⁸ and 518.⁹ With regards to the LGBTQIA+ community, current laws do not provide any special protection to the LGBTQ+ community, as they fall under the general provisions outlined in the aforementioned articles.

⁷ Article 503 Penal Code: “Whoever forces other than his wife with violence and threats to have sexual intercourse shall be punished with hard labor for a period of five years at least. The penalty shall not be less than seven years if the victim is under fifteen years of age.”

⁸ Article 505 Penal Code: “Whoever has intercourse with a minor under the age of fifteen shall be punished with temporary hard labor for a period of no less than five years, and the penalty shall not be less than seven years if the minor has not yet completed twelve years of age. Whoever has intercourse with a minor who has completed fifteen years of age and has not yet eighteen years, shall be punished by imprisonment from two months to two years. In this case, if a valid marriage is concluded between them, the prosecution or trial shall cease, and if a judgment was issued in the case, the execution of the sentence imposed shall be suspended, provided that the judge’s decision to suspend is not issued except on the basis of A report prepared by a social worker that takes into account the minor’s social and psychological conditions. If the decision is issued to stop the prosecution or trial or to suspend the punishment because of the marriage, the judge shall assign the social assistant to submit a report to him on the psychological and social situation of the minor after marriage, every six months within a period of three years from the date of his decision. The prosecution or trial shall continue, or the execution of the penalty shall continue before the expiry of the three-year period if the marriage ends in divorce without a legitimate reason or because of the perpetrator, or if it is found that there is any other legitimate reason that justifies the pursuit of the prosecution or trial or the execution of the penalty in light of the periodic reports referred to in this article. «

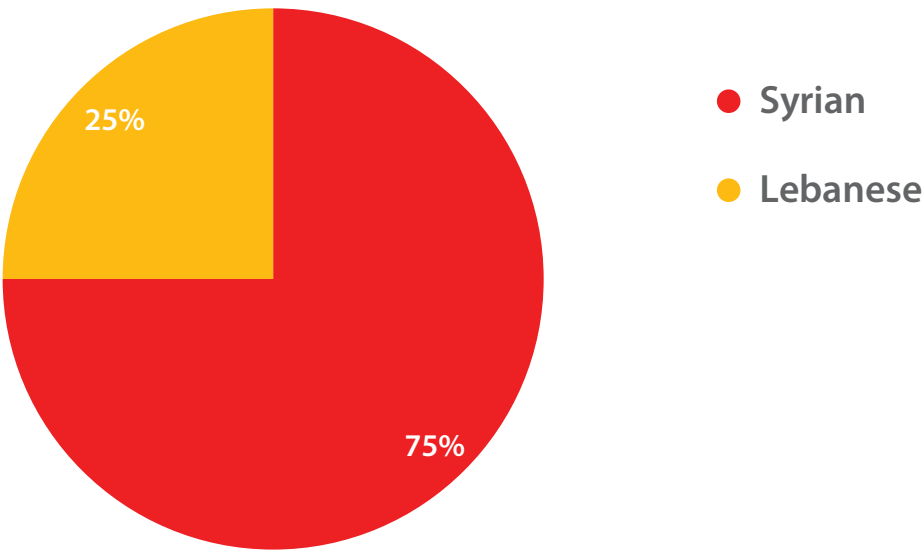
⁹ Article 518 Penal Code: “Whoever seduces a girl with the promise of marriage and breaks her virginity shall be punished, if the act does not entail a more severe punishment, by imprisonment for at least six months and a fine of between three million and five million Syrian pounds, or one of the two penalties. The penalty shall not be less than five years’ imprisonment if the assaulted minor is over fifteen and has not yet eighteen years of age. In these two cases, if a valid marriage was concluded between them, the prosecution or trial ceased, and if a judgment was issued in the case, the execution of the sentence was suspended. If the victim was a minor, the judge’s decision to suspend is not issued except based on a report prepared by a social assistant that takes into account the minor’s social and psychological conditions. If the decision is issued to stop the prosecution or trial or to suspend the punishment due to marriage, the judge, if the victim is a minor, shall instruct the social assistant to submit a report to him on the minor’s psychological and social situation after marriage, every six months within a period of three years from the date of his decision. The prosecution shall continue or the execution of the penalty shall continue before the expiry of the three-year period if the marriage ends in divorce without a legitimate reason or because of the perpetrator, or if it is found that there is any other legitimate reason that justifies the pursuit of the prosecution or the trial or the execution of the penalty in light of the periodic reports referred to in this article.”

In 2022, Helem received a total of 29 rape cases, with the majority reported by Syrian nationals (25 out of 29 cases). The data indicates that 60% of the cases were reported by trans women, 35% of rape cases were reported by cis-men, and the remainder by cis women. The high incidence of rape cases among refugees is attributed to compounded vulnerabilities as well as systemic racism against Syrians fueled by political rhetoric. The lack of legal protection in host communities, inadequate living conditions, and insufficient safe public spaces increase the vulnerability of refugees to sexual assaults. Additionally, they are often subjected to sexual assaults based on their gender expression and/or identity as well as their nationality.

In Lebanon, sexual assault, including rape, is significantly under-reported by the general public and especially by vulnerable groups. LGBTIQIA+ persons are therefore far less likely to report rape incidents due to fear of retribution by the perpetrators or judgment and stigma by society as well as lack of trust in effective recourse to justice through the courts. Historically, security agencies in Lebanon have been implicated in various forms of human rights violations against LGBTQ+ persons, particularly involving underprivileged marginalized communities. These abuses include arbitrary arrests and detention under Article 534 of the penal code or other articles (523, 524, 526, 469) as well as torture and physical violence (HRW, 2019). This leaves queer persons who are victims of sexual assault without any proper form of state and legal support. Despite legal, psychological, and case management and referral (CMR) assistance provided by Helem and other local and international organizations, the level of support remains insufficient, particularly outside of the capital city and for cases without access to such services. The failure to effectively criminalize all forms of sexual assault, to prosecute perpetrators, and to provide safety and security for those who report rape incidents from possible retribution jeopardizes the safety of LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon and virtually ensures that rape cases will continue to happen at high rates with impunity.

Child Abuse

Table 5: Child Abuse Cases by Nationality



In Lebanon, the main law that protects children is Law No. 422/2002, referred to as the “Protection of Juveniles in Conflict with the Law or Exposed to Danger”. The law vaguely stipulates that judicial intervention occurs when “the best interests of the child are at risk.” Without specifying clearly what constitutes instances of abuse and violence. The regulatory decrees of this law have not been issued yet and the main articles of this law are not being implemented, especially with regards to establishing rehabilitation centers and observation units for children in pretrial detention.

Furthermore, dealing with cases of sexual abuse of minors presents a complex and challenging task. The law does not specify a mechanism for proving sexual abuse; instead, it requires evidence, which may not always be available, such as witness testimonies and clear signs of abuse. Furthermore, a lot of children keep quiet out of fear of social backlash and reprisals, especially when it comes to the possible effects on their relationships with their families. Children are frequently the only victims and witnesses, and they do not have enough legal protection, so it is problematic that their testimony is not always accepted as credible evidence in court.

Despite Law No. 293/2014 allowing women and their children to obtain protection from an aggressor, it only applies to children up to twelve, thereby leaving older children with even less protection. Furthermore, Lebanon lacks a national action plan to combat sexual exploitation and abuse. There are no established mechanisms, procedures, or guidelines to mandate the reporting of cases involving child sexual abuse and exploitation, conduct effective investigations into such claims, and bring the perpetrators to justice. These gaps and limitations in the legal framework expose children to significant risks of violence and abuse, underscoring the need for substantial and more effective measures to protect children in Lebanon.

In 2022, Helem reported 8 child abuse cases based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity, the majority of which were of Syrian nationality. According to recent reports, the escalating crisis in Lebanon has put at least one million children at risk of violence (Beirut Today, August 2022), an alarming situation described by the reports released by local child protection organization Himaya and Plan International in 2022. Child abuse occurs across various settings from the family unit, to the school, the neighborhood, and even the workplace, as many children are compelled to work to help sustain their family’s livelihood. Within this dire situation, LGBTQIA+ children face heightened vulnerability due to rampant bullying and the lack of recognition of diverse SOGIESC both within the familial or educational settings, and the lack of oversight in schools and on teachers. Similarly, to rape or sexual harassment, or other forms of violence, gender non-conforming children and those with diverse sexual orientations are structurally ignored by the system as taboo subjects and experience legal erasure for the sake of preserving traditional social norms that underpin the power of sectarian religious and political leaders. As a result, incidents of bullying, physical, sexual, or other forms of violence are rarely reported, and LGBTQ+ children remain unprotected and continue to suffer in silence. It is also worth noting that children of Syrian origin are at higher risk of abuse, reflecting inter-sectional systems of domination within their families, in educational settings, and within hostile host communities.

There is great difficulty in accessing LGBTQ+ children by civil society organizations due to the heightened sensitivity of discussing matters related to SOGIESC in schools and powerful opposition from religious groups, parents, and school boards and administrations. Lack of adequate mental health services, inclusive healthcare, non-discriminatory curricula, protective legislation, and awareness of the unique challenges facing LGBTQ+ children are all major reasons for higher incidents of abuse. It is currently extremely difficult to provide services or even conduct research in institutions of primary, secondary, middle school, and high school education institutions to better understand this problem and develop ways to address its harmful impacts.

Forced Confinement

Forced confinement, as defined in Article 569 of the Lebanese penal code, is the act of denying a person’s freedom through any means possible.¹⁰ This crime carries a penalty of temporary hard labor, which may be increased if one of the seven instances specified in the same article occurs. Despite efforts to curb its incidence, the ongoing economic crisis has led to a rise in cases of forced confinement. The situation is particularly dire for young individuals who are economically dependent on their parents and may be forced to relocate back to their parental homes as a result of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic crisis, and other serious calamities that have befallen Lebanon between 2020 and 2022. As a result, many young people, women, and other vulnerable groups are unable to report cases of abuse for fear of facing homelessness, hunger, and a lack of access to healthcare and other basic needs.

¹⁰ Article 569 - amended according to Legislative Decree 112 dated 9/16/1983: “Whoever deprives another person of his personal freedom by kidnapping or any other means shall be punished with temporary hard labor.
The perpetrator shall be punished with life imprisonment with hard labor in each of the following cases:
1- If the period of deprivation of liberty exceeds one month.
2- If someone who is deprived of his freedom is inflicted physical or moral torture.
3- If the offense is committed against an employee while he is performing his job or in the course of performing it, or because of his affiliation with it.
4- If the motives of the crime were sectarian or partisan, or if the victim took revenge for an act committed by another of his sect, partisans or relatives.
5- If the perpetrator uses his victim as a hostage to intimidate individuals, institutions or the state in order to extort money or
Coercion to carry out a desire, to do an act, or to abstain from it.
6- If, as a consequence of the attack, the criminal committed an assault on a private or public motorized means of transportation, such as a car, train, ship, or plane.
7- If the offense was committed by a group of two or more persons, who at the time of its commission were armed.
The penalty is increased in accordance with Article 257 if the crime results in the death of a person as a result of terror or any other cause related to the accident.”

In 2022, Helem reported 14 cases of forced confinement of LGBTQIA+ persons. However, it is important to note that this number may be significantly understated, as many victims may be hesitant to come forward and report abuse and confinement and are unable to do so if they are experiencing prolonged confinement or chronic restrictions in mobility and communication with the outside world. Further, it is also important to note that the majority of the victims recorded by Helem were children or young adults who confirmed being confined by their parents after their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or expression was revealed, whether intentionally through coming out or through other means without their consent or knowledge. Conservative and reactionary attitudes towards non-normative sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions contribute to the taboo surrounding this issue, hindering efforts to address the harm caused by forced confinement. 50% of the victims collectively identified as trans men and women, who are particularly vulnerable to targeting due to their gender identity and/or expression.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping is a grave violation of human rights and is considered a criminal offense under Lebanese laws. Although the Lebanese Penal Code criminalizes acts of violence and coercion, including kidnapping, it is not enough to prevent incidents of kidnapping of vulnerable populations including LGBTQIA+ persons, and remains unable to prevent or protect against the violence associated with kidnapping, especially when individuals are targeted based on their identity, be it SOGIESC or otherwise. In fact, in 2022 state led repression against the LGBTQIA+ community escalated with various state security agencies, mirroring similar acts by private individuals, created profiles on dating applications to lure unsuspecting LGBTQ+ individuals, and kidnap them for the purpose of rape, extortion, or blackmail.

The number of reported kidnapping cases collected by Helem in 2022 is alarming, with a total of 15 documented cases. All individuals who have reported being kidnapped were Syrian: 46% of them being trans women, and 40% cis men. Here, it is important to highlight that non-Lebanese individuals, especially refugees and migrant workers, are much more vulnerable given that they are often living in Lebanon without the support of their families and without any contact with them. Therefore, in addition to the compounding vulnerabilities mentioned above, the lack of familial support means any case of kidnapping or missing person can go unreported for a much longer time, if ever, and should individuals not have solid social support, or lack registration with UNHCR or other similar agencies, they could disappear entirely without anyone knowing where they went and why.

With the rise of anti-LGBTQ+ movements in Lebanon and the escalating campaigns and hate-speech waves against the community and Syrian refugees, it is likely that the number of kidnappings will continue to rise, especially kidnappings that relate to human trafficking, extortion, and blackmail. This is especially concerning if significant efforts are not made to provide protection for marginalized groups and address the impunity surrounding acts of violence and coercion related to non-normative identities.

Self-inflicted Harm and Suicide

In light of the prevailing economic downturn and pervasive discrimination and violence, a significant number of LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon continue to face a disproportionate burden of mental health challenges, including high rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts.

The number of cases collected by Helem in 2022 reveals further deterioration in comparison to earlier years. Numbers show a staggering 20% increase in the number of individuals contacting Helem's hotline with suicidal ideation and thoughts of self-harm, as compared to the data collected in 2020 and 2021. Recent calls received by Helem, indicate that suicide attempts were reported among 46 LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon. Despite receiving counseling from Helem or its trusted referral partners in response to the attempted suicides, many of the victims reported experiencing low levels of general social support, social integration, and support from peers, all of which have been linked to a higher risk of suicidal behavior. These findings highlight the negative impact of gender-based discrimination on the mental health of LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon, particularly in light of the ongoing crisis, which has further exacerbated the lack of life-saving social support systems, especially outside of Beirut.

Moreover, hundreds of individuals are currently on the waiting list for Helem's free Mental Health Support program, which underscores the dire need for accessible and inclusive mental health services for LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon, particularly outside of Beirut. In rural areas, where discrimination and human rights violations based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity are more common due to prevalent traditional norms, there is also a lack of accessible and LGBTQ+-friendly healthcare facilities. The harsh economic situation and the soaring prices in transportation further isolate LGBTQ+ persons in need of mental health support and living in rural areas.

In "Access to Healthcare: a Right, not a Luxury", Sasha Hilani (Oxfam, 2022) confirms that groups experiencing multilayered discrimination, among which the LGBTQIA+ community, are at greater risk of mental health distress, particularly with the ongoing crises. Their pre-existing struggle to find LGBTQ-friendly mental health practitioners has increased due to the mass exodus of healthcare professionals from Lebanon following the economic crisis, many of them have received extensive training in inclusive healthcare provision. Furthermore, the shortage of medication and the soaring costs of consultations and treatments further jeopardize their right to accessible and inclusive mental health services provided by well-trained professionals sensitive to LGBTQIA+ concerns, steering clear of harmful conversion therapy practices.

Death Threats, Verbal Violence, and Blackmail

Article 574 of the Lebanese Penal Code stipulates that making death threats (threatening to commit a felony) is punishable by imprisonment ranging from one to three years, according to the severity of the threat and its potential impact on the person(s) receiving it. This categorizes the criminal offense as a misdemeanor, with a penalty ranging from two months to two years along with the payment of a fine.¹¹

Therefore, according to Lebanese legislation, any form of threat and/or blackmail against another person is deemed a criminal offense that infringes upon the freedom and dignity of the victim. The police can take preventive actions to protect individuals, depending on the severity of the threats. However, when threats are made verbally without witnesses, it becomes challenging to provide evidence and seek legal and police protection. Moreover, the police rarely provide protection, unless the victim possesses a significant amount of privilege, is financially capable, and/or well connected. This further diminishes the likelihood of police and legal intervention in support of individuals threatened based on their non-normative SOGIESC, unless they are part of a privileged group. For individuals facing intersecting systems of discrimination, their claims are more likely to be disregarded, akin to the erasure of their basic rights, among which the right to exist. In fact, many LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to succumb to blackmail because the financial or in-kind cost of appeasing the blackmailer is often less dangerous than the long-term familial, social, and economic costs of being outed or having one's personal life revealed in public.

¹¹ Article 650 Penal Code: "Anyone who threatens a person to expose, divulge, or inform about a matter and which would harm the dignity or honor of that person or of one of his relatives or honor in order to force him to bring an unlawful benefit to him or others, shall be punished by imprisonment from two months to two years and a fine of up to six hundred thousand pounds. The penalty is increased in accordance with Article 257 of penalties for the perpetrator if the matter that threatens to expose him is related to his work by virtue of his position, profession or art."

In recent years, the LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon has witnessed a disturbing increase in threats, violence, and discrimination. Members of this community have reported receiving death threats, verbal abuse, and blackmail from individuals or groups who seek to impose their own beliefs and values on others, or who view LGBTQ+ individuals as immoral or deviant. This created a hostile and unsafe environment for the community with cases of blackmail, threats, or verbal use occurring upon discovering the person's sexual orientation or gender identity or any audiovisual material depicting them in intimate contexts with other people or by themselves. Threats to disclose private material or life choices for the purpose of blackmail have become extremely common and prevalent. Many of these cases happen between members of the community itself, where often cases of nude photos or explicit videos, taken without consent, are then used to extort community members. The dire economic crisis facing Lebanon has been one of the main drivers behind this alarming increase, and often community members are so scared and intimidated they refuse to disclose the blackmail to anyone including CSOs and legal practitioners.

The number of cases of blackmail, death threats, and verbal violence is the highest of all cases reported by Helem and amounts to 614 cases in 2022 only. The number is alarming and accounts for nearly 16% of the overall number of cases recorded by Helem during that year.

The majority of those who reported being subjected to such violations were Syrian refugees. Additionally, incidents of blackmail typically that involve the extortion of money or sexual favors by clients, sex traffickers, employers, or individuals in relationships with the victims happen on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, dating apps such as Grindr, and chat apps such as Whatsapp. The disproportionate number of blackmail incidents involving Syrian nationals can be attributed to their status as refugees formally registered with UNHCR. Without a formal social or economic safety net, Syrian refugees rely solely on the monthly or emergency cash assistance provided by UNHCR. This leaves them vulnerable to socio-economic rights violations, including blackmail, which further compounds their already precarious situation.

In addition, death threats in Lebanon have also spiked in 2022, amounting to 132 cases in 2022 alone. Syrian cis men (38% of the death threat cases) and Syrian trans women (19% of the death threat cases) are the most prominent victims of death threats. With the general wave of hatred and the numerous campaigns, as mentioned before, in this report, against both Syrian refugees, and the LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon, members who belong to both, find themselves at the utmost risk of violations and have their safety compromised by constant death threats and verbal abuses. Economically precarious individuals within this category that often find themselves grappling with intersecting layers of discrimination and scapegoating are highly unlikely to seek police or legal protection, let alone report violations, due to fear of deportation or state-led repression.

These findings showcase the urgent need for measures to protect vulnerable populations such as Syrian refugees from exploitation and abuse. Immediate action is required to address the root causes of socio-economic rights violations and provide greater support to those who are most at risk. Such measures should include access to safe and affordable housing, protection from employment discrimination, and the provision of legal assistance to those who have been victims of blackmail or other forms of exploitation.

Sex trafficking

Sex trafficking is a global problem that affects millions of individuals, particularly women and children. In Lebanon, the issue of sex trafficking is addressed through Law 164/2011, also known as the Lebanese Anti-Trafficking Law. This law provides legal protection for victims of trafficking and outlines the necessary repercussions for convicted traffickers. One of the key provisions of the Lebanese Anti-Trafficking law is the addition of a chapter to the Lebanese penal code that is specifically dedicated to the crime of human trafficking. This chapter includes articles 586 (I) through 586 (II) which stipulate varying punishments for traffickers depending on the severity of the offense. These penalties range from a minimum of five to a maximum of 15 years of imprisonment, with fine payment.

The Lebanese Anti-Trafficking Law also establishes several measures aimed at protecting and supporting victims of trafficking. These include the provision of shelter, medical care, and legal assistance, as well as measures to ensure the safety of victims and their families. Additionally, the law creates a national anti-trafficking committee tasked with coordinating efforts to combat trafficking and provide support for victims. Despite the existence of these legal protections and support measures, sex trafficking remains a significant problem in Lebanon, as traffickers often target vulnerable populations, including refugees and individuals in poverty, and use a variety of methods to coerce and control their victims.

According to the data collected in 2022, a total of six cases of sex trafficking against LGBTQ+ persons have been reported to Helem, all of which involve individuals of Syrian origin. Discussions and follow-ups of the cases by Helem have always shown that sex trafficking is linked with deprivation of the right to work. In fact, the LGBTQ+ community, particularly trans women and cis men, are disproportionately affected by discrimination in access to labor and employment opportunities, which may occur during the hiring process or while employed. Transwomen (50% of the cases of sex trafficking) are more likely to be denied positions or face discriminatory treatment from employers and colleagues (HELEM, LRV, 2021). As a result of these discriminatory practices, many individuals, especially those in vulnerable situations, are forced to engage in survival sex work to make ends meet, thereby increasing the risk of falling victim to sex trafficking.

Addressing discrimination in the workplace and providing legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals would not only reduce the prevalence of illegal activities, but also improve their overall quality of life. By ensuring that LGBTQ+ individuals are treated equally and provided with the same opportunities as their colleagues, they will be less likely to engage in survival sex work and other illegal activities.

The issue of sex trafficking in Lebanon is shrouded in complexity and ambiguity, with the industry expanding and becoming increasingly prevalent since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011. Many sex work traffickers operate illegally and with impunity, often having connections with law enforcement as well as armed non-state actors on both sides of the border to facilitate the trafficking of human beings. In this context, both Syrian cisgender men and transgender women are equally vulnerable to sex trafficking, with methods and reasons for their exploitation varying widely among those who reported incidents in 2022.

Forced Marriage and Risk of Forced Marriage

Lebanon does not have a unified “Personal Status Law” or any civil code regulating issues such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, among other matters. Each one of the 18 recognized sects has its own set of rules regarding personal law which contrasts in many instances with humanitarian standards and international law. Therefore, issues like marriage, custody of children, inheritance, and other familial matters are often left to religious courts which disproportionately discriminate against women and sexual and gender minorities. Therefore, incidents involving forced marriage often become a severe violation of human rights and affect individuals on a significant level. Unfortunately, in Lebanon, forced marriage is still prevalent, and LGBTQ+ individuals are becoming at a higher risk of this violation due to the significant power and influence religious institutions hold over their lives. The root cause of forced marriage is deeply entrenched in patriarchal traditions and cultural norms. Marriage is viewed as a means of strengthening family ties, social status, and financial stability. More problematic, is that, in some instances, forced marriage is viewed as a solution to remedy individuals’ “deviant behavior,” and a tactic that families often use to enforce heteronormative life on their children. In addition, forced marriage is also often used as a desperate tactic to preserve a family’s “reputation and honor” through plausible deniability, where marriage is marketed as a sure sign of a child’s normative and heterosexual/cis-gendered identity.

Therefore, individuals, especially in rural areas, due to their economic dependence and inability to leave their parental house, sometimes due to death threats, are often forced to marry someone of the opposite gender, leading to a lifetime of trauma, mental health issues, and physical harm - often for both partners. In 2022, Helem has documented 8 cases of forced marriage in 2022, revealing that cis men are the most affected, constituting 5 of the 8 reported cases. Some individuals who have reported being subjected to forced marriage have mainly also said being exposed to conversion therapy, forced sex, rape, confinement, and chronic verbal abuse.

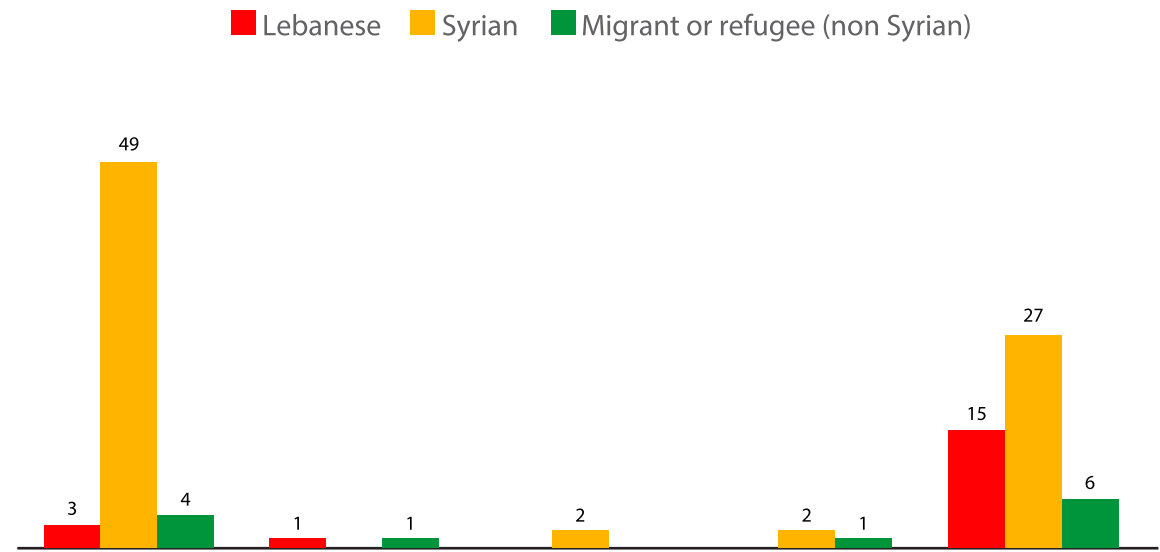
To address the issue of forced marriage among LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon, there is a need for a multi-faceted approach that addresses cultural norms, legal frameworks, and social attitudes toward gender and sexuality. This approach must involve engaging with key stakeholders, including the government, religious leaders, civil society, and families. The Lebanese government must also work towards creating a civil legal framework that allows for personal status laws outside religious courts, recognizes LGBTQ+ rights, and ensures that forced marriage is recognized as a criminal offense with appropriate punishment for offenders. Additionally, there is a need for policies and programs that promote awareness and education on gender and sexuality, human rights, and the harmful impact of forced marriage on all people, not just young cis-gender girls which is the most prevalent form of awareness on this topic.

Lack of Access to Primary Rights

Homelessness, Eviction and Risk of Homelessness and Eviction

Homelessness and eviction are significant issues in Lebanon, particularly for vulnerable populations such as LGBTQ+ individuals. This phenomenon has become increasingly common due to the economic crisis in recent years, which had a significant impact on the housing situation of many individuals, including LGBTQ+ individuals who are already at risk of homelessness and eviction due to discrimination and social stigma. Many living arrangements since the advent of the crisis have been without regulation, with landlords often taking advantage of the desperate situation of vulnerable groups such as refugees and LGBTIQ+ individuals to either rent without contracts, under unsuitable or dangerous living conditions, and with exorbitant prices. To make matters worse, the economic crisis has also led to job losses, reduced wages, and soaring inflation making it increasingly difficult for people to afford housing in general. Consequently, many individuals have been forced out of their homes or are at risk of eviction, with few options other than returning to their parents' homes should they be fortunate to have family in Lebanon and still be able to connect to it, seeking refuge with former partners, or otherwise facing the danger and indignity of homelessness.

Table 6: Eviction Risk by Gender and Nationality



Numbers concerning homelessness are constantly increasing, as Helem recorded 331 cases of homelessness, risk of eviction, and eviction in 2022. Among these cases, 75 individuals have been evicted this year alone, and 98 have reported being homeless.

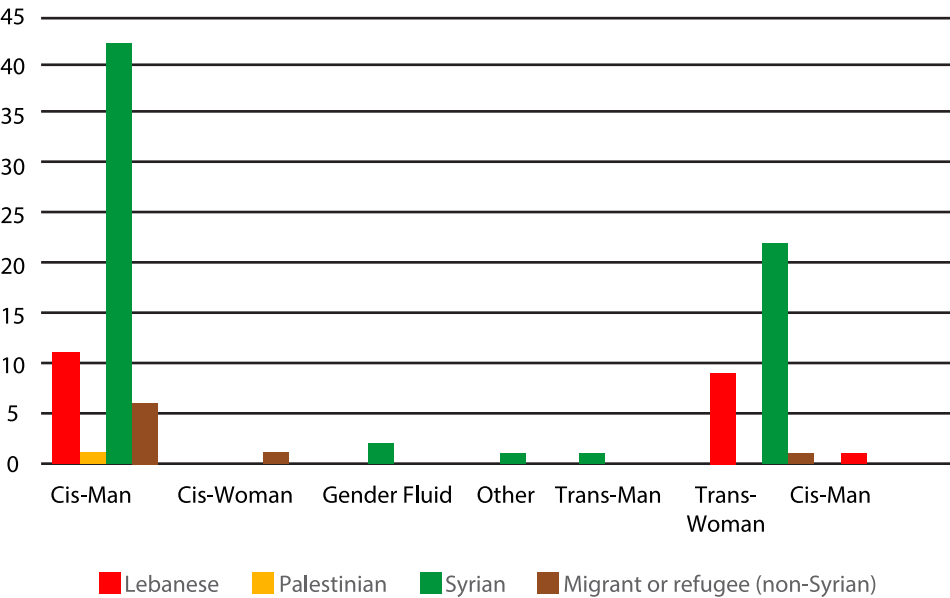
For LGBTQ+ individuals, the economic crisis can exacerbate the already difficult situation they face in accessing housing; especially that many of the cases had already reported being kicked out by their landlord when they found out about their SOGIESC most often reported by their neighbors. Discrimination and social stigma have significantly limited job opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals and increased their likelihood of living in poverty which makes any prospect of finding new spaces to live more difficult.

Among those at risk of eviction, 75% of reported cases involved individuals of Syrian nationality, followed by 14% Lebanese individuals. Syrian refugees in particular face this challenge on a regular basis, as they lack the same access to resources as their Lebanese counterparts, are often without social or familial support, and do not receive adequate financial aid from international refugee agencies in order to afford the purposefully exorbitant prices that Lebanese landlords impose on them within the massively unregulated Lebanese housing market.

Additional reasons for eviction included instances where younger community members were evicted or had to flee their parent's home to escape domestic violence after revealing their SOGIESC to their families or after having it revealed by mistake or by someone else.

As shown in Table 6, Syrians are the most vulnerable to homelessness and the housing crisis. When it comes to homelessness, 70% of the individuals who reported being homeless were holders of Syrian nationality, followed by 23% who were Lebanese.

Table 7: Homelessness by Gender and Nationality



Reports to Helem indicate that Syrians are the most vulnerable to homelessness and the housing crisis. Among those experiencing homelessness, 70% are Syrian nationals, followed by 23% who are Lebanese.

Trans women face the highest risk of eviction and homelessness, with 15 reported cases of eviction threats and 9 cases of homelessness as of December 2022. This is mainly because trans women, as well as all gender non-conforming individuals, have greater difficulty in hiding their SOGIESC, especially when it comes to presenting identification information or official papers that have their dead names and their gender assigned at birth on them which are often in contrast to their chosen names and/or their current physical appearance and means of gender expression. This makes trans women extremely vulnerable to the associated discrimination and violence that often comes with negotiating formal agreements for basic needs, including housing and shelter.

The right to housing is recognized under international human rights law. Housing rights are included in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which are ratified by Lebanon. Therefore, discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in housing violates not only basic human rights but also is a stark failure on behalf of the Lebanese state to uphold its international legal commitments. To address this issue, Lebanon needs to strengthen its legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals and ensure equal access to housing and employment. Organizations and non-governmental groups working on this issue should consider economically viable and sustainable options, such as co-ops, community shelters, and repurposed housing. Additionally, targeted interventions such as LGBTQ+ inclusive housing programs and non-discrimination training for landlords and housing providers can help to reduce discrimination and homelessness among this population.

Inability to Afford Food, Water, and Medication

According to a recent report by Human Rights Watch (Dec 2022), a deepening economic crisis in Lebanon has left the majority of the population unable to secure their social and economic rights. Worryingly, low-income households were particularly affected by poverty and food insecurity caused by political instability, declining economic activity, and rising costs of living.

The queer community in Lebanon is among those mostly impacted by the compounded crises because of their pre-existing struggles to secure their primary rights. A report entitled “Queer Community in Lebanon: Trauma, Inequality and Vulnerability” published by Oxfam in partnership with Helem (June 2021) revealed that the LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon has already been particularly hard hit by the successive economic and political crises affecting the country. The report highlights a sharp increase in demand for basic needs such as food, shelter, and medication, placing an additional burden on a community already struggling with endemic inequality, violence, and violations of their civil, political, and bodily rights.

The numbers of cases reporting the inability to access food, medicine, and basic needs at HELEM in 2022 reflect the same claims of the 2021 HELEM report. In fact, 296 individuals, nearly 10% of the overall cases, have reported not being able to access food, water, medication, or the three combined. Among the nearly 300 cases recorded at HELEM, the inability to afford minimum needs has impacted both groups of persons holding Lebanese as well as Syrian nationality, 45% percent of which are cis men, followed by 40% trans women.

Even prior to the onset of the economic crisis in late 2019, many LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon relied on support from LGBTQ+ groups and community centers for financial assistance, psychosocial support, and health care. However, the economic crisis has placed a significant strain on these organizations, and political pressure has further limited their services. Furthermore, the impact of the crisis on LGBTQ+ individuals is exacerbated by the fact that many who previously provided support to others, including temporary lodging, can no longer do so due to the economic conditions and social and political unrests.

Despite the severity of the situation, the response of the governmental authorities has been inadequate in supporting the most vulnerable communities, failing to ensure access to basic needs, among which food and medical care. Conversely, state institutions have only been prompted to take decisions that essentially protect and amplify the interests of ruling elites at the expense of the overall well-being of society and the underprivileged which has exacerbated the crisis and firmly entrenched control of resources into the hands of a privileged few without hope of any serious reform.

Moreover, Lebanon’s social protection system is highly fragmented, and the state plays a residual role, often delegating social service provision either to the private sector or to clientelist and nepotist networks. This leaves many groups, particularly those living on the margins of the current political and social system without any protection, further exacerbating social and economic inequalities, particularly amidst the ongoing crises.

While humanitarian aid can slow down the collapse and provide a safety net for the poorer groups, there is an urgent need for donors to push for structural economic reforms that prioritize human rights and the needs of the most vulnerable groups and individuals, including marginalized communities and LGBTQIA+ persons.

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Arrest and Detention

While homosexuality is not explicitly criminalized in Lebanon, many articles in the Lebanese penal code are used to oppress persons with non-normative SOGIESC. For example, article 534 criminalizes any intercourse deemed to be “against the order of nature.”¹² Since a precise, unified understanding of what constitutes “unnatural sex” is not available nor agreed upon among the judiciary nor the public, it is often left to the discretion of police forces and/or judges, leading to arbitrary arrest of individuals in Lebanon, based on their SOGIESC. Even though the district court of appeal has dismissed the use of article 534 against LGBTQIA+ persons in many instances since 2017, arrests based on SOGIESC are still common.

Moreover, article 521¹³ of the Lebanese Criminal Code penalizes any “man wearing women’s clothes” and entering places specified for women only, with a maximum sentence of 6 months in prison or with a fine of one million Lebanese Lira. This is used to arrest trans* persons based on appearance and sexual expression. Other articles worth mentioning include Articles 531 and 532¹⁴ of the Lebanese Criminal Code, which penalize the “violation of public morals” in public places or public transportation. Consequently, individuals caught in sexual acts in public spaces are arrested and convicted. Further, article 533¹⁵ of the Lebanese Criminal Code criminalizes the act of creating writings, drawings, and pictures that violate public morals. This article is also used to penalize individuals of the LGBTQ+ community based on private images, writings, and messages found on their phones, deeming them a violation of public morals.

¹² Lebanese Penal Code, Article 534: “Any unnatural sexual intercourse shall be punishable by up to one year of imprisonment.”

¹³ Lebanese Penal Code, Article 521: Every man who disguises himself as a woman and enters a place reserved for women or whose entry is prohibited at the time of the act for non-women shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a maximum of six months or a fine of up to LBP one million.

¹⁴ Infringement of public morals by one of the means mentioned in the second and third paragraphs of Article 209 shall be punishable by imprisonment from one month to one year and a fine of LBP twenty thousand to LBP two hundred thousand.

¹⁵ The same penalties shall apply to anyone who manufactures, exports or supplies writings, drawings, pictures, photographs, films and badges, or other indecent things with the intention of trading or distributing them, or advertises or makes known how such materials may be obtained.

These arrests were justified under the vague and outdated articles 534 and 521, which have been interpreted to criminalize homosexuality and justify transphobia. This law stands in clear violation of international human rights norms and standards, which uphold the rights to privacy and freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

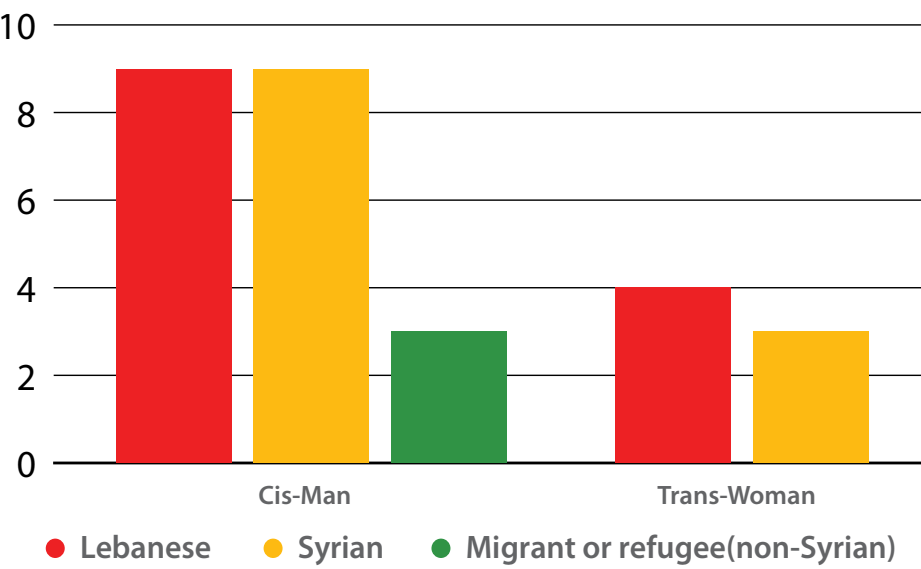
It is important to note that the above-mentioned data may not accurately represent the exact cases of the LGBTQ+ related arrests. This is because of various factors, including the occurrence of a vast number of arrests without Helem’s knowledge, as detainees fear being identified as LGBTQ+ in a country where this is still considered “shameful.” Furthermore, the majority of arrests reported to Helem tend to come from the Morality Protections Bureau at Hobeich police station in Ras Beirut, concerned with processing all cases arising from the breach of Article 534 of the penal code. This means that most cases occurring outside the scope of this bureau are usually not reported to the organization. This is attributed to a multitude of reasons, including the general dysfunction and lack of resources throughout Lebanon’s security apparatus, leading to the complete disregard of established protocols and reporting procedures to Helem. Such cases are often witnessed in other urban and rural areas outside of Beirut.

The consequences of these arrests have been devastating for the individuals involved. Many have been subjected to torture and abuse, and some have been forced to undergo invasive medical examinations to “prove” their homosexuality. Others have been ostracized from their communities, lost their jobs, or faced violence and harassment from family members or others in their community. The Lebanese government has a responsibility to protect the human rights of all its citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It must recognize that its actions against the LGBTQ+ community constitute a clear violation of basic human rights, including the right to privacy, freedom from discrimination, and freedom from torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. The government should immediately release all individuals who have been arrested on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity and repeal the law criminalizing “unnatural acts.”

Labor and Workplace Violations

Work Discrimination

Table 8: Work Discrimination by Gender and Nationality



The Lebanese Labor law’s Article 26¹⁶ prohibits employers from engaging in gender-based discrimination against men and women in terms of job tasks, salary, employment, promotions, and dress code. This legal provision serves as a safeguard for employees against any discrimination based on gender, as it creates a new obligation for the employer to adhere to. If this obligation is not respected, the employee has the right to resign before the end of their contract without prior notice, as stipulated in Article 75¹⁷ subsection 2 of the Law in question. Even though the Lebanese labor law attempts to address work discrimination, it has not been updated since 1959 and remains short of protecting various marginalized groups, including workers based on their SOGIESC or any other vulnerable status beyond a binary recognition of sex/gender. Indeed, incidents of discrimination are still being reported, particularly among members of the LGBTQ+ community. As of 2022, HELEM documented 28 cases of discrimination in the workplace, among these cases 21 involved cis men and 7 involved trans women. Employers tend to exploit queer workers, especially those within the

working class who are not legally allowed to work in Lebanon, by offering lower wages, no benefits, no contracts, and no social security or health insurance.

Discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace remains a significant problem, especially amid the crisis in the country, as resignation (as per Article 75) is no longer a viable option due to a lack of opportunities and overall economic stagnation. According to Helem’s “Labor Rights Violations Report” released in August 2022, LGBTQ+ persons face unequal treatment, work without contracts or registration to the NSSF, and are less paid than their peers - among other violations. In addition, discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace can take the form of discriminatory policies and practices. Due to their SOGIESC, individuals have reported being overlooked for promotions or job opportunities, being assigned menial tasks or responsibilities, or being excluded from training and development programs. For example, some employers may refuse to hire or promote LGBTQ+ individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Others may have policies that exclude them from accessing certain benefits or opportunities, such as access to gender-neutral restrooms.

These practices of workplace discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon hold serious consequences, such as loss of job opportunities, career stagnation, and financial instability, which can affect the individual's mental and physical health. Discrimination can also lead to negative attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals within the workplace, perpetuating a culture of intolerance and exclusion.

¹⁶ Article 26 Labor Law: “The employer may not discriminate between working men and women with regard to: type of work, amount of wage or salary, employment, promotion, professional qualification, and apparel.”
¹⁷ Article 75 Labor Law: “The wage-earner or salary-earner is entitled to leave work before the date provided for in the contract and without prior notice in the following cases:
[...]
2- If the employer does not honor their obligations towards the wage-earner or salary-earner, in conformity with the requirements of the present law;
[...].”

To address workplace discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon, employers must take concrete steps to ensure a safe and inclusive work environment. This includes implementing anti-discrimination policies, providing diversity and inclusion training for employees, and enforcing consequences for discriminatory behavior. It also includes supporting LGBTQ+ individuals by providing resources for mental health and legal assistance and promoting LGBTQ+ visibility and representation within the workplace.

Arbitrary Dismissal

The Lebanese labor law has put forth measures to prevent arbitrary expulsion in the workplace, as discussed in article 50 subsection “d”.¹⁸ While this section outlines some of the cases that can form grounds for arbitrary expulsion. Moreover, subsection d(1), considers dismissal as an arbitrary expulsion whenever it occurs for a non-valid reason or for reasons not related to the employee’s performance. In addition, subsection d(5) protects employees from such dismissal if it has occurred due to the employee exercising his “individual and public liberties within the framework of the laws in force.” However, it is important to note that the law allows for interpretation and leaves it up to Lebanese courts to determine whether other cases should be deemed as arbitrary expulsion.

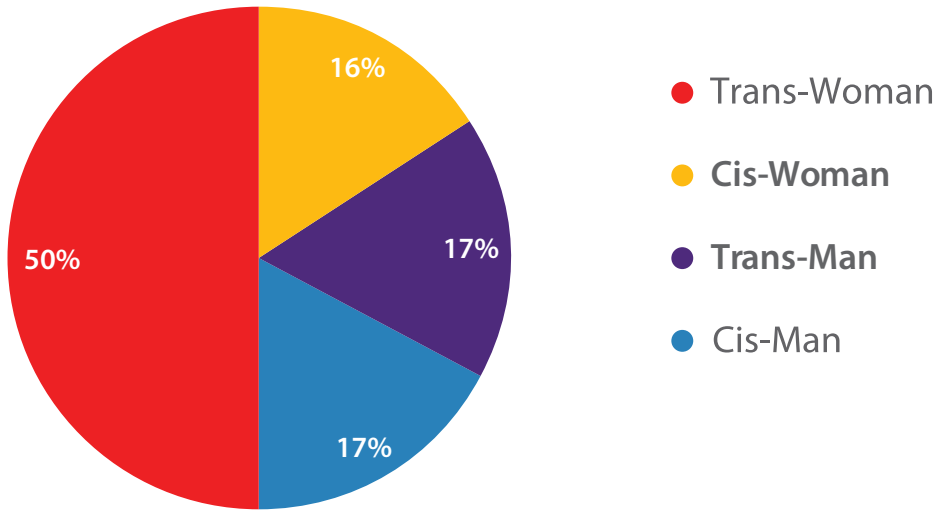
¹⁸ Article 50 Labor Law subsection (d): “Dismissal shall be considered as being the fact of misuse or abuse of right if it should occur in the following cases:
1- For a non-valid reason or for reason in no way pertaining to the worker's fitness or behavior within the establishment or to the sound management and smooth running of the establishment.
2- For having adhered or not to a given trade union, or for having engaged in a legal trade union activity, within the laws and regulations in force or within the framework of a group or individual labor agreement.
3- For having stood for elections, or for having been elected as a member of a trade union office or having represented the establishment's labor force, throughout the period of such representation.
4- For having lodged, in good faith, with the competent Services, a complaint regarding the implementation of the provisions of the present law and of texts referring thereto, or having brought a case against the employer on the same basis.
5- For having exercised his individual or public liberties within the framework of the laws in force.”

Despite the measures outlined in the Lebanese labor law, reports of arbitrary expulsion continue to surface. Helem recorded an increase of 50% in cases of arbitrary expulsion between 2021 and 2022, with a total of 9 cases of arbitrary dismissal reported in 2022. With more than 75% of them targeting Syrian refugees, the majority of those cases involved Syrian cis men (5 cases) and one trans woman, highlighting the vulnerability of refugees in the Lebanese job market and the prevalence of the practice of hiring refugees by Lebanese employers in order to avoid competitive wages and providing benefits. It is worth noting that many Syrian workers are employed without any written or verbal contract, making it difficult for them to seek justice in the case of dismissal. Moreover, individuals whose SOGIESC was revealed at their workplace have also experienced immediate dismissal by their employers, without any compensation or notice period. Such cases have been reported frequently and are indicative of the discrimination and stigma faced by the LGBTQ+ community in the workplace. It is essential to recognize that labor rights violations in Lebanon are underreported and that these cases represent only a fraction of the community's experience.

More needs to be done to improve the situation, and efforts must be made to ensure that labor laws are enforced and that employees are protected from arbitrary expulsion based on SOGIESC or any other personal characteristic. Effectively preventing such dismissals necessitates a multifaceted strategy, including the implementation of anti-discrimination policies and the establishment of secure reporting mechanisms. Additionally, it is imperative to engage the private sector to spearhead these efforts by cultivating workplaces that are inclusive, diverse, and equitable. This collaborative approach can drive meaningful change and foster environments where every individual is respected and protected.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Table 9: Work Discrimination by Gender and Nationality



Article 1 of Law No. 205/2020 provides a definition of sexual harassment as “any repeated improper behavior, undesired by the victim and with a sexual connotation violating his moral and physical wellbeing.”¹⁹ This law convicts harassers with a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment ranging from one month to one year, and a fine ranging from three to ten times the minimum wage. However, the absence of legislation on sexual harassment and exploitation in the workplace remains an issue. Although a draft law on sexual harassment in the workplace was approved by the cabinet in 2017, it is still pending approval in parliament.

The current law, despite being a good step, falls short of decreasing the burden of proof on the victim and protecting those who are not covered by the labor law and are most vulnerable to harassment and exploitation, such as domestic workers. Furthermore, neither of the existing laws provide protection based on SOGIESC, nor do they acknowledge that the burden of proof on queer individuals is much costlier and more dangerous than that on normative and cis-hetero individuals experiencing the same violations.

This is even more troubling because sexual and other forms of harassment are one of the most common forms of discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace. Being subject to harassment can severely affect the well-being of queer people and can take various forms, such as verbal abuse, physical threats or violence, exclusion from social activities, offensive comments, jokes, or derogatory language about a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Harassment, first and foremost, creates a hostile work environment that can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression.

As seen in Table 10, 50% of individuals who have been victims of sexual harassment in the workplace identified as trans-women, followed by equal percentages for cis-women, cis-men, and trans-man combined. Despite Law 205/2020 enhancing penalties for workplace sexual harassment, the Lebanese labor law has yet to explicitly address the issue. Therefore, there is a crucial need for comprehensive legislation that not only offers protection against sexual harassment and discrimination but also acknowledges and addresses the distinct challenges faced by queer individuals in the workplace.

¹⁹ Law 205/2020, Anti-sexual harassment Law.

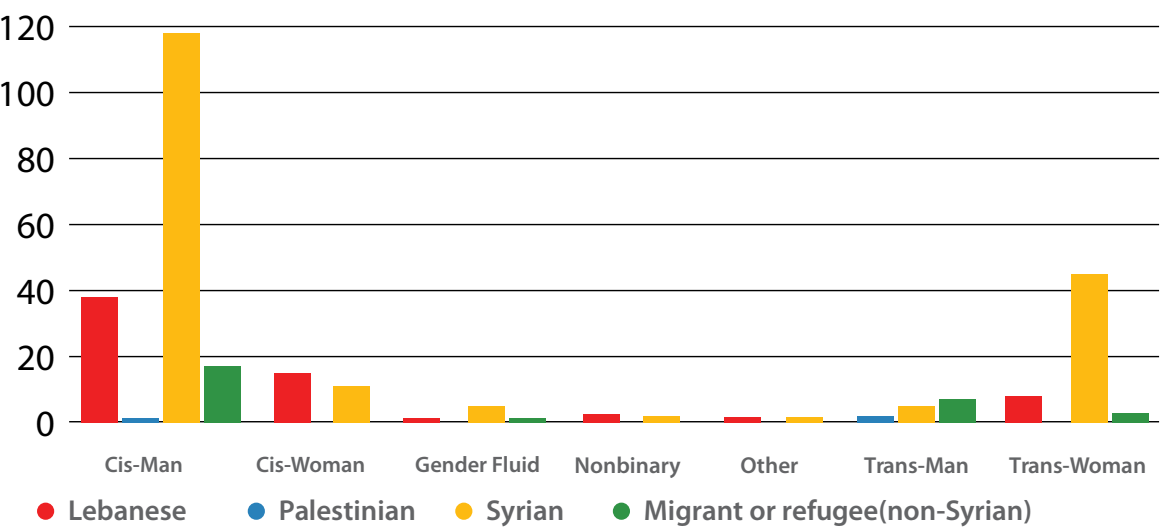
Needs Assistance

Legal Assistance

Regarding Helem’s response to calls for legal assistance among the LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon for 2022, the organization received a total of 71 calls for legal assistance. The primary category of cases requiring legal assistance involved individuals summoned for investigation, whether they were already detained or at a heightened risk of arrest. Additionally, Helem provided legal aid for cases of sexual and gender-based violence where victims sought to press charges against perpetrators and demand necessary police protection. Among the reported arrest cases, 42% involved Syrian refugees and Lebanese nationals, constituting around 51% of the recorded cases. Most Syrian refugees were detained under the pretext of lacking necessary residency papers or not being registered with the UNHCR. Interrogation attempts, mistreatment, and other interactions with investigators and police officers revealed consistent discrimination and targeting based on the detainee’s SOGIESC, as documented through case management done by Helem lawyers.

Psychological Care Provision and SOGIESC Questioning Needs

Table 10: Psychological Assistance by Gender and Nationality



The demand for mental healthcare services by the LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon has increased sharply due to the several crises that have befallen Lebanon since the beginning of 2020. Helem received 292 cases in 2022 alone, with the majority of cases related to suicidal ideation, clinical depression, and post-traumatic stress. These alarming figures reflect the deteriorating nature of mental healthcare provision in Lebanon, with a majority of the LGBTQ+ community being unable to access or afford it.

The cost of mental healthcare in Lebanon, including medication and psychiatric care, is high due to the soaring inflation and the unavailability of qualified therapists, counselors, and psychiatrists who adhere to guidelines set by the Lebanese Psychological Association and the Lebanese Association of Psychiatrists. Furthermore, many practitioners still engage in conversion therapy also known as SOGIESC change efforts, further limiting access to appropriate care for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Table 11 shows the distribution of LGBTQ+ community members who sought mental health care at Helem. Syrian refugees were found to be the most at risk due to the effects of institutionalized xenophobia in addition to homophobia and transphobia. This is particularly true for those who have not registered with UNHCR and lack a reliable safety net.

Shelter

As part of Helem’s activities in 2022, the organization provided shelter for a total of 35 LGBTQ+ individuals who were either already homeless or under threat of becoming so, protecting them from potential harm.

Among the cases received by Helem in 2022, Syrian cis men were the most in need of shelter, with 21 cases out of 35, followed by 7 instances involving Syrian trans women. Providing shelter for LGBTQ+ individuals is a critical activity, particularly in Lebanon, where many members of the community face threats to their safety and well-being. Many LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon risk being ostracized by their families, rejected by their communities, or even subjected to violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. As a result, many of these individuals find themselves without a safe place to live, rendering them vulnerable to further harm. This situation is particularly dire for those who have been disowned by their families, as they may lack other means of support or shelter.

Given the lack of legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon, very few organizations provide shelter specifically for this population. As a result, many LGBTQ+ individuals are forced to live in unsafe conditions or rely on the kindness of friends or acquaintances for a temporary place to stay. This situation is not only precarious but also perpetuates the cycle of vulnerability and marginalization many LGBTQ+ individuals face in Lebanon.

Cash Assistance

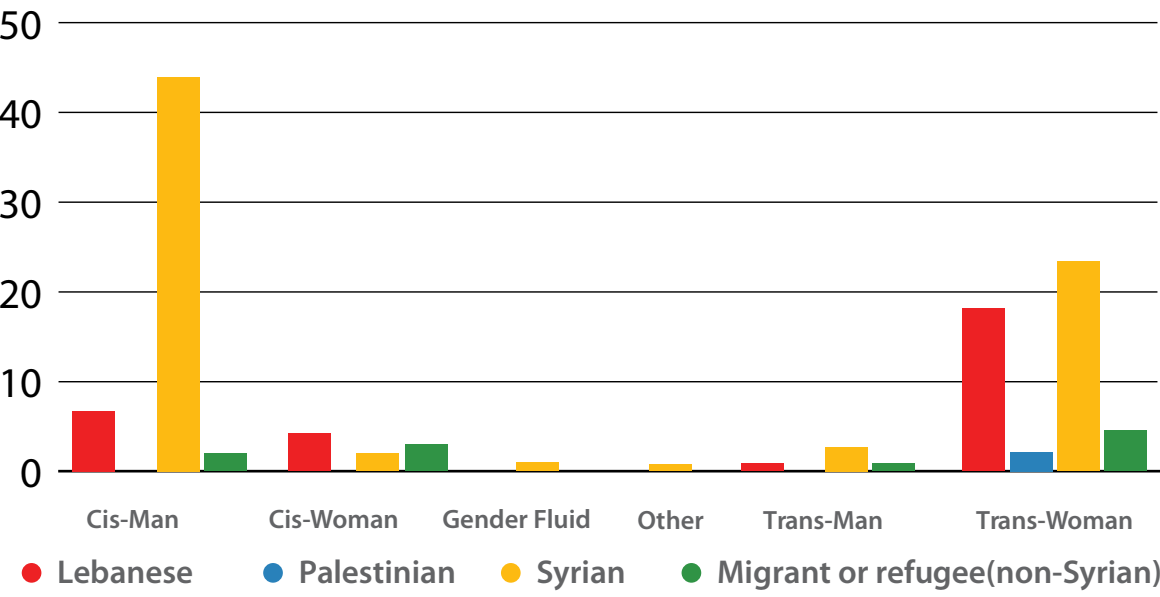
Cash assistance is a crucial aspect of the support provided to the LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon by Helem, and should be included in the activities of other organizations focusing on humanitarian, development, and crisis response assistance for all vulnerable groups and marginalized communities in the country. The provision of cash assistance is often essential for meeting the basic needs of individuals who face a range of threats, including sexual and orientation-based violence, verbal and physical abuse, work discrimination, and other forms of intimidation. As previously explained, for these individuals, securing basic needs such as food, shelter, and transportation becomes essential to guarantee their safety, security, and health.

The dire economic situation in Lebanon has made it even more important to provide cash assistance to those in need, particularly those who require medical attention or mental health support. Many individuals may find themselves unable to afford urgent medical tests and medications, hospitalization, or shelter, which can exacerbate their already vulnerable situation. In addition to meeting basic needs, cash assistance can also be used for relocation purposes, particularly for victims of violence or individuals who are at risk of violence. This type of assistance is usually provided after the development of a case management plan, which is tailored to the needs of the individual in question and is agreed upon by both the protection officers and the applicant.

Medical Assistance

Access to healthcare is a critical issue for LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon due to several factors. Firstly, the ongoing economic crisis in the country has resulted in a decrease in availability and an increase in the cost of healthcare. Secondly, the government is unable to provide any form of social security and healthcare, and private health insurance companies are unwilling and unable to cover the specific healthcare needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

Table 11: Medical Assistance by Gender and Nationality



Thirdly, the ongoing crisis in Lebanon has caused a significant number of healthcare professionals to leave the country, leading to a shortage of qualified healthcare providers who are able to attend to the specific healthcare needs of the LGBTQ+ community. This is especially true in areas related to endocrinology, gynecology, and mental health. The shortage of qualified healthcare providers has resulted in increased demand for the remaining clinics and practitioners, causing further strain on an already limited healthcare system. Finally, the existing healthcare options available are often unsafe and unschooled in how to service and treat non-conforming and non-normative bodies and people, which further compounds the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community.

In 2022, Helem received 135 calls requesting medical assistance; 17 of which were related to sexual health and sexually transmitted infections. The remaining cases involved chronic or one-time needs for medicine, operations, medical consultations, and other healthcare-related needs. It is worth noting that the majority of the cases involved Syrian cis men and trans women. Amidst the campaigns of hate and scapegoating of Syrian refugees, LGBTQ+ persons remain the most vulnerable as they face systems of injustice both within their community and the host community.

It is crucial to work towards health care provision systems that are accessible to all marginalized groups regardless of SOGIESC, status, or background. However, in the shorter term, it is important to inform and educate healthcare providers about how to effectively treat and care for non-normative bodies and persons across various healthcare sectors. Furthermore, it is also important for the queer community in Lebanon to organize its own mutual aid groups to offer each other mental support, medical material assistance, and a safe space to express their various concerns.

Asylum

The situation for LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon has become increasingly dire, with many individuals seeking assistance for resettlement or asylum abroad. In 2022, Helem recorded 138 individuals who sought the organization's help and advice to secure asylum or resettlement in global north countries, with the majority being Lebanese or Syrian refugees. The number of individuals seeking assistance for the purpose of resettlement or asylum in 2022 has increased exponentially when compared to previous years. This is mostly due to the deteriorating living conditions in Lebanon and especially the lack of safe spaces, resources, and protection for LGBTQ+ individuals, amidst raging hate and violence campaigns.

Out of the 138 individuals who sought assistance, 93 were residents in Lebanon seeking guidance on resettlement or asylum procedures. Approximately 55% of them were Lebanese inquiring about resettlement or asylum in a different country for multiple reasons, such as facing credible threats, decreased safety, oppression, and violation of their basic human rights. The remaining were mostly Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR, seeking to escape a dual hate and scapegoating campaign against both refugee and queer communities. It is important to note that the actual number of LGBTQ+ refugees reporting a need for resettlement was much higher than the recorded figure. As the recorded numbers were for refugees whose durable solution was restricted to resettlement after a period of case management.

The remaining 45 cases were individuals residing outside of Lebanon who were applying for asylum mainly in European countries but reported difficulties in proving to asylum courts that Lebanon is unsafe for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Many of these asylum seekers reported that their assigned judges in other countries incorrectly believed that Lebanon is safe for LGBTQ+ individuals and does not criminalize based on their SOGIESC, which is, unfortunately, misinformed and inaccurate.

The portrayal of Lebanon as a tolerant and vibrant space for LGBTQ+ populations is mostly hyperbolized, authored by non-Lebanese journalists and authors, and mostly covers communities that are protected by their own individual wealth, social status, or multiple nationalities. LGBTQ+ individuals in Lebanon still struggle to receive police and judicial protection against their perpetrators, while SOGIESC-based violence has been on an unprecedented rise, especially in the past three years due to the ongoing crises.

It is clear that there is a pressing need for organizations such as Helem to provide support to LGBTQ+ individuals seeking resettlement or asylum abroad. While Helem does not provide any legal assistance in cases involving asylum, it does provide access to publicly available information as it pertains to legal applications for asylum for individuals under threat due to their SOGIESC. The number of individuals seeking assistance from Helem highlights the urgent need for international organizations and governments to provide support and protection to LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers in Lebanon and other countries facing similar crises.

5-Recommendations

To Civil Society Organizations

- Ensure through policy and practice that all existing humanitarian or economic aid efforts are LGBTQIA+ inclusive and do not discriminate or curtail people's right to access basic services including but not limited to food provision, access to healthcare, access to mental health services, shelter, education, and capacity building.
- Ensure through policy and practice that all development or human rights initiatives have a mandatory gender impact analysis that recognizes a non-binary and diverse view of gender identity and expression.
- Ensure that groups and/or individual actors organizing around sexual and bodily rights are included in coalition building and systemic reform efforts around civil, political, social, and economic rights and that all resulting legislative and policy advocacy acknowledges their participation, reflects their needs, and offers protection.
- Refrain from acquiescing to or collaborating with public, private, or non-state actors and entities that target or have targeted LGBTQIA+ communities and spaces, including organizations, events, and/or their advocacy.
- Ensure that all leadership, personnel, and partners have been exposed to LGBTQIA+ persons and/or issues and have been sensitized and/or educated about LGBTQIA+ rights and persons, especially as front liners and actors involved in humanitarian response.

To the Lebanese Government

- Repeal articles 534, 521, 526, 531, 532, and 533 of the Lebanese penal code that are used to criminalize same-sex relations and nonconforming gender identities and expression; criminalize impersonating women and entering women-only places; criminalize sex work; criminalize breaking public decency and morality norms; and criminalize the promotion or sale/purchase of items considered contrary to public morals respectively.
- Offer proper assistance to victims of physical violence, sexual harassment, rape, and forced confinement. In addition, the Ministry of Justice and the security bureaus undergo proper investigations into the complaints filed by the victims.
- Work towards the creation of a monitoring mechanism within the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Social Affairs, aimed at taking in complaints and monitoring the work of ISF on receiving and assisting sexual-based gendered violence (SBGV) victims.
- Take steps to enforce Laws 205 and 204/2021 pertaining to sexual harassment and domestic violence by providing education and training to officials in the Ministry of Justice and officers in security bureaus
- Develop a housing policy that is inclusive of the LGBTQIA+ community to solve the current housing issue, ensuring that individuals are protected from evictions based on their sexual orientation and gender preferences.
- Develop an accessible and qualified healthcare system that is inclusive to the LGBTQIA+ community across its various departments. Take steps to ensure that healthcare practitioners abide by guidelines and ethical standards set by local and international health organizations
- Facilitate the procedure of submitting claims and accessing medications for LGBTQIA+ persons for social security at the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Affairs.
- Ratify ILO convention 190 which protects workers from violence and harassment in the workplace and also a comprehensive employment anti-discrimination law that includes protections against discrimination based on gender expression and sexual orientation.
- Ratify ILO Convention 44 that secures unemployment allowances to the involuntarily unemployed and expand the coverage of the National Social Security Fund to ensure the right to social security for all, as stipulated in Article 9 of the ICESCR.

To the International Community

- Ensure that all existing humanitarian, development, and human rights programs funded include a gender impact analysis gender impact analysis that recognizes a non-binary and diverse view of gender identity and expression.
- Ensure that funding and support for LGBTQIA+ targeted services and advocacy not only prioritizes decriminalization and political participation but also social and economic reforms in the branches of government including but not limited to the labor law, the housing code, healthcare policy, sanitation, and education.
- Ensure that LGBTQIA+ targeted funding prioritizes protection and support for survivors of violence, exploitation, and sex trafficking and that it prioritizes the establishment of shelters, health clinics, and other safe spaces.
- Maintain pressure on governmental institutions in Lebanon to perform structural reforms in key areas: Judiciary independence, inclusivity and accessibility of health and education systems, decent and accessible and inclusive housing programs, protection of the workers' rights, freedom of speech and assembly.

To the Community

- Establish strategic networks and alliances among LGBTQIA+ CSOs grounded in shared principles and values, to enable each organization to operate freely while collaborating to maximize impact. This collaboration can enhance efforts in advocacy, service provision, engagement, outreach, and protection of queer rights in Lebanon.
- Promote, educate, and raise awareness about the establishment of mutual aid networks within the community and among various marginalized groups, with the goal of addressing basic needs, fostering allyship solidarity, and laying the foundation for political mobilization against systemic injustice and discrimination.
- Encourage, inform, and educate on workers-led alternative economic initiatives such as co-ops, timebanks, and exchange networks.
- Engage and inform allies and accomplices (NGOs, individuals, alternative media...) regularly in order to build, and expand safe spaces and safety nets outside of the queer community. Additionally, collaboration with alternative media and public figures is essential to challenge misconceptions and prejudice.

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