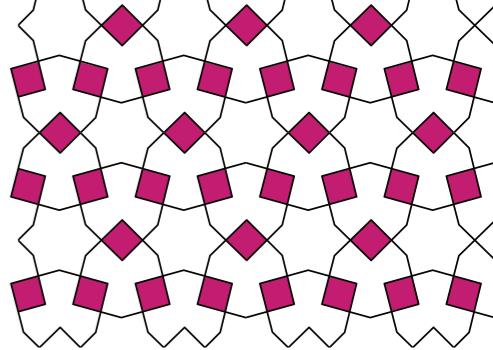




**LGBTQ RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS REPORT
2023**

Background



While 2022 laid the groundwork for institutionalized homophobia through bans on gatherings and public scapegoating, 2023 marked a devastating escalation in state and societal violence against Lebanon's LGBTQIA+¹ community. Legislative efforts to criminalize homosexuality intensified, hate crimes surged, and censorship of LGBTQIA+ content reached unprecedented levels. State actors expanded repression from banning gatherings to violently disrupting them, while non-state extremist groups targeted educational spaces, bars, and cultural events with impunity. By August 2023, political and religious leaders had incited peak levels of hostility, culminating in raids, assaults, and death threats against queer individuals.

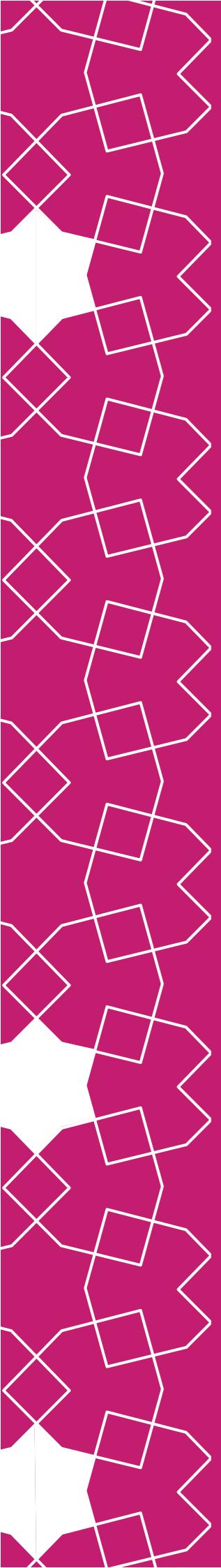
This repression unfolded alongside Lebanon's unrelenting socio-economic collapse, currency devaluation, infrastructure failure, and political paralysis, which pushed marginalized groups, including LGBTQIA+ individuals, deeper into precarity. The crisis took a catastrophic turn in early October 2023, when the war began on Lebanon's southern border, igniting a humanitarian emergency. Israeli aggressions and cross-border clashes displaced thousands, straining already-fragile systems and diverting resources away from critical services. For LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly refugees and trans women, the war compounded existing vulnerabilities: overcrowded shelters in conservative areas exposed them to heightened violence, harassment, and forced outing, while many humanitarian responses systematically neglected their specific needs.

The timing of the Israeli aggression on Lebanon, late in the year, limited documentation of its full impact, as outreach efforts were disrupted and reporting mechanisms collapsed. Yet the erosion of state infrastructure and the prioritization of some populations over others in conflict mitigation deepened existing inequalities, leaving LGBTQIA+ individuals disproportionately vulnerable to exploitation, homelessness, and exclusion from aid. While the full scale of violations will likely emerge in 2024, 2023 laid bare the consequences of systemic abandonment of a community scapegoated, displaced, and stripped of dignity at the intersection of political, economic, and social collapses.

Against this backdrop, LGBTQIA+ individuals with intersecting marginalized identities, specifically related to immigration status and class, continued to face existential threats. The state's failure to repeal repressive laws like Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code, ratify protective conventions, or implement inclusive policies has created a vacuum where hatred thrives. Without urgent intervention, 2024 risks cementing this trajectory, rendering the lives of LGBTQIA+ individuals evermore expendable in Lebanon's unending crises.

This report utilizes rigorous, survivor-centered documentation to record the grave deterioration in the rights and safety of Lebanon's LGBTQIA+ community through a lens of systemic accountability and lived trauma. Methodologically, it intertwines desk research to track legislative assaults, public incitement, and institutional repression, with frontline Helem data. By employing a two-pronged documentation method, Helem contextualizes human rights abuses against the LGBTQIA+ community, including harassment, hate crimes, and censorship, alongside needs assessments to expose intersectional precarity and systemic failures. Centering Helem's evidence helps trace how state and non-state actors weaponize legal vacuums, socio-economic collapse, and impunity to escalate violence.

¹The LGBTQIA+ acronym refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual individuals. The plus sign at the end of the acronym is included to represent the many additional orientations, identities, and expressions that people may identify with, acknowledging that sexuality and gender exist on a broad and diverse spectrum.



Overview of Perpetrators of LGBTQIA+ Rights Violations

State Actors

Government Officials and Political Leaders

These include ministers, members of parliament, other politicians (whether actively involved in politics or not), and other actors involved in governance and the political sphere in the country. Their influence in 2023 revolved mainly around the introduction of anti-LGBTQIA+ laws, increase in censorship, and incitement of hate.

Security Forces and Law Enforcement

These include Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF), local police, and other security agencies. These actors, tasked with protecting citizens, were either negligent in the protection of LGBTQIA+ communities against attacks or were actively involved in the violence and complicit in the suppression of LGBTQIA+ rights.

Non-State Actors

Religious Leaders and Institutions

While religious leaders and institutions from all religions are highly intertwined within the governance and political sphere in Lebanon, they hold influential social power that further the marginalization of LGBTQIA+ individuals and legitimize discriminatory policies and actions. Key religious figures have leveraged their social prowess to publicly support anti-LGBTQIA+ measures. Additionally, extremist religious groups like Jnoud El Rab (The Lord's Soldiers) have actively participated in violence and intimidation against the LGBTQIA+ community.

Legal Institutions

The Lebanese penal code criminalizes LGBTQIA+ individuals under Article 534 (which criminalizes “sexual intercourse contrary to the order of nature”) as well as other Articles related to moral offences (533-531), debauchery (526), and sexual impersonation (521). Public prosecutors and courts use these laws to penalize, harass, detain, or imprison individuals. By platforming anti-LGBTQIA+ voices, the Beirut Bar Association also contributes to the spread of anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric and hinder progress toward equality.²

Individual actors

Unorganized social groups, such as local communities, family members, or neighborhood groups, also often act independently as perpetrators of violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals within their communities. Unlike more organized groups that actively pursue and deliberately target LGBTQIA+ members, these uncoordinated groups tend to engage in sporadic and isolated acts of hostility.

Conventions and International Human Rights Law

As of the writing of this report, no international human rights mechanisms, including Conventions, Committees, or Special Rapporteurs, have been explicitly charged to protect against LGBTQIA+ human rights violations. In lieu of such mechanisms, treaties that include protective provisions under the broader umbrella of human rights can be leveraged. These include:

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):** Included in the preamble of the Lebanese Constitution, the UDHR stipulates the duty of protection from discrimination or its incitement.
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):** The ICCPR contains provisions on equality before the law, freedom from discrimination, freedom of expression, and the right to privacy that can be applied to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals from discrimination, violence, and other human rights violations.
- **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR):** The ICESCR ensures rights related to work, education, health, and an adequate standard of living, and prohibits discrimination on any ground, including sexual orientation and gender identity.
- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):** CEDAW’s provisions against gender-based discrimination should protect LGBTQIA+ women and can be extended to those with nonbinary identities, particularly if they are discriminated against because of their gender expression and identity.
- **Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT):** This treaty prohibits cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, which could potentially be applied to cases of violence or discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Other treaties, which primarily provide a framework for protecting specific marginalized groups, can be understood to include LGBTQIA+ individuals. Similar to CEDAW, these treaties can be used as a foundation for advocating for the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals by recognizing that LGBTQIA+ individuals form part of these groups, and are thus also entitled to protection under these international agreements. These include:

- **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD):** While ICERD primarily addresses racial discrimination, it also includes provisions on equality before the law and protection against discrimination in general, which can be interpreted to include discrimination on the basis of SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics).
- **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD):** The CRPD includes provisions for non-discrimination and equal protection under the law, which should also protect LGBTQIA+ individuals with disabilities from intersecting forms of discrimination.
- **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):** The CRC protects children from discrimination and ensures their rights to health, education, and protection from violence. LGBTQIA+ youth should be included under these protections, particularly in safeguarding them from bullying, family rejection, and violence.

²Mohamad El Chamaa, «Bar Association head hosts author who made recommendations to reduce spread of homosexuality in Lebanon» L’Orient Today, April 2023, 28, <https://bit.ly/4qkLUsp>

Human Rights Violations Against the LGBTQIA+ Community in 2023

Below is a snapshot summary of key events and violations perpetrated against the LGBTQIA+ community by type. It is important to note that this summary is not exhaustive and focuses on major reported events.

Civil and Political Rights Violations

Discrimination in Legal Systems

The legal landscape for LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon faced significant challenges in 2023. In June, the Islamic Cultural Center filed a claim to dissolve Helem.³ Meanwhile, an attempt by a number of independent members of parliament to potentially introduce a notion to repeal Article 534 from the Lebanese penal code faced massive opposition from multiple religious and political forces. Public outrage included intense anti-LGBTQIA+ campaigns against many of the signing members of parliament and local organizations working on LGBTQIA+ rights. This pressure forced parliament member Adib Abdel Massih to backtrack his support and withdraw his name from the list. In a public statement, he cited his commitment to religious and societal values and expressed that his intention was to open dialogue about the law rather than endorse homosexuality.

Two months later in August, Minister Mohamed Mortada and MP Ashraf Rifi submitted and presented draft laws aimed at criminalizing homosexuality and its promotion. This draft legislation seeks to impose prison sentences of up to three years for promoting «deviant sexual relations» or supporting sex change efforts, with fines. This expands the scope of punishment present in the current legislation, which mostly focuses on personal conduct, to include explicit criminalization of any activities deemed to “facilitate, protect, or incite” homosexuality.^{4,5}

³The Islamic Cultural Center Files a Claim to Dissolve Helem NGO," L'Orient Today, June 2023,17, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1340886/islamic-cultural-center-asks-authorities-to-dissolve-lgbtq-rights-ngo.html>.

⁴"Islamic Cultural Center Files Claim to Dissolve Helem NGO," L'Orient Today, June 2023,17, <https://bit.ly/44PQYgc>

⁵عبد المسيح أعلن سحب تؤديه على اقتراح قانون الغاء المادة 534 من قانون العقوبات, National News Agency - Lebanon, August 2023,15, <https://bit.ly/4puEGCh>

Two months later in August, Minister Mohamed Mortada and MP Ashraf Rifi submitted and presented draft laws aimed at criminalizing homosexuality and its promotion.⁶ This draft legislation seeks to impose prison sentences of up to three years for promoting «deviant sexual relations» or supporting sex change efforts, with fines. This expands the scope of punishment present in the current legislation, which mostly focuses on personal conduct, to include explicit criminalization of any activities deemed to “facilitate, protect, or incite” homosexuality.⁷

The draft law conflates LGBTQIA+ identities with mental disorders, categorizing them under «sexual deviancy» or «paraphilia,» which it claims necessitates strict punishment to safeguard public order, constitutional integrity, and societal morals. The use of these terms not only morally condemns and pathologizes sexual orientations and interests deemed non-normative, but justifies their criminalization on this basis. Moreover, the draft law invokes Article 9 of the Constitution to justify prioritizing «divine obligation, religious principles, and freedom of practicing religious rituals» over personal freedoms. The proposal's language also targets efforts to “promote such behaviors,” explicitly framing homosexuality as a “condemned and rejected phenomenon” and a threat to public order. Using the vague notion of «promotion» risks encompassing not only advocacy for LGBTQIA+ rights but also media representation and public discourse, which further suppresses free speech. Moreover, as the language of the proposed law also criminalizes freedom of expression and assembly, it could enable authorities to target safe spaces, educational programs, grassroots activism, and even public support of LGBTQIA+ individuals.⁸

This tactic of scapegoating the LGBTQIA+ community to increase the crackdown on civil society activities and dissent under the guise of morality or public order echoes regional trends. Countries like Iraq and Egypt have previously passed laws conflating LGBTQIA+ advocacy with societal threats, aiming to marginalize civil society actors, journalists, and organizations, including those unrelated to LGBTQIA+ issues.

⁶Nizar Saghieh, “Lebanon’s ‘Minister of Culture’ Desperately Tries to Resurrect Past Taboos,” The Legal Agenda, September 2023,25, <https://english.legal-agenda.com/lebanons-minister-of-culture-desperately-tries-to-resurrect-past-taboos/>.

⁷يفي تقدّم باقتراح قانون مكرر يقضى بتجريم الترويج للشذوذ الجنسي, National News Agency – Lebanon, August 2023,17.

⁸Ashraf Rifi, [Law Criminalizing Homosexuality], proposal submitted to the Lebanese Parliament, Beirut, August 2023 ,19.

Limiting Freedom of Speech and Increased Censorship of LGBTQIA+ Content

The year also saw increased censorship of LGBTQIA+ content and limitations on freedom of expression, mostly centered around upholding religious values and morality. Religious influence played a role, with Sheikh Hassan Merheb issuing a fatwa in September calling for a boycott of MTV due to it airing a pro-LGBTQIA+ ad, further restricting the visibility and representation of LGBTQIA+ issues in the public sphere.⁹

Similar to the previous year's banning of several movies over their inclusion of LGBTQIA+ characters, Lebanese authorities continued the censorship of films. In June, Lebanese authorities prevented local film distribution companies from screening the new Spiderman movie. While distributors claimed not receiving any reasons for the ban, speculations led to a brief display of the transgender flag in a minor scene, which was perceived as pro-LGBTQIA+ content.¹⁰ This ban was followed by the Ministry of Culture's request to ban the Barbie movie in August, stating it “promotes sexual deviance and transgender sexuality” as well as contradicting morality and faith.¹¹ The film, which was eventually aired in September, makes no explicit reference to sexuality, but promotes feminist messages and includes LGBTQIA+ personnel.

Violence and Harassment

Hate Crimes, Threats, Violence, and Harassment

In 2023, hate crimes and violent attacks against LGBTQIA+ individuals and spaces surged. April witnessed the Beirut Bar Association sponsoring an anti-LGBTQIA+ book, setting a tone of hostility for the year.¹² During the hour-long presentation of the book, titled “The Crime of Homosexuality,” the book author made multiple inciteful statements.

⁹Jad Hani, “Social Media Reaction to SKeys’ Violation Monitoring: One Month into the Cyber Campaign against MTV,” SKeysMedia, October 2023,9, <https://www.skeysmedia.org/en/News/Reports/10931/2023-10-09>.

¹⁰Raphaël Abdehnour, “Another movie banned in Lebanon: the latest Spider-Man movie featuring a transgender flag,” L>Orient Today, June 2023 ,21, <https://bit.ly/4oQNSQr>

¹¹“Lebanon Moves to Ban ‘Barbie’ Film for ‘Promoting Homosexuality,’” Reuters, August 2023 ,11, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/lebanon-minister-moves-ban-barbie-film-promoting-homosexuality09-08-2023-/>.

¹²Mohamad El Chamaa, «Bar Association head hosts author who made recommendations to reduce spread of homosexuality in Lebanon,» L>Orient Today, April 2023 ,28, <https://bit.ly/3MATRv3>

However, the most notable incident occurred on the night of August 23rd. Just outside Madame Om, a local bar hosting a drag show, militants from the religious Jnoud El Rab group gathered upon learning about the nature of the event. What started as homophobic slurs and verbal hostilities escalated into assaults, physical aggressions, and threats of further violence against drag performers and attendees.¹³ The aggressors' attack also included destroying furniture and property.

This incident, coupled with the negligence from authorities and adverse public opinion, had a ripple effect, paving the way for the extremist «Jnoud El Fayhaa» group to target a school in Tripoli for painting its facade in rainbow colors, which have come to be interpreted as a sheer promotion homosexuality, no matter the context, directly threatening individuals for being “enemies of Islam.”¹⁴ The month continued with anti-homosexuality protests and a group of militants attacking Tyre's Cloud 59 Beach Club for being LGBTQIA+-friendly, were armed men with guns, knives, and sticks shot in the air and attacked the venue, claiming a party was being thrown “in honor of LGBTQIA+ individuals.”¹⁵ This streak of violence continued into September, with extremists raiding the Marsa Association office in Tripoli over allegations of promoting homosexuality.¹⁶

When LGBTQIA+ communities attempt to push back against growing hostilities and rights violations, they are met with escalated violence and systemic complicity. The September 2023 March for Freedoms, a collective response by over 24 civil society organizations to protest crackdowns on personal and political liberties, exemplified this. As demonstrators gathered to demand equality, they were violently assaulted by homophobic mobs hurling stones and slurs, resulting in severe injuries and hospitalizations.¹⁷ This incident unfolded against a backdrop of intensifying state-sanctioned campaigns targeting LGBTQIA+ individuals¹⁵ since mid-2022.¹⁸ The pattern is clear: resistance is met with collective punishment, forcing marginalized communities to choose between self-determination and survival in a society that criminalizes their existence.

¹³Rasha Younes, «Violent Assault on Drag Event in Lebanon.» Human Rights Watch, August 2023 ,25, <https://www.hrw.org/news/25/08/2023/violent-assault-drag-event-lebanon>.

¹⁴«Jnoud El-Fayhaa: A New Extremist Group Emerges in Tripoli, Lebanon.» LBC Group, September 2023 ,2, <https://www.lbctvgroup.tv/news/news-bulletin-reports/72143/jnoud-el-fayhaa-a-new-extremist-group-emerges-in-tripoli-lebanon/en>.

¹⁵William Christou, «Lebanese Freedom March Attacked by Anti-LGBTQ Assailants.» The New Arab, October ,2023, <https://www.newarab.com/news/lebanese-freedom-march-attacked-anti-lgbtq-assailants>.

¹⁶Nabilah Chsain, «The Attack on a Health Care Center in Tripoli.» The Legal Agenda, September 2023 ,22, <https://english.legal-agenda.com/the-attack-on-a-health-care-center-in-tripoli/>.

¹⁷Amnesty International, «Lebanon: Investigate Assault on Freedom March Protesters,» October 2023 ,3, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/10/2023/lebanon-investigate-assault-on-freedom-march-protesters/>.

¹⁸Helem. LGBTQIA+ Labor Rights Violations Report (2023-2022), (Lebanon: Helem, 2023), <https://www.helem.net/publications/lgbtq-labor-rights-violations-report2023-2022>.

Police Brutality and Negligence

The Lebanese Internal Security Forces also played a role in the violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals. In the attack on Madame Om, reports revealed that security forces failed to intervene against the militant violence and instead targeted attendees and staff with harassment and interrogations.¹⁹ During the March for Freedoms in September 2023, they not only failed to intervene, but actively enabled the attack—Amnesty International has documented how ISF members assaulted protesters pleading for protection and harassed journalists attempting to document the violence, reportedly under the orders of the Ministry of Interior.²⁰ No arrests followed, cementing a culture of impunity.

Rights of Vulnerable Group

within the LGBTQIA+ Community

Violations against Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Individuals

Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals faced targeted hostility in 2023. The Jnoud El Rab group released a video across their social media channels in August, exposing a drag queen's official name and identity. Jnoud El Rab's outing of this drag queen, which was later picked up by conservative pages and media outlets, constituted a clear act of aggression aimed at shaming and endangering diverse gender expression. This violation sheds light on the specific and heightened risks that trans individuals encounter within the broader LGBTQIA+ community in Lebanon. This incident is not an isolated act, but a consequence of structural neglect stemming from the lack of both legal safeguard for marginalized communities and meaningful attempts at justice and accountability for responding to anti-LGBTQIA+ violence and abuse.

¹⁹Rasha Younes, «Violent Assault at Drag Event in Lebanon.» Human Rights Watch, August 2023 ,25, <https://www.hrw.org/news/25/08/2023/violent-assault-drag-event-lebanon>.

²⁰Amnesty International, «Lebanon: Investigate Assault on Freedom March Protesters,» October 2023 ,3, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/10/2023/lebanon-investigate-assault-on-freedom-march-protesters/>.

Nationality and Legal Residency Status

LGBTQIA+ refugees, migrant workers, and stateless individuals in Lebanon face compounded vulnerabilities. Under the abusive “Kafala” (sponsorship) system, migrant workers, including many LGBTQIA+ individuals who may be fleeing persecution in their home countries, are trapped in exploitative labor conditions.²¹ Reporting abuse or violence risks deportation, termination of residency, or retaliation from employers. Similarly, Syrian and Palestinian LGBTQIA+ refugees lack legal protections and face discrimination in housing and healthcare, often concealing their identities to avoid harassment in and out of refugee camps. Stateless individuals, are denied basic rights, including access to healthcare and education, leaving LGBTQIA+ stateless people doubly invisible to state institutions.

Disability, Chronic Illness, and Access to HIV Care

LGBTQIA+ individuals with disabilities or chronic illnesses, including those living with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), confront intersecting barriers to safety and care. Lebanon's economic collapse has decimated healthcare infrastructure, causing severe shortages of preventive medicine, testing kits, and treatment, and rendering any available care—often privatized—increasingly expensive. Stigma poses a significant barrier as doctors often refuse to treat LGBTQIA+ patients, especially transgender individuals or those living with HIV, citing “moral” objections.²² People with disabilities face additional exclusion, as public spaces and support services rarely accommodate diverse mobility, sensory, or cognitive needs. Furthermore, mental health resources are virtually inaccessible for marginalized groups, whether due to cost, discrimination from practitioners, transportation barriers, or limited services from LGBTQIA+ or mental health-specific organizations.

Structural Roots of Harm

These intersecting vulnerabilities are sustained by Lebanon's institutionalized discrimination. Authorities ignore violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly refugees, disabled people, and those living with HIV, while courts prioritize “public morality” over human rights. Without laws criminalizing hate crimes, ensuring healthcare access, or dismantling the “Kafala” system, marginalized subgroups remain trapped in cycles of exploitation. Justice requires not only repealing anti-LGBTQIA+ laws and ensuring protection mechanisms but also addressing how nationality, disability, and health status, amongst other intersecting vulnerabilities, deepen oppression within the community.

Cultural, Economic, and Social Rights Violations

Cultural Violations, Moral Panic, and LGBTQIA+ Symbolic Erasure

The moral panic surrounding LGBTQIA+ visibility in Lebanon during this period manifested in widespread campaigns to erase any rainbow symbols, driven by a mix of public pressure, institutional complicity, and preemptive self-censorship. Businesses and cultural spaces faced targeted hostility, often from conservative factions or state-aligned actors, leading to the removal of rainbow-themed products and imagery. Far-right groups and conservative social media campaigns weaponized public outrage to pressure businesses into compliance. For example, Pain d'Or, a Lebanese bakery, replaced its rainbow-themed cakes with “sunset cakes” after being accused of promoting LGBTQIA+ rights, a decision framed as a response to backlash from anti-LGBTQIA+ activists. Similar tactics were employed against other retailers, with online mobs accusing businesses of “moral corruption” for selling rainbow-colored items. Meanwhile, Lebanon's Culture Minister amplified the stigma through social media, mocking LGBTQIA+ rights instead of addressing the economic crisis fueling public discontent and the scapegoating of the LGBTQIA+ community.²⁴

²¹Anti-Racism Movement (ARM), “No Ethical Contract Under Kafala,” Anti-Racism Movement, July 2020, 6, <https://armlebanon.org/no-ethical-contract-under-kafala/>.

²²While no official data is available to confirm this claim, it is supported anecdotally through personal accounts and reports within LGBTQIA+ communities, particularly from individuals in healthcare advocacy and support networks.

²³Najib, “Pain D'or Replaced Rainbow Cakes with Sunset Cakes,” Blog Baladi, September 2023, 12, <https://blogbaladi.com/pain-dor-replaced-rainbow-cakes-with-sunset-cakes/>.

²⁴Ibid.

While Lebanon does not have formal laws explicitly banning rainbow symbolism, businesses began operating under fear of indirect repercussions. Authorities have historically used vague charges like “violating public morals” to target LGBTQIA+ gatherings, creating a climate where preemptive censorship becomes a survival strategy.²⁵ However, non-state actors’ erasure of LGBTQIA+ symbols in Lebanon through rogue actions or vandalism is not a recent phenomenon. In June 2022, Beirut Pride’s “Blooming Billboard” in Sassis Square, a vertical garden designed to bloom into a rainbow flag with the message “Love Always Blooms,” was vandalized overnight by Jnoud El Rab and other far-right groups, who tore out flowers and defaced the installation.²⁶

These incidents exemplify the intersection of public moralizing and state indifference. After conservative groups circulated videos condemning the bakery’s rainbow cakes, the company issued a public statement disavowing LGBTQIA+ advocacy, replaced the products, and avoided further critique of government inaction.²⁷ The moral panic and crackdowns pushed retailers in Beirut’s Hamra district and other commercial centers to quietly remove rainbow-colored clothing, accessories, and children’s toys, fearing boycotts or vandalism. This mirrored regional trends observed in Gulf states, where ministries of commerce conducted raids to confiscate rainbow items under the guise of protecting “Islamic values.”²⁸

This moral panic reflects a strategic diversion from Lebanon’s systemic failures, such as hyperinflation and political corruption. By scapegoating LGBTQIA+ visibility, authorities and conservative groups deflect attention while reinforcing hetero-patriarchal norms. The targeting of rainbow symbolism in Lebanon is not merely cultural persecution but a political tool to consolidate power, suppress marginalized voices, and uphold heteronormative structures in the absence of meaningful legal or economic reforms.

²⁵A.Z., “Rainbow Items and the Morality of Colors in Arab Countries,” Arab Reform Initiative, February 2023 ,2, accessed July 2024 ,20, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/rainbow-items-and-the-morality-of-colors-in-arab-countries/>.

²⁶Helem. LGBTQIA+ Labor Rights Violations Report (2023–2022), (Lebanon: Helem, 2023), <https://www.helem.net/publications/lgbtq-labor-rights-violations-report2023-2022->.

²⁷Najib, “Pain D’or Issues Statement on the Rainbow Cake Controversy,” Blog Baladi, August 2023 ,1, <https://blogbaladi.com/pain-dor-issues-statement-on-the-rainbow-cake-controversy/>.

²⁸A.Z., “Rainbow Items and the Morality of Colors in Arab Countries,” Arab Reform Initiative, February 2023 ,2, accessed July 2024 ,20, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/rainbow-items-and-the-morality-of-colors-in-arab-countries/>.

Educational Discrimination

Educational institutions were not immune to the anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment. In August 2023, the Ministry of Education confiscated board games from a summer school due to a rainbow logo, interpreting it as promoting LGBTQIA+ rights.²⁹ The minister stated that the decision was a personal one taken to avoid confusions, reflecting the ambiguity of official policy and its arbitrary nature.³⁰

Social Stigmatization and Incitement

Social stigmatization against LGBTQIA+ individuals also intensified throughout 2023, fueled by hostile public incitements.³¹ In May, the Ministry of Interior publicly referred to homosexuality as a “scourge” and the “wrath of God,”³² while in July, Hezbollah’s leader called for the death penalty for homosexuality and suggested early marriage as a “cure.”³³ Political and religious leaders, including the Prime Minister, Members of Parliament, and others, further fueled anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment through public statements and meetings.³⁴

²⁹Megaphone (@megaphonenews), “The Board Game that Terrorized the Public,” Instagram, August 2023 ,22, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CwPo3maMhCb/>

³⁰ibid.

³¹Emmanuel Haddad, “Lebanon’s LGBTQ+ Community Targeted From Every Direction,” L’Orient Today, August 2023 ,14, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1346389/lebanons-lgbtq-community-targeted-from-every-direction.html>.

³²ibid.

³³«Nasrallah Slams Gay Relations, Says Muslims Should «Punish» Quran Desecrators,» Naharnet, July 2023 ,30, <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/299295>.

³⁴«Lebanon Bans Snake and Ladder Game from Summer Schools.» Al Bawaba, August 2023 ,22, [https://www.albawaba.com/node/lebanon-bans-snake-and-ladder-game-summer-schools1531385-\)](https://www.albawaba.com/node/lebanon-bans-snake-and-ladder-game-summer-schools1531385-).

Digital Rights Violations

Online Harassment, Invasion of Privacy, and Cyberbullying

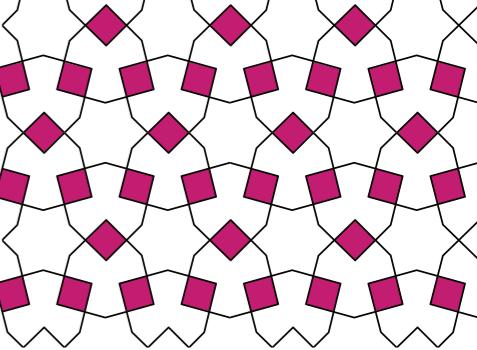
In the digital realm, LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to face online harassment and violations. Historically, Lebanon's LGBTQIA+ community has faced digital exploitation and blackmail, with perpetrators using social media, dating apps, and hacked personal data to target individuals. Perpetrators often threaten to expose victims' sexual orientation or gender identity, a significant risk in a country with no legal protections against LGBTQIA+ discrimination and where societal stigma remains pervasive. Blackmailers frequently extort money or manipulate victims into compliance, leveraging fears of familial rejection, violence, or professional ruin.

In 2023, LGBTQIA+ individuals faced intensified harassment and violations, with attacks often amplified by Lebanon's absence of legal safeguards against cybercrimes targeting marginalized communities. The Jnoud El Rab group released a video in August that not only targeted a drag queen, but also conveyed broader hostility toward the LGBTQIA+ community across social media platforms and conservative news outlets. This online aggression exemplifies the growing use of digital platforms to harass, intimidate, and invade the privacy of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Beyond individual harm, such digital aggression reflects a pervasive tactic to silence LGBTQIA+ voices, which jeopardizes their safety and mental wellbeing. Many victims report self-censoring or withdrawing from online spaces altogether to avoid retaliation, causing a direct erosion of their freedom of expression and access to community support networks.³⁵

Critically, Lebanese authorities have consistently failed to investigate or prosecute digital harassment campaigns against LGBTQIA+ individuals. Cybercrime laws remain vague and unenforced, while existing anti-discrimination frameworks exclude protections for gender identity or sexual orientation. This institutional apathy normalizes online violence, enabling perpetrators to act with impunity.

³⁵A.Z., "Rainbow Items and the Morality of Colors in Arab Countries," Arab Reform Initiative, February 2023 ,2, accessed July 2024 ,20, <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/rainbow-items-and-the-morality-of-colors-in-arab-countries/>

Helem's Documentation of LGBTQIA+ Human Rights Violations



Methodology

Data for this report was collected through a mixed approach, combining direct standardized intake accounts from Helem's helpline and beneficiaries, as well as targeted interviews and outreach through key informants and stakeholders. The helpline serves as a primary point of contact, where individuals report incidents, seek support, or provide information related to violations or challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals.

To ensure ethical data collection, informed consent was integrated into every stage of the reporting and documentation process. Individuals who contacted the helpline or engaged through stakeholders were informed about the purpose of the data collection and assured anonymity and confidentiality. Participation was entirely voluntary.

Demographic Breakdown

In 2023, Helem documented 1,018 cases of SOGIESC-based human rights violations, reported by 401 individuals. Previously, in 2022, Helem documented over 3,699 cases of human rights violations, based on more than 1,886 individual visits to its Protection and Services department. The department managed these cases using a specialized case management system, providing free mental health support, emergency intervention, cash-based assistance programming, and referrals to other LGBTQIA+ inclusive services.

The drop in cases can be attributed to Helem's strategic repositioning. In 2023, Helem made a deliberate decision to shift from providing direct services and focus more on advocacy efforts.³⁶ The absence of support mechanisms, lack of inclusion in national strategies, and protection from increasing institutionalized anti-LGBTQIA+ discrimination created challenges in meeting the growing basic needs of a marginalized community.

This active exclusion from funding and protection mechanisms placed immense pressure on Helem's limited resources and small team. As such, Helem encouraged existing and well-established humanitarian organizations to step in and support the varied needs of the LGBTQIA+ community. This strategic shift, while resulting in a significant reduction in the number of documented service-related case reports, allowed Helem to protect individuals from violations through legal and paralegal interventions, build partnerships, and promote community organization as sustained civic action. The decrease in reports for basic needs reflects this organizational change rather than a reduction in need and highlights the importance of Helem's evolving role in fostering long-term, sustainable support systems through advocacy.

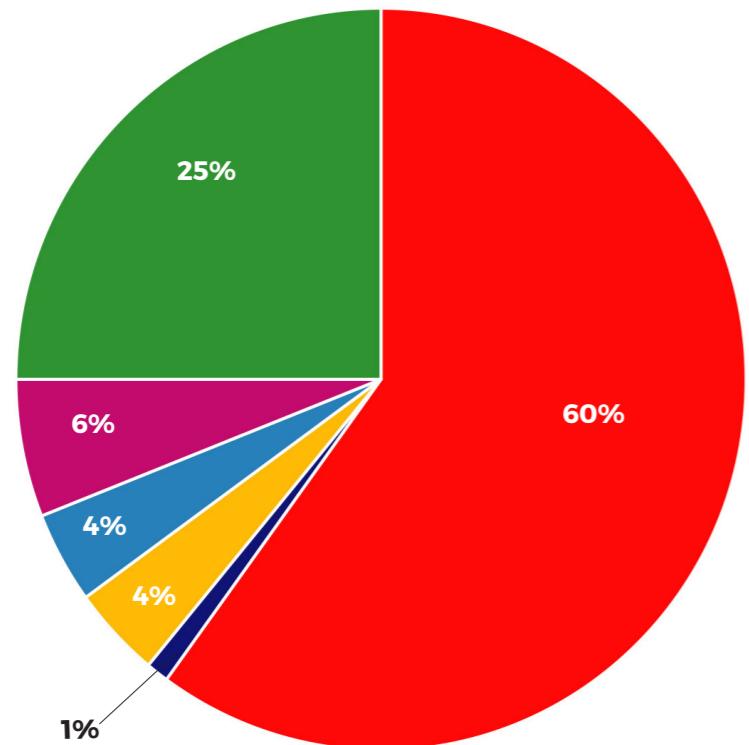
The reported data should be considered indicative rather than representative due to the limited capacity and programming available for documenting LGBTQIA+ human rights violations in South West Asia and Northern Africa (SWANA). Moreover, individuals may be unwilling to report these violations due to fear of repercussions, public association to the LGBTQIA+ community, or lack of knowledge and accessibility to reporting mechanisms.

³⁶Helem "Statement Concerning the Closure of Helem's Services Department," December 2022 ,21,
<https://bit.ly/4iOLVCp>

Helem anonymously collects demographic data for all incidents reported to its Protection and Services Department based on selected lists of identities. The key demographic categories are listed below:

SOGIESC Status

Gender Identity and Expression

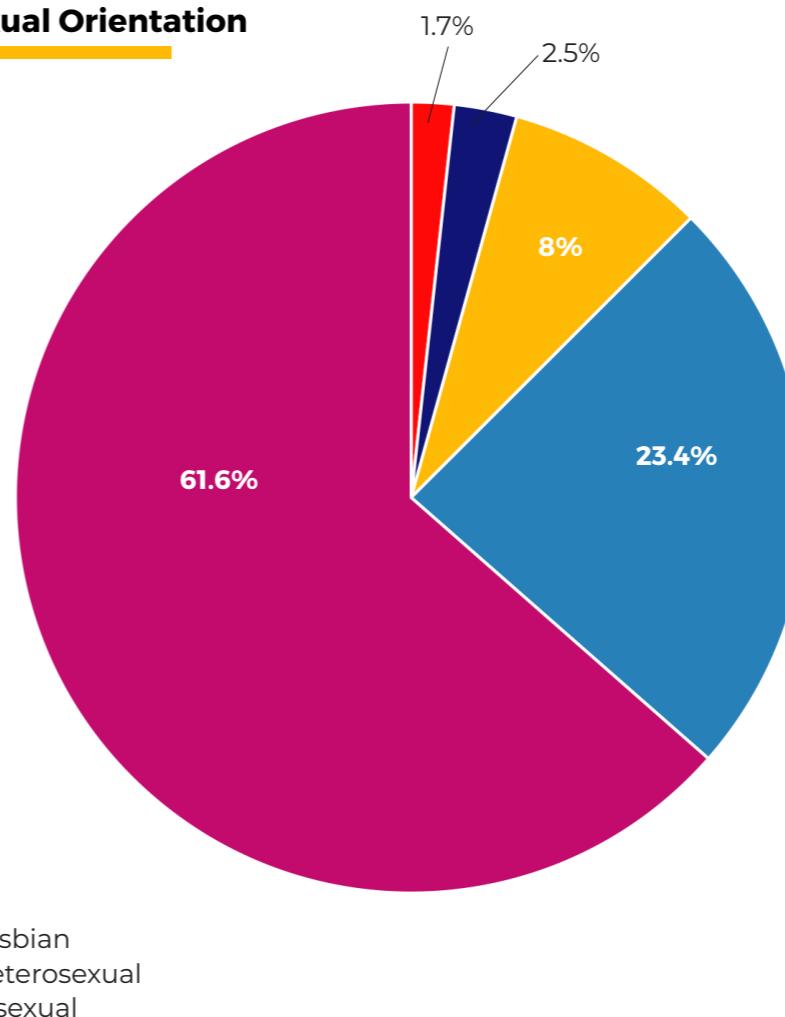


- Cisgender
- Genderqueer
- Non-binary
- Agender, Genderfluid or Undefined
- Trans Man
- Trans Woman

Percentage of Cases by Gender Identity and Expression

Approximately 60% of the reported cases involved individuals identifying as cisgender, while 25 percent of people reporting were trans women, 4% were trans men, 6% were nonbinary, 4% were genderqueer, and the remaining 1% were divided among agender, genderfluid, or undefined.

Sexual Orientation

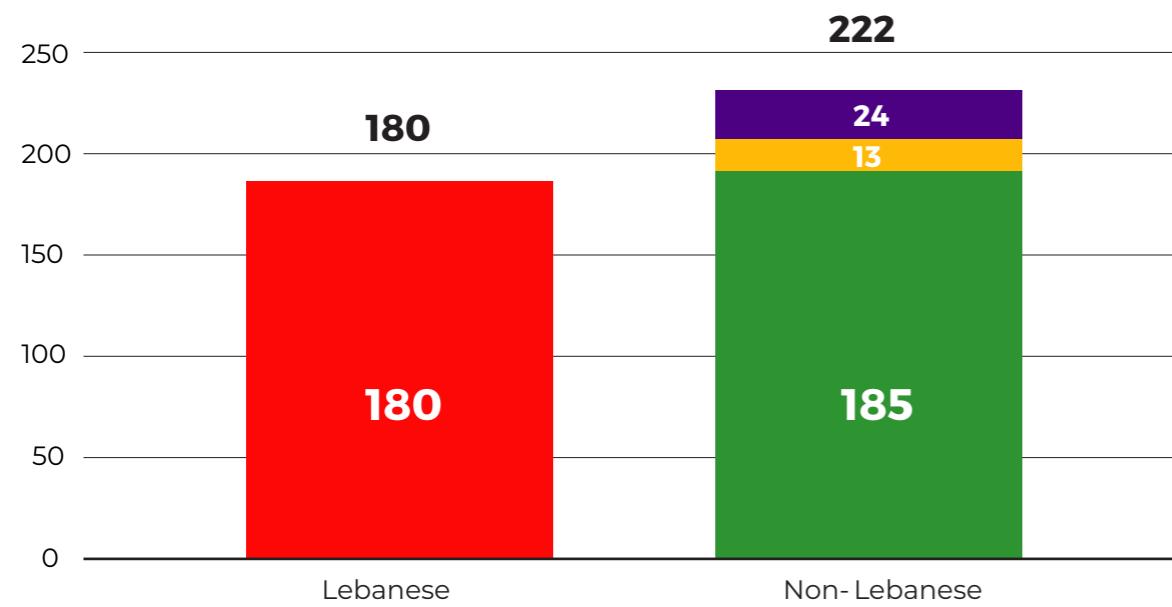


Percentage of Cases by Sexual Orientation

Approximately 61% of individuals reporting HRV cases identified as gay, and around 24% identified themselves as trans. Bisexual individuals reported 8% of cases, while 2% of individuals identified as heterosexual, 2% as lesbian, 2% as pansexual, and the remaining 1% included individuals who are asexual, undefined, questioning, and demisexual.

Immigration Status and Nationality

Immigration Status

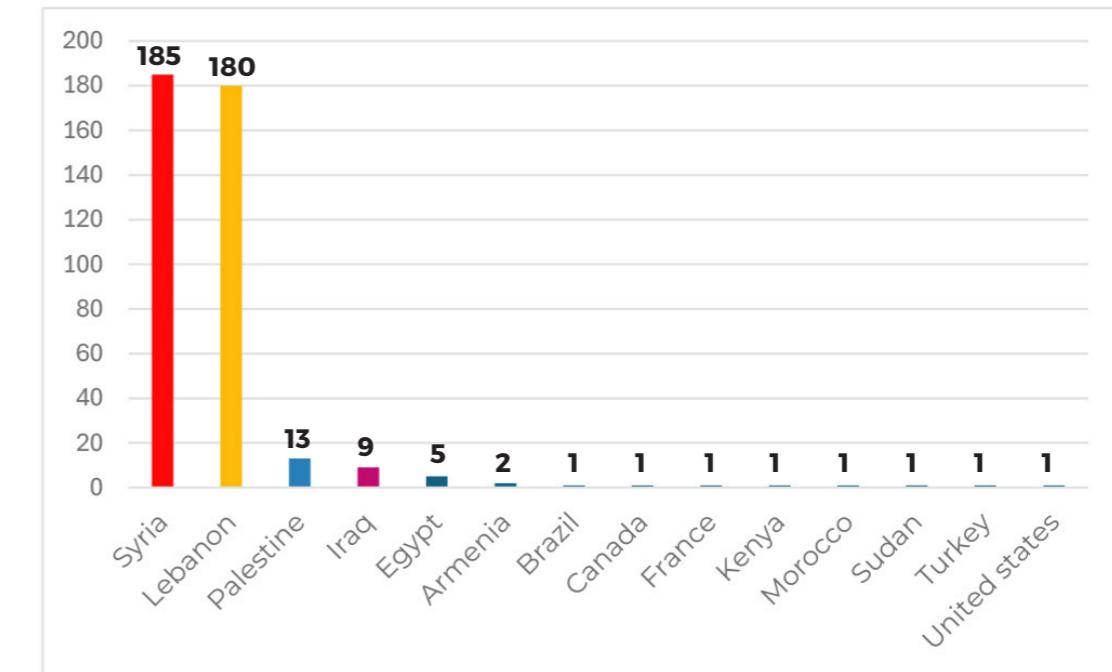


- Lebanese
- Syrian
- Palestinian
- Others

Percentage of Cases by Nationality and Immigration Status

Cases were reported by both Lebanese (42%) and non-Lebanese individuals (58%). Refugee and forcibly displaced individuals made up 90% of the non-Lebanese population, including Syrians, Palestinians, and people of other nationalities regardless of residency status. The remaining 10% of the non-Lebanese group include asylum seekers, migrant domestic workers, expats, and those who relocated voluntarily.

Nationality



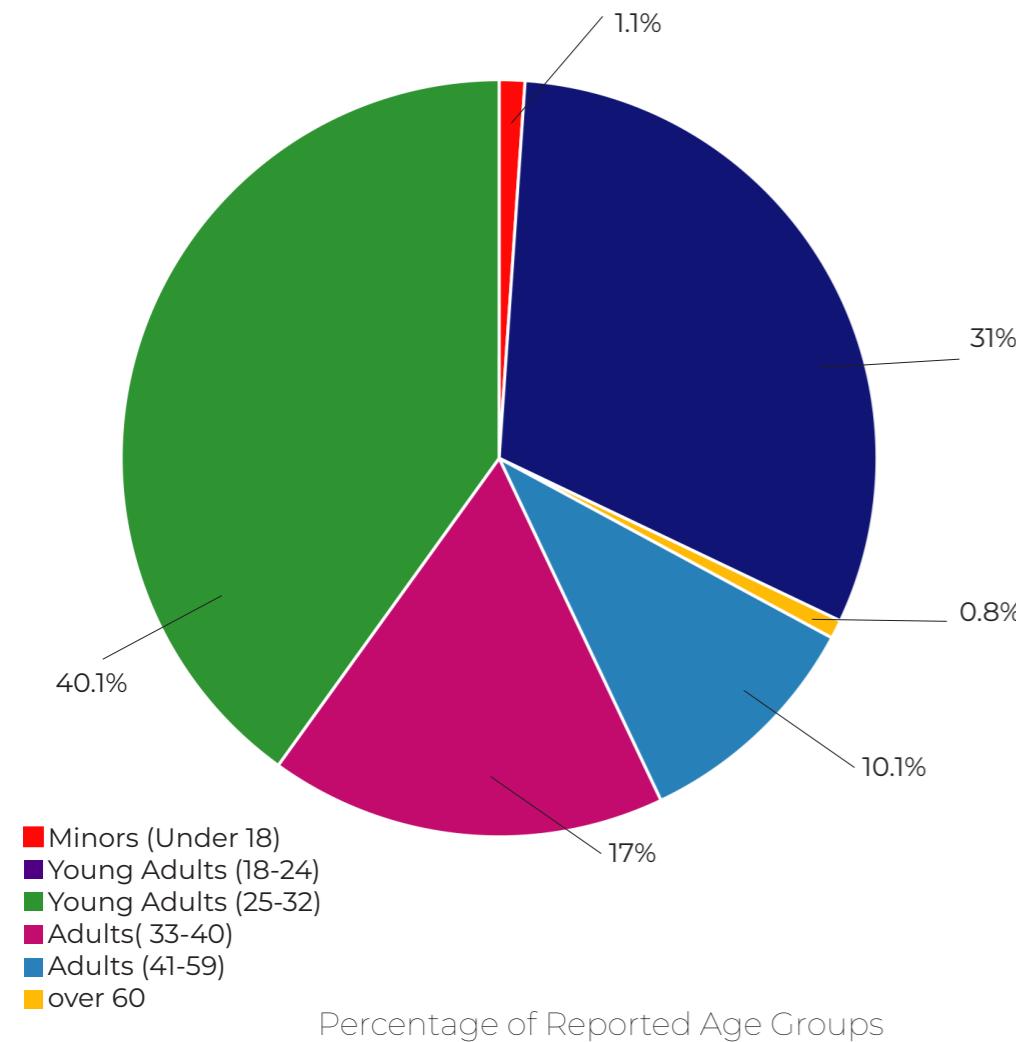
Syrian nationals reported 46% of cases, followed closely by Lebanese nationals at 45%. Palestinians and Iraqis reported 3% and 2% of cases, respectively, and the remaining nationalities made up less than 1% of cases each, with Egyptian and Armenian nationals being the only ones among them with more than one report.

Other Demographic Groups

Disability and Health Status

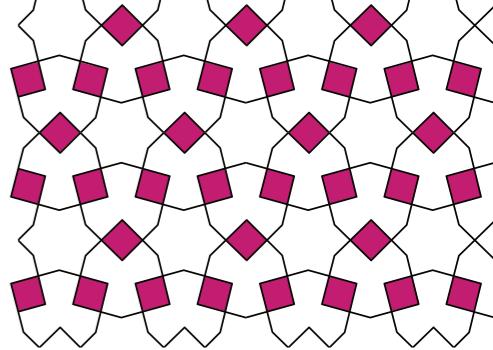
Around 2% of individuals reported living with a disability, all of which were related to mobility.

Age



The majority of cases, 71%, were reported by young adults, with 40% being in the 25-32 age range and 31% being in the 18-24 age range. Adults made up the second most common group at a total of 27%, broken down into 17% for the 33-40 age range and 10% for the 41-59 age range. Minors and those over the age of 60 each made up around 1%. 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.

Summary of Violations



Civil and Political Rights Violations

Criminal Procedures

Helem documented cases of criminal procedures related to arrest, detention, trial, and imprisonment of LGBTQIA+ individuals for their sexuality and/or gender expression. While homosexuality itself is not explicitly criminalized in Lebanon, several vaguely worded articles in the Penal Code are regularly used to oppress individuals with non-normative SOGIESC, including:

- **Article 534:** This article criminalizes «unnatural sexual intercourse,» which is vaguely defined and subject to interpretation.
- **Article 521:** This article penalizes men who wear women's clothing and enter women-only spaces, with penalties including imprisonment for up to six months or a fine. It is used to target and arrest transgender individuals based on their appearance and gender expression.
- **Articles 531 and 532:** These articles address the «violation of public morals» in public spaces and on public transportation, leading to the arrest of individuals engaged in sexual acts in public.
- **Article 533:** This article criminalizes the creation, distribution, or possession of materials deemed to violate public morals, including private images or writings, which can be used to target LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- **Article 523:** This article penalizes individuals involved in «prostitution» or activities related to sex work, with imprisonment or fines. It has been used to target vulnerable individuals, including LGBTQIA+ people, under the guise of moral policing.
- **Article 524:** This article addresses individuals who facilitate or profit from prostitution, with harsher penalties than Article 523. It is often enforced broadly, targeting LGBTQIA+ individuals under suspicion of «indecent behavior.»
- **Article 526:** This article focuses on combating «trafficking for sexual exploitation,» imposing strict penalties for those who coerce others into prostitution or related activities. While its intent is to protect victims, the vague language can lead to the criminalization of marginalized individuals, including LGBTQIA+ persons, who may be forced into sex work due to systemic inequalities.

The implementation of these laws lacks clear definitions and frameworks, which allows for arbitrary enforcement. This often leads to the arrest of LGBTQIA+ individuals based on homophobic reservations tied to their gender expression, illegal investigative techniques (such as the anal exam), and the withdrawal of rights during investigations (such as denial of access to phones or legal representation). These arrests are not grounded in reasonable doubt or legitimate suspicion but are instead driven by discriminatory practices and personal biases of law enforcement and judicial authorities.

In 2017, a District Court of Appeal dismissed several cases where Article 534 was used against LGBTQIA+ individuals, reflecting a legal precedent against its discriminatory application. Judges such as Mounir Sleiman (Batroun, 2009), Naji Dahdah (Metn, 2014), Hicham Kontar (Jdeideh, 2016), Randa Kfouri (Appeals Court, 2018), and Rula Husseini (Appeals Court, 2018) have issued rulings rejecting the criminalization of consensual same-sex relations under Article 534.³⁷ Despite these legal victories however, arrests based on sexual orientation and gender expression continue.

In 2023, reported cases of criminal procedures involving arrest, detention, trial, and imprisonment of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon remained relatively low, consistent with 2022 figures, each constituting less than 1% of total documented violations. However, this apparent stability does not necessarily indicate improved conditions. Instead, it may reflect the broader collapse of state institutions, where law enforcement priorities have shifted away from formal arrests and legal proceedings toward unchecked social and economic rights violations. The lack of institutional oversight has led to an increase in extrajudicial abuses, such as blackmail, forced evictions, and physical violence, perpetrated both by authorities and non-state actors without legal accountability. This structural breakdown creates a misleading perception that fewer arrests mean improved conditions, when in reality the environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals remains precarious.

³⁷Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: Same-Sex Relations Not Illegal," July 2018, 19, <https://www.hrw.org/news/19/07/2018/lebanon-same-sex-relations-not-illegal>.

Among the reported cases in 2023, the majority involved cisgender Iraqi men. One individual, a 22-year-old Iraqi man holding valid legal residency, reported that upon arriving at a police station to report a theft that resulted in the loss of his visa and residency documents, he was met with skepticism and detained for 14 hours under suspicion due to his residency status. During detention, he faced bullying and derogatory remarks about his demeanor, exemplifying the prejudices LGBTQIA+ individuals endure within the legal system. Another Iraqi gay man was summoned to a police station due to expired residency papers. Upon arrival, he was detained for two days without clear justification and was subjected to physical abuse and sexual harassment by a police officer, exacerbating the vulnerabilities faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals with precarious legal statuses.

In addition to these violations, some civilians in Lebanon face trials in military courts. Military courts traditionally serve to address offenses within the armed forces; when their jurisdiction expands to include civilians, this raises serious concerns regarding due process and human rights. As well as a lack of transparency and procedural safeguards, the right to appeal within the military court system is limited, and lawyers report that torture and coercion are often reported by detainees.³⁸

LGBTQIA+ individuals are not exempt from this violation. In August 2023, a Lebanese trans woman was communicating with a prisoner from Roumieh via Facebook Messenger. After she shared pictures of herself, the prisoner was offended to learn that she is trans, and accused her of sending drugs to the jail. Despite the fact that she is a civilian and the alleged offense had no connection to military affairs, this accusation led to a court case against her in the military court, where she was denied legal representation and subjected to psychological abuse.

These incidents give insight into the systemic discrimination and abuse that LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly transgender women and non-Lebanese people, face in Lebanon. Despite the low number of formally reported arrests, the pervasive environment of hostility, lack of legal protections, and the risk of abuse within detention settings continue to pose significant threats to their safety and well-being. Instead, the shift away from formal legal channels toward extrajudicial abuses such as blackmail, evictions, and violence highlights a dangerous lack of oversight and accountability.

³⁸Human Rights Watch, It's Not the Right Place for Us: The Trial of Civilians by Military Courts in Lebanon, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2017), <https://www.hrw.org/report/26/01/2017/its-not-right-place-us/trial-civilians-military-courts-lebanon>.

Freedom of Expression and Assembly

In 2023, Lebanon witnessed a significant deterioration in civic space, with repression disproportionately targeting marginalized communities like LGBTQIA+ individuals while also intensifying against journalists, artists, and comedians. This pattern of repression, often starting with the most vulnerable groups, risks expanding to broader segments of society, further eroding fundamental freedoms for all. For instance, comedian Nour Hajjar was arrested and interrogated for certain satirical jokes during his performances.³⁹ The government also intensified its use of restrictive legislation to silence dissent, with authorities carrying out arbitrary arrests, legal threats, and intimidation against those critical of the state. According to Amnesty International, these repressive measures specifically targeted LGBTQIA+ advocacy efforts, as well as broader civil society actors, contributing to a hostile environment where individuals feared retaliation for reporting violations or engaging in protest activities.⁴⁰ This broader climate of censorship and repression has likely led to significant underreporting of abuses against LGBTQIA+ individuals, as fear of retaliation, social stigma, and legal consequences further discourage victims from seeking justice.

Helem's documentation of freedom of expression and assembly violations, though limited in number, reveals alarming trends. While only five reports were recorded under this category, they paint a concerning picture of overlapping violations, including forced confinement, physical violence, and verbal abuse. These incidents showcase the growing risks faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals and highlight the urgent need to address systemic repression before it further erodes civic freedoms for all.

The assault on Madame Om, a Beirut bar hosting drag performances, illustrates how repression extends beyond formal protests to cultural spaces. In August, extremists from the group Jnoud El Rab violently disrupted a drag show, confining attendees and performers inside under threats of physical violence. One drag artist described hiding behind a stage curtain as perpetrators tried to break in, later escaping only after disguising their appearance.

³⁹Amnesty International, "Lebanon: Comedian Arrested for Critical Jokes," August 2023, 31, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/08/2023/lebanon-comedian-arrested-for-critical-jokes/>.

⁴⁰Amnesty International, "Lebanon: Attack on Freedoms Targets LGBTI People Repressive Legislation; Unlawful Crackdown," September 2023, 5, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/09/2023/lebanon-attack-on-freedoms-targets-lgbti-people-repressive-legislation-unlawful-crackdown/>.

Police officers who arrived focused on gathering attendee lists rather than protecting victims. One of the drag queens, now living in hiding, reported severe emotional distress and workplace impacts, stating, “We slept knowing tomorrow might change our lives.”

The March for Freedoms in September 2023, held in Riad El Solh, became a stark reminder of the escalating repression against civic activism in Lebanon. Organized as a response to the increasing violations against the campaign of incitement against fundamental freedoms, it was violently disrupted by civilian and non-state groups as security forces idly watched. This incident echoed past violations, such as the 2017 crackdown on Beirut Pride, where organizers were detained and forced to cancel events under threats of prosecution.⁴¹ Notably, religious clerics took to social media to issue public warnings about repercussions, declaring that they “would not bear responsibility for what might happen” if the event proceeded.⁴² The recurrence of such attacks demonstrates a troubling pattern of state-tolerated violence against LGBTQIA+ and civil society gatherings. If no action is taken to hold perpetrators accountable and protect the right to peaceful assembly, these violations will not only persist but escalate, further normalizing violence and silencing dissent. The failure to address this systemic repression risks deepening the erosion of civic freedoms and emboldening extremist groups, creating an increasingly hostile environment for marginalized communities and activists alike.

Freedom of expression violations also manifest in context-specific ways, as seen in the case of a bisexual man in Tripoli. Living in a conservative area, he self-censors online and avoids queer gatherings due to fears of violence, stating, “I can’t be myself anymore.” This chilling sentence highlights how repression silences even individual expressions of identity.

From the criminalization of protest and violent attacks on LGBTQIA+ cultural gatherings to the self-censorship that LGBTQIA+ individuals are driven to, the recurrence of such violations depicts a troubling normalization of hostility toward dissent and expression. Without urgent action to hold perpetrators accountable and safeguard fundamental freedoms, these abuses will not only persist but escalate, further silencing marginalized voices and eroding civic space for all.

⁴¹Amnesty International, “Crackdown on Beirut Pride an ‘Outrageous Attempt to Deny Human Rights of LGBTI People,’” May 2018, 17, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/05/2018/lebanon-crackdown-on-beirut-pride-an-outrageous-attempt-to-deny-human-rights-of-lgtbi-people/>.

⁴²Raphaël Abdelnour, “‘Freedoms March’ Comes under Attack in Downtown Beirut,” L’Orient-Le Jour, September 2023, 30, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1351027/freedoms-march-comes-under-attack-in-downtown-beirut.html>.

Violence and Harassment

In 2023, there were 888 reported cases of violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals, a slight decrease of less than 10% from the 971 cases in 2022. However, this decline in reported cases does not reflect a reduction in violence. In reality, the LGBTQIA+ community in Lebanon has faced persistent and increasing violence, both in public and private settings. The impunity surrounding the Madame Om attacks, for instance, encouraged further violations and set a dangerous precedent for unchecked violence, and the rise in anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric throughout the year significantly contributed to emboldening perpetrators and normalizing abuse. These attacks, marked by incitement and public hostility, escalated tensions to a zenith, creating an environment where LGBTQIA+ individuals faced heightened risks. This resulted in a decrease in outreach—in an effort to reduce visibility and safeguard security—as well as a heightened fear among victims, leading to an overall decline in reported cases despite the worsening situation.

While overall reports decreased, severe or high-risk cases, such as rape, continuous forced confinement, and severe physical violence, became more prevalent. These cases are typically defined by factors that indicate an immediate threat to life and require urgent intervention. The escalation of severe cases reflects broader systemic issues, including rising levels of homelessness among LGBTQIA+ individuals, increased economic precarity, and a lack of access to justice. With limited legal protections and growing hostility from both state and non-state actors, many victims are unable to seek recourse, leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and social marginalization.

General violence refers to acts of harm occurring in both private and public spaces. Meanwhile, domestic violence, characterized by the perpetrator being someone residing with the survivor, involves behaviors used to control an intimate partner or immediate family member through various forms of harm, including physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological abuse. Distinguishing between general and domestic violence is crucial, as the dynamics of each differ significantly; domestic violence often involves ongoing patterns of control within intimate relationships, where victims may be less likely to report abuse due to fear of outing themselves or facing additional social and legal repercussions, as well as fear of worsening violence if the abuse is exposed.

General Violence

(2023 Total: 751 incidents)

Type of Violence	Percentage of Total General Violence (%)
Verbal Violence	40%
Physical Violence	19%
Sexual Harassment	16%
Rape	12%
Blackmail	9%
Forced Confinement	4%

Domestic Violence

(2023 Total: 137 incidents)

Type of Violence	Percentage of Total General Violence (%)
Verbal Violence	65%
Physical Violence	23%
Sexual Harassment	7%
Rape	3%
Blackmail	1%
Forced Confinement	1%

General Violence

While there has been a decrease in the overall recorded incidents of general violence, there was a notable increase in high-severity cases. For example, reports for cases of forced confinement more than doubled from 14 in 2022 to 30 in 2023.

● Verbal Violence

Verbal violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals remained the most pervasive and widespread form of abuse among all demographic groups, accounting for 40% of the cases with 300 reports. It often occurs in public settings as a method of bullying and intimidation, particularly targeting those with visible LGBTQIA+ identities, as highlighted by most case narratives. For instance, a gay man in Hamra was walking with friends when two men on a motorcycle began hurling homophobic slurs at them. When the group ignored the verbal abuse, the perpetrators escalated to throwing water and eventually rocks at them. Data from this year and last showed that this category was often linked to other forms of abuse, and most often overlapped with physical violence and blackmail. Similar to the previous case, a nonbinary Syrian individual in Akkar was physically attacked at a supermarket by two men who demanded they cut their hair, threatening to kill them if they refused.

The rise in anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric in public discourse has emboldened perpetrators, leading to an increase in verbal violence and creating an environment where such abuse is normalized and often goes unchecked. For example, a pansexual genderfluid individual, who organized feminist club events at their university, faced severe verbal abuse and threats after inviting Helem to speak at one event. When religious students learned about Helem's LGBTQIA+ advocacy, they became aggressive, threatening Helem representatives and forcing them to leave through a back door. After the event, the perpetrators turned their hostility toward the organizer, threatening them for facilitating the event.

Vulnerable populations were particularly affected, where all reported cases involving minors and individuals over 60 included verbal abuse. One case involved a 16-year-old trans girl who was outed to her parents without consent by her school administration following a fight with another student over her gender identity. This incident expanded the list of perpetrators beyond schoolmates to both school staff and the girl's parents, all of whom continued verbally abusing her, repeatedly mocking her and pressuring her to change her behavior, appearance, and mannerisms to conform to traditional gender norms. This experience mirrors the systemic failure of institutions meant to protect minors, where instead they participate in their victimization and leave young LGBTQIA+ individuals without safe spaces in their homes, schools, or communities.

Verbal violence was also a common cause of social isolation, particularly among those who had already been forced out of their homes. One gay man who had repeatedly changed apartments due to homophobic flatmates recounted how, in his most recent experience, his flatmates began bullying him, escalating to physical abuse, after learning about his sexual orientation. In another case, a Syrian man was forced to relocate due to a crackdown on Syrian refugees, only to be verbally harassed and later physically attacked by a neighbor for being LGBTQIA+. Other individuals reported facing verbal violence in public settings. One trans woman and her friends, for example, were verbally harassed and pelted with eggs by a group of men on motorcycles in Gemmayzeh. The aggressors shouted insults at them before speeding away, leaving them feeling unsafe in their own neighborhood.

In addition to the verbal violence individuals are subjected to in person, digital spaces have increasingly become extensions of these abusive environments. One example is the violence experienced on LGBTQIA+ dating apps like Grindr. In certain Arab countries, individuals have reported instances where others use these platforms to bully and harass users. For example, in Egypt, authorities have been known to create fake profiles on Grindr to entrap and arrest LGBTQIA+ individuals. In March 2023, Grindr even issued a warning to its users in Egypt, alerting them that police were impersonating community members on digital platforms to target LGBTQIA+ individuals.⁴³

While many LGBTQIA+ individuals reported being targeted through social media, messaging apps, and other online platforms by strangers, the majority of case narratives indicated that the perpetrators were individuals they know personally. One Syrian nonbinary individual was relentlessly harassed and threatened by distant family or community members from their hometown in Syria over WhatsApp and social media before being physically attacked and outed in public. Another survivor, a Syrian man, described how his friends regularly sent him verbal threats online, while a distant relative attempted to manipulate him into revealing his location. In another case, a woman was consistently harassed anonymously by an individual living in her hometown in Morocco, who repeatedly sent her messages threatening to find her in Lebanon and forcibly take her back.

These cases demonstrate how verbal violence is not just a standalone form of abuse but a powerful weapon used to control, intimidate, and dehumanize LGBTQIA+ individuals. Whether in the workplace, online, or in public spaces, it reinforces broader systems of exclusion and violence, stripping individuals of their sense of safety and belonging. For many, verbal abuse is the first step in a cycle that escalates into physical violence, forced displacement, and social isolation, leaving survivors to remain in a constant state of fear and instability. Without meaningful legal protections or social support systems, LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon are left to navigate these threats alone, often at great personal risk.

Physical violence

Physical violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon saw a sharp increase in 2023, with cases rising significantly compared to the previous year. While 2022 data did not differentiate between general and domestic cases of physical violence, the combined total stood at 193 cases. In 2023, this number increased to 231, reflecting the growing threats faced by the community, where physical attacks often occur alongside verbal and sexual violence.

Trans women were disproportionately affected by physical violence in severity, making up 32 cases, with many experiencing it in conjunction with sexual assault. In one case, a trans woman met someone through a dating app, only to be taken to an apartment where multiple perpetrators attempted to rob her.

⁴³"LGBTQ+ Dating App Grindr Warns Egypt Users of Police-Run Accounts," Al Jazeera, March 2023, 25, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/25/3/2023/lgbtq-dating-app-grindr-warns-egypt-users-of-police-run-accounts>.

When they realized she had no money, they physically assaulted her, and when she tried to scream for help, one of them pulled a knife and threatened to kill her. In another case, a trans woman was lured into a car, where she was blackmailed, slapped, and beaten with a steel bar. She suffered a broken leg, severe head wounds requiring sutures, and broken teeth. Despite obtaining a medical report and filing a complaint with the police, she was forced to drop the charges due to escalating death threats from the perpetrators' families.

Non-Lebanese individuals, particularly Syrian refugees, were another highly vulnerable group, as highlighted by the 43 cases of physical violence against them. Data showed the compounded threats stemming from both xenophobia and anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment. In one instance, a Syrian gay man was waiting for a taxi in Dora when two men offered him a ride. Once on the highway, they pulled a gun on him, at first threatening and slapping him on the basis of his sexual orientation and gender expression. Upon inspecting his documents and discovering his nationality, they beat him further. Many non-Lebanese people also deal with threats from the family and community members even after they have left or fled their home countries. For example, a gay man who fled Syria due to threats from his family over his sexual orientation faced further violence in Lebanon, when his brother-in-law lured him to a meeting under false pretenses only to physically attack him upon arrival.

A significant number of the reported physical attacks outside the domestic setting stemmed from forced outings, where LGBTQIA+ individuals were exposed against their will to family members, colleagues, or community members. In one case, an individual's cousin spotted them at a public event and proceeded to out them, encouraging others nearby to join in the verbal and physical attacks. In another incident, a person living with HIV was outed within their community, leading to violent attacks by people in their neighborhood, who targeted them both for their sexual orientation and HIV status. These cases show how outing not only strips individuals of their privacy and exposes them to social stigma but also puts them in immediate danger, making them more vulnerable to violence both in domestic and public spaces.

The August 2023 Madame Om attacks marked a critical turning point in the escalation of physical violence from individual attacks to coordinated efforts. Reported cases escalated from 20 in July to 41 in August and remained at a heightened level in the following months.

The impact of the Madame Om attack extended beyond the night itself. Legal and social impunity along with the growing support for this violence emboldened perpetrators and supporters of this attack as Helem recorded further violence in the weeks that followed. Most notably, one of the drag performers who was publicly identified in a video released by Jnoud El Rab received death and rape threats, forcing her to flee her home. Another gay man was physically attacked by Jnoud El Rab members in October while on his way to church.

The climate of hostility escalated into September 2023, with extremists of different backgrounds attacking protesters during the March for Freedoms in Riad El Solh. Casework showed that one participant was warned by a journalist about potential violence due to the presence of suspicious individuals near the march. As they attempted to leave the area, a man on a motorcycle began hurling insults at them. While fleeing, the participant was struck on the back by one assailant and then hit in the face by another. Their friends faced similar violence as they tried to escape. Multiple organizations and journalists have documented the violent mobs targeting protesters, with reported abuses ranging from the confiscation of personal belongings, including cameras,⁴⁴ to brutal physical assaults that left victims bloodied.⁴⁵

Physical violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon is not random but deeply connected to systemic discrimination, social stigmatization, and targeted campaigns of harassment. Whether through forced outings, entrapment via dating apps, or coordinated extremist attacks, LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to face physical danger in both public and private spaces, with little to no protection from authorities.

⁴⁴Megaphone, "Security Forces at the Service of Thugs: Suppression of "March for Freedom" and Journalists," YouTube, 02:45, September 2023, 30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JT72BDFNFO>.

⁴⁵MTV Lebanon News, "مسيرة الحريات تتحول الى مواجهات وتهديد" (YouTube video, 2:31), uploaded September 30, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZPRtaKK0ew>.

● Sexual Harassment and Rape

Sexual harassment and rape violation cases witnessed an alarming rise in reports in 2023, increasing by %160 and %220 respectively compared to 2022. Of these reports, a majority overlapped with other abuses like physical and verbal violence as well as blackmail, indicating the severity of violence experienced by victims.

Many cases involved meeting strangers through dating apps who took advantage of victims, often using substances to incapacitate them. For instance, a Lebanese gay man in Bekaa was lured by someone he met on a dating app. After being drugged, the abuser forcefully confined him and attempted to coerce him into sex.

Marginalized and vulnerable populations are often more subject to being exploited through sexual harassment and rape. These violations are more commonly reported among refugees, transgender individuals, and young adults, particularly in the 24-18 age range. For example, a transgender Egyptian young woman who fled Beirut due to verbal and physical abuse relocated to the suburbs, where she initially felt safer. However, the landowner's son began sexually harassing her. Fearing retaliation and unable to afford relocation, she remained silent until the harassment escalated to physical and sexual abuse, forcing her to leave the area in August.

LGBTQIA+ individuals also face sexual harassment in institutional and healthcare settings. In one case, a trans man seeking medical care was reportedly coerced by a doctor to remove his clothing under false pretenses. The doctor, who insisted this was necessary despite the patient not experiencing this in previous checkups, proceeded to ogle at his scars and genitals, leaving him feeling violated and powerless.

Data also pointed to perpetrators leveraging economic power to coerce sexual favors, taking advantage of financial vulnerability and intersecting marginalized identities. A transgender Sudanese woman, left without a job, was lured to a perpetrator's apartment under the guise of a job opportunity, where she was raped at gunpoint and threatened with further harm if she reported the incident. Similarly, a lesbian woman in Beirut lost her job and struggled to find new employment, leaving her unable to pay rent. Her landlord sexually harassed her, demanding that she "pay the rent in a different way." When she refused, he evicted her, outed her to the neighborhood, and subjected her to verbal attacks.

These cases highlight how sexual violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals is part of a broader system of exploitation that preys on economic vulnerability, social marginalization, and the lack of institutional protections. Survivors are often left without recourse, as perpetrators use financial threats, blackmail, or physical violence to silence them, reinforcing the cycle of abuse.

● Blackmail

Blackmail-related abuses, often tied to threats of outing someone's LGBTQIA+ identity whether in person or online, were significantly reported, similar to 2022. Blackmail cases were tied to verbal and physical violence, showing how threats and coercion are used alongside other forms of abuse to control or intimidate victims. This trend continued in 2023, with numbers showing a steady rise, reinforcing the use of blackmail as a tool of coercion and harassment.

Blackmail cases under general violence often involve strangers met on social media who exploit personal information or photos. For example, one case involved a gay Lebanese man blackmailed by a stranger on social media, who further threatened to release private photos online if personal identification was not shared.

A key factor enabling these blackmail cases is the digital landscape, where perpetrators exploit dating and social media platforms to target LGBTQIA+ individuals. Many incidents occurred on Grindr and META platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp), where abusers create fake profiles to entrap victims, coercing them into sharing personal information or intimate photos before using these materials for extortion. This pattern is also noted in other SWANA countries, like Egypt, where security forces have actively used platforms like Grindr to lure and arrest individuals under vague morality laws, or Iraq, where armed groups have leveraged social media to extort LGBTQIA+ people, threatening to expose their identities unless they pay ransoms.⁴⁶ Given the lack of digital protections and legal recourse for LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon and the region overall, victims often fear reporting these crimes, further emboldening perpetrators.

⁴⁶Human Rights Watch, All This Terror Because of a Photo: Digital Targeting and Its Offline Consequences for LGBT People in the Middle East and North Africa, (New York:February, 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/report/21/02/2023/all-terror-because-photo/digital-targeting-and-its-offline-consequences-lgbt>.

Case data showed that blackmail was most common among Lebanese and prominently affected gay individuals (12 cases), often in combination with verbal or physical abuse. It also appeared frequently among bisexual individuals (5 cases) and was particularly prevalent among adults aged 22 (32-25 cases). Vulnerable groups, such as non-Lebanese—including refugees and migrant workers—or young adults living with their families, may be at even higher risk due to their socio-economic status and dependence on family or employers.

While the Lebanese Penal Code technically criminalizes blackmail, as highlighted in Articles 660 and 661, their application fails to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals due to societal stigma, institutional discrimination, and a lack of explicit protections for sexual orientation and gender identity. In one documented case, a gay Lebanese man was blackmailed by someone he met on a dating app. The perpetrator threatened to release intimate photos unless the victim paid a ransom. Despite the clear violation of the Lebanese Penal Code, the victim chose not to report the crime, fearing that authorities would focus on his sexual orientation rather than the blackmail.

Moreover, refugees, migrant workers, and economically disadvantaged LGBTQIA+ individuals face additional barriers to accessing legal protections. For example, non-Lebanese victims may fear deportation or further marginalization if they engage with the legal system. In one particular case, a Syrian gay man near Saida was lured through Tinder into meeting someone. Upon arrival, they were ambushed, forced into a car, subjected to verbal and physical violence, threatened with deportation. This individual could not report the attack to authorities due to Lebanon's lack of safeguards for LGBTQIA+ individuals, coupled with his precarious residency status. Reporting the crime risked exposing his sexual orientation to hostile institutions, potentially triggering deportation under Lebanon's discriminatory immigration policies or retaliation from his assailants, who invoked state complicity by threatening to involve security forces.

● **Forced Confinement**

Forced confinement, as outlined in Article 569 of the Lebanese Penal Code, refers to the act of restricting a person's freedom by any means. In Lebanon, forced confinement is most prevalent amongst youth—minors and young adults—who are financially dependent on their families, or who have increased vulnerability due to the various ongoing crises and thus may be compelled to return to their families.

In 2022, forced confinement was reported in only 4 cases (0.38% of total), so the sharp rise to 30 cases in 2023 marks a significant and concerning escalation. This shows a growing trend of restriction and control within the context of the broader socio-economic crisis in Lebanon. The rise can be attributed to worsening economic conditions, where financially dependent youth, particularly those reliant on their families, are forced to return to their family homes. Young adults, particularly those in the 24-18 age range, were the most common group reporting forced confinement, with 6 cases.

Often, those returning to their family homes face further violence in this setting. According to case data, forced confinement overlapped with verbal violence in 18 cases, which indicates that verbal abuse is often part of a broader strategy to isolate and confine victims, limiting their ability to escape abusive situations.

It is important to note that forced confinement was prominent among non-Lebanese individuals, particularly refugees, which could indicate perpetrators belonging outside of the family, such as employers. This is further corroborated by the overlap of forced confinement and blackmail, which suggest perpetrators outside the family sphere used threats and blackmail to continue the confinement. For instance, a Syrian man from Akkar was in a relationship with another man when his partner's cousins discovered their relationship. They abducted him, taking him to an empty apartment where they physically assaulted him. He was held for an entire day without food or water before being released with a warning that if he was seen in the area again, he would be killed.

A different form of forced confinement is seen in cases where vulnerable individuals, like non-Lebanese, are trapped by financial coercion and exploitation. One case involved a Palestinian man whose flatmate convinced him to pay 200\$ for a fake Lebanese passport under the pretense that it would help him leave the country.

Unable to find work to pay off the debt, he was pressured into sex work as the only way to repay the money. Over time, the perpetrator, being the flatmate, escalated control by locking him inside the apartment while he was away, preventing him from looking for work. When confronted, the perpetrator physically assaulted him and withheld his identification documents until full payment was made, further entrenching his captivity.

Other cases illustrate how forced confinement is used as a tool for both punishment and control. In one instance, a Lebanese gay man in Bekaa was kidnapped by someone he met on a dating app. The abuser attempted to force him into sex, filmed him naked, and sent the video to his parents, demanding money for his release. Although his parents paid the ransom, they ultimately disowned him, leaving him homeless.

The use of forced confinement as a tool of violence was also evident during public attacks on LGBTQIA+ spaces. At the Madame Om attacks, Jnoud El Rab militants trapped attendees inside the bar for hours, targeting those perceived to be LGBTQIA+ or allies. This highlights how forced confinement extends beyond the private sphere, being used to intimidate and instill fear in those who are (or are assumed to be) part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Domestic Violence

While in 2020, Lebanon enacted Law No. 204 to protect against domestic violence, which included a broader definition of domestic violence and tougher penalties than its earlier version, previous Helem reports have indicated limitations in the law's ability to explicitly protect LGBTQIA+ individuals from domestic violence. This lack of protection mechanisms leaves a population already at risk all the more vulnerable.

Trends between general and domestic violence showed some overlaps. For instance, verbal violence remained the most common form of violence reported across both. Similar to general violence, 2023 data showed that physical and verbal violence were also the most compounded violations within domestic violence, suggesting that verbal degradation often escalates into physical assault.

● Verbal Violence

Verbal violence is the most common form of domestic abuse. Cisgender individuals accounted for the largest group experiencing this (35 cases), followed by trans women (10 cases), nonbinary individuals (5 cases), and genderfluid and genderqueer individuals (1 case each). This form of abuse was also widespread among immigrants and refugees, who made up 33 of the 52 total cases. Within sexual orientation categories, gay individuals reported the highest number of cases (36), followed by bisexual individuals (6), transgender individuals (8), and lesbians (2). Young adults were particularly vulnerable, with both the 24-18 and 32-25 age groups each reporting 23 cases.

Verbal abuse often escalates into more severe forms of violence or serves as a tool for social control, aiming to isolate and intimidate individuals. Anecdotes from cases reported LGBTQIA+ individuals being subjected to continuous verbal harassment from family members, with threats of outing and forced marriage frequently used to reinforce familial authority. In one case, an individual's partner revealed their sexual orientation to their parents, leading to an immediate barrage of death threats. Another survivor had to flee their apartment after being confronted by their siblings in public, who verbally abused them and threatened further harm. Others described being monitored and followed by relatives, receiving threats of forced marriage as a way to suppress their identity.

This pattern reflects the broader cycle of violence LGBTQIA+ individuals face, where verbal abuse often serves as both a precursor to physical violence and a tool to coerce conformity through fear. In many cases, survivors had no choice but to flee their homes, yet even after escaping, threats and harassment from family members persisted, forcing them into a state of constant displacement.

● Physical Violence

Domestic physical violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon is rarely an isolated act; instead, it reflects a systemic cycle of abuse that begins within households and extends into public spheres. Many victims first experience violence in their own homes, where rejection from family members escalates into physical aggression, forcing them into precarious living situations. Those who flee often face new threats outside—whether from extended family, community members, or even law enforcement, who continue to target them based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

While Lebanon's Penal Code criminalizes physical assault (Article 547), it fails to include explicit protections for LGBTQIA+ survivors, as gender identity and sexual orientation are not recognized as protected categories under Lebanese law. This legal vacuum, coupled with institutionalized homophobia and transphobia, discourages survivors from reporting violence, fearing retraumatization by authorities or even prosecution under discriminatory laws like Article 534, which ambiguously criminalizes "sexual acts contrary to nature." The persistence of this violence as well as deeply ingrained homophobia and transphobia shape every aspect of life for LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon, from personal safety to housing security and beyond.

There was a total of 32 reports for physical violence, comprising both standalone acts and those compounded with other violations. Reports of physical violence alone were documented in 5 cases, affecting both cisgender individuals (3 cases) and trans women (2 cases). While both groups are clearly at risk of physical abuse, trans women face additional risks of other forms of violence. However, physical violence was rarely experienced in isolation. Many cases were accompanied by additional violations, particularly verbal abuse and blackmail. In 22 cases, physical violence was reported alongside verbal violence, with cisgender individuals (13 cases) and trans women (7 cases) making up the majority of victims, along with genderqueer, nonbinary, and agender individuals..

Anecdotes from different cases showed a common thread in how outing, whether by an ex-partner, a sibling, or other family members, acts as a catalyst for physical violence. In one case, a young man was outed by his ex-partner, leading to his brother attacking him with a knife. Another individual was pursued and physically assaulted by their cousin after their sexuality became known within the family. The use of digital spaces for blackmail further worsens these risks. Some individuals had their private photos shared without consent, leading to public humiliation, social ostracization, and heightened threats of violence due to societal stigma.

Persistent domestic violence, often inflicted by family members or intimate partners, transforms homes into dangerous environments. Often, LGBTQIA+ individuals are forced to flee for survival or face violent expulsion, resulting in prolonged instability and heightened vulnerability. One gay man endured repeated abuse from multiple family members: his mother forcibly kicking him out, his siblings physically attacking him, and his father assaulting him after discovering his sexual orientation.

With nowhere safe to turn, he cycled through different apartments, constantly uprooted as he tried to evade his family's reach. Another individual, after leaving his parents' home in 2020, was repeatedly tracked down and attacked by his family, forcing him to move every few months. This constant displacement disrupts any sense of security, making it difficult to maintain employment, access services, or build stable relationships, further increasing the risks of exploitation and homelessness.

Escaping domestic perpetrators of physical violence does not always mean finding safety, especially for those living in deeply conservative environments, where the general public may also be perpetrators themselves. Case anecdotes described how some individuals were hunted down in public spaces, on the streets, or in front of their workplaces, by family members who continued to harass and attack them. In many instances, perpetrators not only imposed physical violence but also mobilized others to enforce punishment. This tactic exploits anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment to the perpetrator's benefit, galvanizing strangers into action. One such case involved a Lebanese gay man whose nephew led a group of men to his apartment, where he was abducted, beaten, and blackmailed.

Transgender individuals in Lebanon face widespread physical violence, often targeted for not conforming to rigid gender norms. One trans woman reported enduring repeated physical attacks from her father and brother whenever she expressed her femininity, forcing her to suppress her identity at home to avoid abuse. In another case, a trans man was assaulted by his father and older brother for adopting a masculine appearance and demeanor. These cases reflect a broader reality in which transgender individuals are subjected to systemic abuse, not only from strangers but also from those closest to them, leaving them with few safe spaces.

These stories are not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern of abuse, where LGBTQIA+ individuals are left vulnerable to violence with little to no institutional protection. The lack of legal safeguards against forced outing, family-based violence, and digital blackmail means many are left with no choice but to flee their homes, sever ties with loved ones, or seek refuge in already unstable and precarious living situations.

● Sexual Harassment and Rape

While significant in general violence, sexual harassment and rape are much less frequently reported in domestic settings, which aligns with the broader trend of underreporting—particularly in cases where the perpetrator is a family member, spouse, or partner. Domestic sexual violence is widely recognized as being significantly underreported due to fear of retaliation, social stigma, and the lack of legal protections for survivors. These reasons, coupled with mistrust in institutions, make it difficult to accurately assess the true scale of the issue.

One survivor's experience illustrates this reality. After five years in a relationship, the survivor's partner forced himself upon the survivor, inflicting physical pain. This assault marked the end of their relationship, but the violence did not stop there. Four months later, his father confronted him, shouting homophobic slurs after the ex-partner had deliberately exposed his sexual orientation to his family. His mother then called him, saying, «I don't have a gay son, and if I see you, I will kill you.» Fearing for his life, he fled Tripoli and relocated elsewhere, hoping to find safety near his workplace. As these case anecdote show, domestic sexual violence is not only a reality but one that often leads to additional forms of harm, including forced outing, family rejection, and displacement.

● Blackmail

Blackmail is a less frequent but intense form of control in domestic violence situations, often paired with verbal or physical abuse. Domestic violence-related blackmail was prominent among cisgender, gay, immigrant, and young adult (32-25) individuals. Further investigation is needed to distinguish the dynamics and contexts of blackmail within domestic violence from those involving strangers or general violence.

Case narratives reflected the ongoing trend and pattern of domestic blackmail, forced outing, and violence centering family members and intimate partners. These cases frequently involved third parties outside the household, and intimate partners often exploited power imbalances, such as economic dependence, legal residency status, or social vulnerability, to coerce and control victims. One case involved a Syrian individual whose partner, planning to move to Canada, built their trust and persuaded them to share personal identification documents under the pretense of helping with migration.

The perpetrator proceeded to publicly post the documents alongside private photos. This pattern of betrayal and coercion shows the deep vulnerabilities LGBTQIA+ individuals face within their closest relationships, where trust can easily turn against them, often leaving them with little to no recourse for protection or justice.

This pattern of weaponizing personal information extends beyond romantic relationships. Several individuals reported being outed by family members, either as an act of punishment or to isolate them socially. In one case, a man's wife discovered his sexual orientation, leading her to seek divorce from him and later expose his sexual orientation to his brothers, who began sending him death threats. Another man, after divorcing his wife for similar reasons, faced relentless harassment from both his family and his former in-laws, eventually forcing him to flee Tripoli to escape threats of violence.

Forced outings have also led to street violence. One individual, after being exposed by his sister for both his sexual orientation and HIV status, began facing attacks from strangers in his neighborhood. Others reported that their families used social media to track and blackmail them, sometimes creating fake accounts to gain access to their posts before using the content against them.

For LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially refugees and those already in vulnerable positions, blackmail and forced outing isn't just about personal rejection, it can mean losing access to housing, employment, and personal safety. One individual, after fleeing Syria to avoid forced military conscription, was blackmailed and outed by his former partner back home, cutting off what little support network he had left. In another case, an individual who had been attacked and stabbed by his father's associate confided in his employer about the attack, only to be fired immediately upon revealing his sexual orientation.

● **Forced Confinement**

Only one case of forced confinement was reported in a domestic setting, which involved a trans woman in the 24–18 age range. In addition to experiencing physical violence, this incident served as a mechanism to restrict her gender expression and isolate her from social support. Forced confinement, particularly of trans individuals, is often used by family members to suppress non-normative identities and prevent visibility.

To provide broader context, forced confinement in cases of general violence can occur in various settings and involve different perpetrators, such as employers, acquaintances, or strangers. Unlike domestic cases driven by familial control or “disciplinary motives,” these often reflect economic exploitation or xenophobia, exploiting power dynamics and the relationships between the victim and perpetrator. However, in both contexts, confinement strips individuals of agency and often co-occurs with psychological trauma and physical abuse.

This form of violence was recorded only with non-Lebanese, particularly refugee communities, where economic dependence and cultural expectations make resistance even more difficult. In one case, a 22-year-old Palestinian gay man was forced into an arranged marriage by his family. Desperate to escape, he sought irregular migration routes, only to be exploited by a smuggler who subjected him to forced labor before placing him on an overcrowded boat bound for Europe.

The Lebanese army intercepted the vessel, forcing him to return to his family home, where he remains under constant pressure to go through with the marriage while facing verbal abuse and death threats.

The broader social and economic crisis in Lebanon continues to make escape from forced marriage more difficult, particularly for those with limited financial independence. Many victims have no viable options to leave, leaving them trapped in environments of control, abuse, and coercion.

● **Forced Marriage**

Forced marriage remains a tool of control, particularly affecting young adults who are economically dependent on their families. In some cases, families use forced marriage to relieve economic burdens or as a method of sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts. Other reasons included easing social surveillance or reinforcing heteronormative expectations and gender roles upon LGBTQIA+ individuals.

In 2023, two cases of forced marriage were reported, both involving cisgender individuals, one of whom identified as gay. While the reported cases are 75% lower than in previous years, this does not necessarily indicate a decline but rather shifts in patterns of coercion or underreporting. Forced marriage is accompanied by other forms of abuse, with one reported case also involving verbal violence, reflecting the use of intimidation and coercion to enforce compliance.

SOGIESC Change Efforts

In 2023, Lebanon continued to see the practice of SOGIESC Change Efforts (hereafter referred to as conversion therapy) despite increasing global opposition and recognition of its harm. Unlike several countries that have banned the practice, Lebanon has no legal protections against it, allowing conversion therapy to persist in various forms. With the penal code still containing provisions used to criminalize same-sex relationships and the broader social environment remaining hostile toward LGBTQIA+ identities, these harmful practices continue to be tolerated, if not actively encouraged in some settings.

This year's case data recorded three reports of conversion therapy attempts, all affecting young adults from different backgrounds, reflecting the specific vulnerability of this demographic. In one case, a 21-year-old Palestinian gay man was forced into conversion therapy after his father caught him looking at nude pictures of men on his phone. The immediate reaction was verbal and physical abuse, followed by blame for his father's subsequent hospitalization. His parents then coerced him into seeing a psychologist for conversion therapy, where he had to «pretend to be cured» to escape further punishment. However, his financial dependence on his family has left him trapped in an abusive home, where he continues to experience daily verbal harassment and bullying.

Refugees may be particularly vulnerable to these practices due to their lack of legal and social protections. One Syrian man described how, after undergoing repeated conversion therapy sessions, he ultimately agreed to marry a woman, believing that doing so would improve his life circumstances. His experience highlights how conversion therapy may not always appear to be imposed by force but can also come as a result of extreme pressure, where individuals see no other path to social acceptance and security.

Transgender individuals also face unique risks, as conversion therapy often targets both gender identity and sexual orientation. One trans man from southern Lebanon was outed to his family and subsequently forced to see a psychologist, who attempted to convince him that being transgender was a choice and that his life would be easier if he abandoned his transition. This reflects a broader pattern in which medical and psychological professionals, rather than providing affirming care, reinforce harmful narratives that pressure LGBTQIA+ individuals into suppressing their identities.

Conclusion

While Lebanon continues to face challenges, as highlighted by these cases, recent developments suggest a growing recognition of the harms of conversion therapy. In 2022, a national debate on conversion therapy in Lebanon was sparked by a campaign event in Saida, which ignited nationwide discussions on the legitimacy of conversion therapy as a supposed "cure for homosexuality."⁴⁷ These debates prompted a circular issued by the Union of Psychologists in Lebanon, which emphasized the rejection of conversion therapy as unscientific and harmful, calling for respect for diverse societal and religious beliefs while promoting the development of laws to protect marginalized groups from psychological harm. Considering this, the low case numbers of conversion therapy reports may reflect underreporting, but they may also reflect the developments from the previous year.

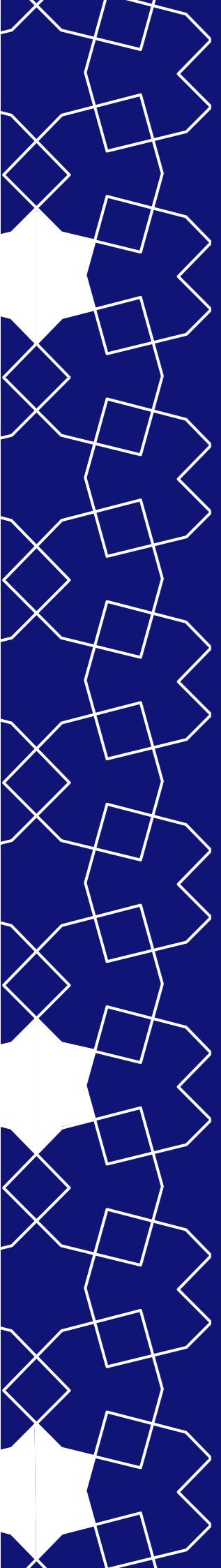
While these developments are promising, Lebanon still faces significant legal and social barriers to fully banning conversion therapy. As the debate in 2022 showed, the combined influence of religion, weak legal protections, cultural stigma, and lack of political will all contribute to the challenges of banning conversion therapy in Lebanon. Additionally, conversion therapy in Lebanon takes many forms, including psychiatric or psychological treatments, religious exorcisms, faith-based «healing» rituals, and even folk remedies involving witch doctors or traditional medicine. These practices, while varying in method, are all rooted in the same false premise that LGBTQIA+ identities are unnatural or in need of correction, and they continue to cause severe psychological and physical harm to those subjected to them. Until these broader systemic issues are addressed, efforts to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals from harmful practices like conversion therapy will continue to face significant obstacles.

The analysis of violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon in 2023 reveals a persistent, deeply entrenched and multifaceted crisis, where different forms of abuse often overlap. Domestic violence, particularly when perpetrated by family members, frequently escalates into physical abuse, leaving survivors with little recourse or support. In contrast, sexual violence is more commonly reported in general settings, where perpetrators operate with relative impunity due to the lack of legal protections. The underreporting of severe violations, including sexual violence, forced marriage, and confinement, suggests that fear of retaliation and cultural stigma continue to silence many survivors, particularly in domestic contexts. Non-Lebanese populations continue to face some of the highest risks, experiencing verbal and physical violence often compounded by blackmail, forced confinement, and limited access to protection mechanisms. Young adults, particularly those in the 24-18 age range, are also more vulnerable to multifaceted and intersecting forms of violence, frequently reporting cases of blackmail, physical attacks, and coercion.

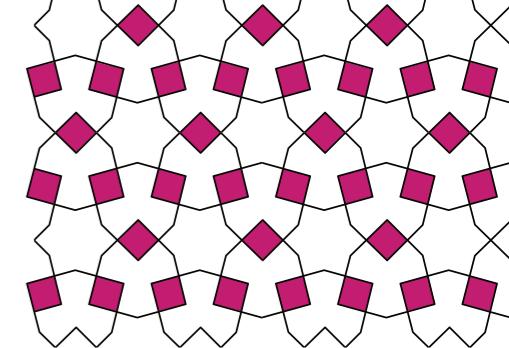
One of the most significant patterns in the data is the intersection of multiple forms of violence. Gay individuals report the highest rates of verbal and physical abuse, often in conjunction with blackmail. Trans women, meanwhile, experience disproportionately high rates of rape, sexual harassment, and physical violence, marking them as one of the most vulnerable groups. While certain groups, such as asexual and demisexual individuals, reported fewer cases, this may indicate underreporting rather than a lower prevalence of violence.

The findings highlight the urgent need for targeted protective measures, particularly for trans women, non-Lebanese, and others facing compounded risks. The persistence of overlapping forms of violence sheds light on the necessity of comprehensive support services that address the full scope of abuse, not just within domestic settings but across all aspects of public life. Without legal protections and systemic interventions, LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon will continue to face violence at the hands of both their families and wider society, with little means of escape or justice.

⁴⁷Raphaël Abdelnour, "Lebanon's LGBTQ+ Suffer Impacts of Discredited 'Conversion Therapy,'" L'Orient Today, December 2022 ,15, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1321698/lebanons-lgbtq-suffer-impacts-of-discredited-conversion-therapy.html>.



Cultural, Economic, and Social Rights Violations



Cultural, economic, and social rights are a category of human rights that focus on ensuring that individuals have access to essential aspects of life, enabling them to live in safety and dignity. These rights include both access to services and resources such as food, water, housing, and sanitation, as well as economic stability, health and wellbeing, and protection from discrimination. Violations of these rights occur when individuals or communities are denied access to these basic necessities due to discriminatory practices, government policies, or other systemic barriers.

There was a sharp decrease in reports related to these rights in 2023, dropping from 296 in 2022 to just 10. This can be largely attributed to Helem's strategic shift towards advocacy at the end of 2022. However, this decline does not necessarily reflect an actual improvement in conditions; instead, it showcases the absence of comprehensive data collection on LGBTQIA+ individuals within broader humanitarian and aid efforts in Lebanon. While mainstream humanitarian actors document worsening trends in access to healthcare, housing, food security, and employment, their reports do not specifically account for experiences of those in the LGBTQIA+ community, leaving a critical gap in understanding how these challenges disproportionately impact LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Given the intersectional levels of marginalization and vulnerability faced by the LGBTQIA+ community in Lebanon, it is reasonable to assume that these worsening economic and social conditions widely documented across the general population are even more severe for LGBTQIA+ individuals, who often face family rejection, workplace discrimination, and barriers to accessing public services. For instance, Oxfam's research indicates that LGBTQIA+ communities in Lebanon are systematically discriminated against, resulting in denial of equal access to general and mental healthcare services.⁴⁸ Additionally, in 2020, Helem reported a significant increase in food insecurity among LGBTQIA+ individuals, noting a more than 1,000 rise in those seeking food assistance between January and June of that year.⁴⁹ The New Humanitarian emphasizes that Lebanon's humanitarian response must better recognize and address the specific needs of marginalized groups, particularly sexual and gender minorities.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Tarek Al Ali, "Too Often Last in the Queue for Food Assistance, Lebanon's LGBTQIA+ People Struggle with Surging Hunger," Views & Voices, Oxfam GB, June 2023 ,7, <https://views-voices.oxfam.org.uk/06/2023/lebanon-lgbtqia-hunger/>.

⁴⁹Tarek Zeidan, The Universal Periodic Review of LGBTQ+ Rights in Lebanon (Lebanon: Helem, 2020), <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=8301&file=EnglishTranslation>.

⁵⁰Jasmin Lilian Diab, "A Moral Imperative to Protect Lebanon's LGBTQI+ Displaced," The New Humanitarian, November 2024 ,4, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/04/11/2024/moral-imperative-protect-lebanon-lgbtqi-displaced>.

The decline in recorded cases therefore does not indicate an improvement in access but rather a growing challenge in recognizing, documenting, and responding to these violations.

Food Security, Access to Clean Water and Sanitation, and Other Basic Needs

The right to adequate food, clean water, sanitation, and other basic necessities is a fundamental economic and social right, yet many LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon face severe deprivation in these areas. Economic precarity, discrimination, and lack of legal protections all contribute to a crisis where marginalized communities, particularly refugees, trans women, those engaged in irregular labor, and individuals with disabilities, struggle to access even the most essential resources. While reports related to food security, water access, and sanitation made up only 1 case in 2023, the severity of which sheds light on a widespread but often underreported crisis.

LGBTQIA+ individuals facing resource insecurity frequently contend with multiple forms of marginalization that intensify their vulnerability. Trans women reported the highest levels of deprivation, accounting for more than half of the documented cases involving food and water scarcity. In one case, a trans woman was coerced into sex work under the promise of food and money, only to be exploited and left without payment. This case illustrates how economic vulnerability is frequently weaponized against trans women. The overlap between food insecurity and economic marginalization was also clear among gay men, who reported slightly higher instances of compounded needs where food insecurity was linked to lack of access to sanitation. A gay Palestinian man reported that due to financial instability, his household could only afford one meal per day, often surviving on discarded leftovers.

Non-Lebanese were particularly affected, with five out of seven cases of food and water deprivation involving non-Lebanese individuals. Syrian refugees reported most of these cases, followed by Iraqi and Palestinian refugees, who struggle to access clean water and sanitation in informal settlements and refugee camps. Lebanese individuals were also significantly affected, reflecting the broader impact of the country's economic collapse on both refugee and local populations. In one case, an Iraqi household of two gay men faced severe food insecurity due to xenophobia preventing them from securing employment, leaving them entirely dependent on restaurant scraps.

Adults in the 40-33 age range were the most affected, with cases evenly split between food and water deprivation alone and those also experiencing lack of access to sanitation. Young adults, particularly those aged 32-25, also reported significant deprivation, highlighting the economic struggles of those early in their careers or facing unemployment. Individuals with disabilities faced unique challenges in securing food, water, and sanitation. One survivor of the Beirut explosion reported difficulty maintaining employment due to their injuries, which directly impacted their ability to afford food and other essentials. Their case demonstrates how disability, economic instability, and social marginalization intersect to deepen vulnerability.

Lack of access to sanitation is another critical issue, often linked to displacement and homelessness. In one case, a gay man was forced to flee his home due to familial violence, leaving him without financial resources or a place to stay. He resorted to sleeping on Beirut's streets, scavenging food, and drinking contaminated seawater to survive. Another case involved a man targeted by an armed non-state actor, who stripped him of his belongings and left him unemployed and homeless, forcing him to live with extreme food deprivation for a month. Others reported being unable to access clean water, relying instead on unsafe sources due to financial constraints. One individual, after being forcibly displaced because of his sexuality, described resorting to washing in the sea due to lack of access to running water.

While formal reports on food, water, and sanitation insecurity remain relatively low, the cases illustrate a far-reaching crisis. Many LGBTQIA+ individuals facing these conditions may avoid reporting due to stigma, fear of retaliation, or lack of access to services or awareness of available support mechanisms. The data indicates that resource deprivation is not merely a matter of economic collapse or lack of aid but a symptom of systemic inequalities that disproportionately impact LGBTQIA+ individuals. Addressing these issues requires not only direct material assistance but also broader structural changes, including protection from economic exploitation, access to non-discriminatory employment opportunities, and the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals in social welfare programs. Without such measures, food and water insecurity will continue to be a devastating but often invisible crisis within Lebanon's LGBTQIA+ community.

Housing and Shelter Violations

Housing insecurity remains a critical issue for LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon, where discrimination, xenophobia, and economic instability intersect to create widespread violations of the right to adequate shelter. While reported cases of housing violations decreased from 331 in 2022 to 15 in 2023, this drop does not indicate an improvement in conditions but rather a shift in documentation or underreporting, particularly as economic hardship and social hostility toward LGBTQIA+ individuals persist. The cases reported in 2023 reveal an alarming trend of targeted evictions, community-driven expulsions, and housing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, often forcing individuals into homelessness or unsafe living conditions.

Evictions by landlords based explicitly on sexual orientation or gender identity remained one of the most common forms of housing discrimination. In multiple cases, landlords forcibly removed tenants after discovering their LGBTQIA+ identity or following public anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric. A Lebanese gay man in Beirut was asked to vacate his home after a politician made a speech condemning LGBTQIA+ individuals, with the landlord justifying the eviction by stating that he did not support the community. Another gay Lebanese man and his friend were forced to leave their apartment after the property owner expressed fear of being targeted by Jnoud el Rab or other armed groups due to their presence. Transgender individuals, particularly trans women, also faced severe housing discrimination. A Syrian trans woman living in Bekaa was suddenly told to leave her apartment after neighbors spread rumors about her, with the landlord citing pressure from the community. In another instance, a Syrian trans woman was physically and verbally assaulted by a landlord in Beirut after he found out about her gender identity, evicting her immediately despite having already received her rent payment.

Beyond landlord-driven evictions, LGBTQIA+ individuals also faced forced removals by their communities, neighbors, and even law enforcement. In Mount Lebanon, a Syrian trans woman was forcibly removed from her home after local police officers visited her apartment and gave her seven days to vacate, stating that she was unwelcome in the area due to her gender identity. Similarly, in Beirut, a trans woman and her boyfriend were verbally harassed and physically attacked by neighbors. The neighbors threatened them with death if they did not leave, throwing their belongings into the street and forcing them to abandon the area. Left without shelter, they temporarily stayed with a friend, but after being rejected and expelled by the community again, they spent nights sleeping under a bridge before being forcibly removed by municipal authorities.

While less frequent, housing violations also extended beyond formal rental agreements. Some individuals were forcibly expelled from their family homes after being outed. One young 24-year-old gay man in Tripoli was physically abused by his siblings for being LGBTQIA+ and was kicked out by his mother on multiple occasions. In May, he was forced to sleep on the streets for two days after his latest expulsion, having nowhere else to turn.

In other cases, housing discrimination overlapped with sexual harassment and exploitation. A cisgender lesbian woman in Beirut was propositioned by her landlord, who told her she could stay rent-free if she provided sexual favors. When she refused, he immediately evicted her. Similarly, an Iraqi refugee in Bekaa found himself in an unsafe housing situation when his new flatmate began sexually harassing him, eventually forcing him to leave and spend two days sleeping at his workplace due to lack of shelter.

Young adults were particularly vulnerable to housing violations, making up the majority of reported cases. Those in the 24-18 age range faced the highest levels of forced evictions and landlord refusals, exacerbated by Lebanon's youth unemployment crisis and rising living costs. Many were either unemployed or working in precarious seasonal jobs, making it difficult to maintain stable housing and leaving them susceptible to exploitation, harassment, and displacement.

Nationality and immigration status played a significant role in housing insecurity. Non-Lebanese were disproportionately affected, with Syrian and Iraqi nationals making up over half of reported cases. Discrimination against refugees remains a significant barrier to stable housing, with landlords frequently exploiting their legal precarity to impose higher rents or issue arbitrary evictions. One Iraqi refugee in Beirut was evicted in January due to both his nationality and sexual orientation. Unable to secure alternative housing, he was left homeless for a day, sleeping on the streets before finding temporary shelter. For refugees, repeated evictions often led to further instability, as individuals unable to secure housing due to financial constraints found themselves displaced again not over their identities, but because they could not afford rent after having paid for months in advance in previous accommodations.

The housing crisis for LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon is not only a reflection of economic hardship but also of systemic discrimination, xenophobia, and transphobia. The high prevalence of eviction cases among trans women, Syrian refugees, and Iraqi individuals points to the intersectional nature of these violations, where both sexual orientation and gender identity compound pre-existing vulnerabilities. While fewer cases were formally reported in 2023, the narratives reveal a continued pattern of displacement, community-led expulsions, and economic exploitation that places LGBTQIA+ individuals at heightened risk of homelessness and violence. Addressing this crisis requires urgent legal protections against housing discrimination, the expansion of emergency housing services for displaced individuals, and broader efforts to combat anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment in both private and public housing sectors.

Service-Based Discrimination

Protection from service-based discrimination, both public and private services, is part of the right to an adequate standard of living. However, LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon continue to face systemic barriers when accessing essential services, including healthcare, humanitarian aid, and recreational facilities. This type of discrimination violates these rights by denying individuals their basic rights and reducing their ability to lead a dignified life.

A rapid gender analysis report focusing on the internal displacement crisis in South Lebanon showed the particular vulnerability of LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly in accessing humanitarian services due to both legal and social barriers. Discrimination in accessing essential services, such as health services, is widespread, particularly for transgender and gender-diverse individuals, leading to increased risks of exploitation, sexual harassment, and rape. Overcrowded shelters often lack privacy and safety measures, further endangering these vulnerable groups. Without access to legal protections or safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ people, their ability to secure basic needs and maintain a dignified standard of living is significantly compromised.⁵¹

Case reports from 2023 revealed four instances of service denial, all involving Syrian refugees: two cisgender gay men and two transgender women. These cases reflect a broader trend of discrimination faced by non-Lebanese LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly those already struggling with economic precarity. In one case, a Syrian trans woman reached out to a humanitarian NGO for charitable assistance, only to be rejected outright due to her gender identity. Another Syrian trans woman with a disability sought help from a local NGO, but after initially receiving support, she was suddenly cut off and blocked by the organization upon learning about her gender identity.

Discrimination also extended to private services. A Syrian gay couple was expelled from their gym in Mount Lebanon after management discovered their sexual orientation, with no refund offered despite their prepaid membership. These cases showcase how service-based discrimination is not limited to emergency aid or government institutions but extends to everyday spaces where LGBTQIA+ individuals attempt to participate in public life.

Although only a small number of cases were formally reported, trends documented in 2022 indicate that this form of discrimination remains persistent and likely underreported. Those most affected were young adults in the 32–25 age range, with one case involving an adult aged 59–41. Economic vulnerability played a significant role, as three of the individuals denied services were unemployed, while one was working part-time. These patterns highlight how employment insecurity and financial dependence further limit access to essential services, leaving LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially refugees and transgender people, without recourse when faced with systemic discrimination.

⁵¹Jasmin Lilian Diab, Rapid Gender Analysis: Gender, Conflict, and Internal Displacement in South Lebanon (Lebanon: CARE International and UN Women, 2024), <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/rapid-gender-analysis-gender-conflict-and-internal-displacement-and-south-lebanon>.

Workplace Discrimination

Workplace discrimination continues to be a significant barrier to economic security for LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon, particularly in the absence of anti-discrimination protections. The right to work and fair labor conditions extends beyond access to employment; it includes protection against exploitation, harassment, and wrongful termination. However, case reports from 2023 show that discrimination in the workplace remains widespread, with individuals facing bullying, arbitrary dismissal, wage exploitation, and exclusion based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The economic crisis has further deepened these challenges, as marginalized workers, particularly refugees, migrant domestic workers, and young adults, are left with limited options for stable employment.

Work Environment

Discrimination in work environments emerged as the most frequently reported form of workplace violation, with nine documented cases. LGBTQIA+ employees often face persistent bullying and harassment, creating hostile conditions that leave them with no choice but to endure mistreatment or leave their jobs. These violations are particularly damaging for refugees, who are barred from formal employment and often forced into informal, unregulated jobs, as well as for young adults who already occupy precarious positions in the labor market.

One case involved a Lebanese gay man working as a bartender and cashier who was outed by his co-workers after they discovered his Instagram profile. The harassment he endured during shifts made his workplace unbearable. Despite his efforts to seek support from his manager, no action was taken to address the situation. Similarly, a gay Syrian refugee employed at a restaurant faced repeated harassment from the owner, who made inappropriate advances. When the worker rejected these advances, the owner retaliated by falsely accusing him of theft and issuing threats.

In another instance, a Lebanese trans man was initially hired for a hospitality job but experienced escalating bullying once his probation period ended. His co-workers mocked him, and management reduced his salary, claiming he should be grateful to have a job at all since «other companies wouldn't accept him.» These cases highlight the systemic discrimination and exploitation LGBTQIA+ individuals face in the workplace, particularly those in vulnerable positions such as refugees and young adults.

Arbitrary Termination of Employment

Arbitrary termination of employment was another prevalent violation, disproportionately affecting non-Lebanese workers and young adults. Out of the seven reported cases, four involved non-Lebanese, including Syrian and Sudanese workers. These populations are often subjected to legal exclusions and social stigmatization that heighten their risks of workplace discrimination and sudden termination. In one case, a Syrian gay man was fired from a salon after his employer found out about his sexual orientation through social media. He had already worked there for a month without receiving any wages, yet he was immediately dismissed. A Sudanese trans woman was similarly terminated after her co-workers discovered her gender identity through social media. She was called in by management and fired, told explicitly that the company did not accept LGBTQIA+ employees. When she came to collect her salary, she was only given half of what she was owed.

These cases also highlight how LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly migrant domestic workers, often face termination without financial compensation or alternative housing, leaving them in precarious situations. A Kenyan lesbian domestic worker was dismissed after rejecting sexual advances from her employer. Not only was she denied her salary, but she was also forced to leave the residence without any accommodation or financial support, placing her at immediate risk of homelessness.

Furthermore, workplace discrimination extended beyond those who openly identified as LGBTQIA+ to individuals merely suspected of belonging to the community. A heterosexual cisgender woman in Beirut was fired after a colleague spread a rumor that she was a lesbian. The employer justified the dismissal by stating that they «do not accept people from the LGBTQIA+ community» in their company. This case showcases how even an unsubstantiated suspicion of being LGBTQIA+ can result in workplace exclusion, reinforcing a culture of fear and discrimination in professional settings.

● **Other Violations**

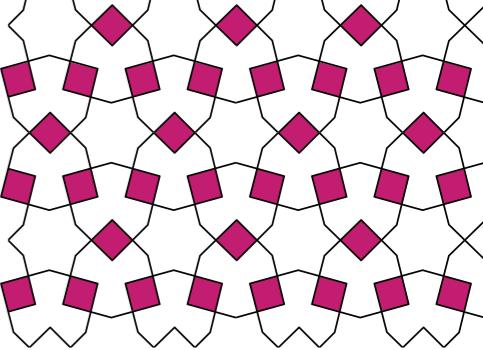
Other violations included contract exploitation and financial coercion. One Lebanese gay man who worked as a freelancer in interior design suffered a work-related injury when he fell from a balcony. His employer had initially promised to cover medical expenses in case of an accident, but when the worker sought compensation, the employer not only refused but also falsely accused him of theft. The employer then threatened to out him to neighbors and clients if he did not drop the issue.

Workplace discrimination also extended to recruitment, where LGBTQIA+ individuals were excluded from job opportunities based on their identities. A Lebanese trans woman was denied an interview solely due to her appearance. Before she even had the chance to sit for the interview, she was told, «this is not going to work because of the way you look.»

Beyond these direct violations, LGBTQIA+ individuals have also been punished in the workplace for expressing their beliefs or reporting anti-LGBTQIA+ discrimination and harassment. A Lebanese gay teacher working at an educational institution posted content supporting LGBTQIA+ rights after the Madame Om attacks, which prompted his manager to issue an official warning over his “unacceptable” social media activity. Although he was not fired outright, his opportunity for career advancement was blocked when the institution deliberately rescinded a promotion abroad due to his vocal support. Another case involved an Iraqi gay man who endured bullying from colleagues and managers because of his perceived feminine behavior. After months of verbal abuse, he finally reported his manager’s harassment, only to be dismissed by higher management, who told him that «everybody already knows you’re gay.»

Needs Assessment

Conclusion



Helem has for years provided extensive support to the LGBTQIA+ community in Lebanon in the form of legal, psychological, medical, and shelter assistance, as well as cash aid to those facing homelessness or violence.

Past years have increased the demand for assistance, with cases being exacerbated by Lebanon's ongoing socio-economic crises, shrinking civic space, and lack of accessible and affordable services and resources. In 2022, legal assistance was a critical component, with mental health services being in high demand, particularly with cases linked to depression and suicidal ideation. Helem also offered shelter to 35 individuals, mainly Syrian cis men and trans women, and provided cash assistance as an essential lifeline for covering basic needs and facilitating relocation for those at risk.

Compared to 2023, 2022 witnessed a 45% decrease of the total number of assistance cases from 1,944 to 1,076 respectively, with cash assistance being the most provided service (523 cases), highlighting the growing economic challenges. While legal assistance decreased slightly from 71 to 58 cases, asylum assistance remained comparable in percentage (5% in 2023 compared to 7% in 2022). Psychological care saw a significant drop from 292 to 40 cases, indicating either reduced service accessibility or underreporting. Shelter provision also dropped from 35 to 24 cases, further reflecting resource constraints or evolving priorities in addressing immediate community needs.

Syrian refugees have also struggled with funding cuts, especially after the suspension of UNHCR-funded cash assistance for refugees in 2023. According to a 2023 Human Rights Watch report, many relied on aid programs to cover essential needs such as housing, food, and healthcare. The cuts exacerbated their already precarious situations, leading to increased poverty and vulnerability. This was reflected in Helem's data, with cash assistance (22), blackmail (5), and UNHCR matters (such as asking for support in contacting or reconnecting with UNHCR or their protection file-related concerns) (19) also reflecting the precariousness of their status.

However, the increasing demand for cash assistance in 2023, coupled with the concerning numbers of individuals requesting more than one type of assistance, points to the worsening economic hardships affecting marginalized LGBTQ+ communities. Overall, while the types of services remained consistent, the shifts in volume and distribution reflect the broader impact of Lebanon's ongoing crises on the community's vulnerability. This shift could also reflect the growing fear of seeking out assistance or fatigue from the situation, as services available continue to shrink.

The alarming escalation of violations against Lebanon's LGBTQIA+ community in 2023, marked by state-backed repression, extremist violence, and draconian legislative efforts, has unfolded against a backdrop of unaddressed systemic failures from 2022. As such, the documented drop in case numbers reflects not improvement but a collapse of institutional protections, shrinking civic space, and the chilling effect of fear on reporting. Trans women, Syrian refugees, and disabled LGBTQIA+ individuals endure intersecting crises: economic precarity, targeted violence, and exclusion from humanitarian aid, all exacerbated by Lebanon's political paralysis and the 2023 Israeli war on Lebanon.

In this year, trans women (433 cases) remain among the most vulnerable, navigating severe economic instability (305 cash assistance requests), homelessness, and systemic violence. Meanwhile, Syrian refugees (90 cases) face compounded threats related to sexuality and gender, physical attacks, blackmail, and eviction, amplified by xenophobia and exclusion from legal residency. The war further destabilized this landscape, displacing LGBTQIA+ individuals into unsafe shelters where harassment and outing are rampant, and resources scarce.

The data highlights a stark reality: Lebanon's LGBTQIA+ community is trapped in a cycle of structural violence. The failure to repeal Article 534, ratify core international labor and refugee protection conventions (including the 1951 Refugee Convention, its 1967 Protocol, and key ILO conventions on discrimination), or implement inclusive housing policies has left LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially refugees, trans women, and disabled persons, without legal recourse or safe havens. In the absence of international legal frameworks that protect employment rights, regulate residency, or ensure access to shelter, systemic exclusion persists across sectors. Meanwhile, the war intensified risks for internally displaced LGBTQIA+, who now face dual threats of war and SOGIESC-based persecution.

Urgent action is non-negotiable. The Lebanese government must immediately decriminalize same-sex relations, enforce anti-discrimination laws, and integrate LGBTQIA+ needs into crisis responses. The international community must condition aid on rights progress, fund emergency shelters, and pressure tech platforms to protect users from digital entrapment. NGOs must prioritize intersectional aid and secure reporting tools for anti-LGBTQIA+ violations.

Without accountability, Lebanon's LGBTQIA+ community will remain a target of state and societal violence. Systemic reform is crucial, not merely to mitigate harm, but to dismantle the architectures of oppression that render lives of LGBTQIA+ individuals expendable. Survival hinges on translating these recommendations into action, ensuring no one is left behind in the fight for dignity and justice.

Recommendations

The escalation in violations against the LGBTQIA+ community in 2023, from state-backed legislative attacks to extremist violence, demands urgent action to address both longstanding systemic failures and new threats. Unresolved 2022 priorities, such as repealing Article 534 and ratifying ILO conventions, remain critical as Lebanon's crises deepen vulnerabilities for marginalized groups. Syrian refugees, trans women, and disabled LGBTQIA+ individuals face intersectional violations risks, enduring exclusion from legal protections, humanitarian aid, and safe housing. The recommendations below emphasize intersectional strategies, immediate accountability, and global collaboration to counter repression and uphold dignity for all.

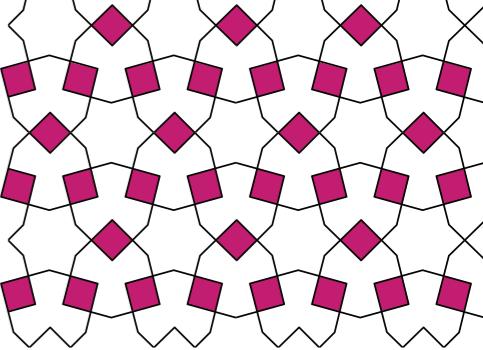
To the Local LGBTQIA+ Community and Influential Actors

Mutual Aid & Solidarity:

- Strengthen mutual aid networks to address 2023's worsening economic crisis (e.g., food insecurity, evictions) by boosting volunteer and organizer capacity.
- Establish confidential, accessible support networks, including mental health services, legal aid, and emergency housing, for individuals at risk of or recovering from conversion therapy, forced marriage, and other similar risks.

Ally Engagement:

- Train allies and alternative media to counter 2023's surge in anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric and censorship (e.g., banned films, fatwas).
- Create intersectional safe spaces for refugees, trans women, and disabled LGBTQIA+ individuals.



To Allied Local and Regional NGOs and Civil Organizations

Outreach, Partnership, & Community Support:

- Strengthen connections between mutual aid networks, local LGBTQIA+ communities, and grassroots civil society groups to improve coordination of food, housing, and financial support.
- Develop joint outreach campaigns to raise awareness of available services among marginalized LGBTQIA+ populations.
- Support local initiatives in volunteer mobilization, resource distribution, and safe community spaces to ensure that assistance reaches the most vulnerable.

Advocacy & Coalition Building:

- Expand partnerships with regional LGBTQIA+ organizations to share strategies against regressive laws (e.g., Iraq's anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation).
- Deploy different tactics, such as holding individuals and organizations accountable or refraining from collaborating with entities targeting LGBTQIA+ communities, including those censoring content or inciting hate speech.

Capacity Building:

- Pledge and provide both technical and financial support to address 2023's worsening economic crisis, particularly focusing on present grassroots efforts like mutual aid.
- Train frontline workers on LGBTQIA+ rights, with 2023 updates on digital safety (e.g., responding to Grindr entrapment).

To the Broader Human Rights Community and INGOs

Coalition Building

- Partner with local organizations for capacity building and knowledge exchange.
- Establish emergency evacuation initiatives through coordinated international partnerships to safeguard at-risk LGBTQIA+ individuals, including activists, community leaders, and those facing imminent threats. These programs should prioritize:
 1. Rapid-response mechanisms (e.g., safe houses, expedited visas, or temporary asylum pathways) for urgent protection.
 2. Long-term resettlement support (e.g., housing, legal aid, psychosocial care) in collaboration with host countries.
 3. Confidential referral systems involving trusted NGOs, embassies, and international bodies to ensure safe and culturally sensitive transitions.

Inclusive Humanitarian Aid

- Ensure all aid programs (food, healthcare, shelter) are explicitly LGBTQIA+ inclusive, addressing notable risks documented in 2023 (such as evictions or blackmail).
- Mandate gender impact analyses for all initiatives, incorporating nonbinary and intersectional identities (e.g., refugees, disabled individuals).

Tech Accountability

- Pressure platforms like Grindr and Meta to enhance user safety in high-risks regions, particularly regarding online blackmail.
- Cybersecurity experts to partner with local and regional organizations to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals from blackmail, online harassment, and outing.

To the Lebanese Government

Legal Reforms

- Repeal Articles 532, 531, 526, 521, 534, and 533 of the penal code to decriminalize same-sex relations, gender expression, and public morality offenses.
- Enact comprehensive anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBTQIA+ individuals in employment, housing, and healthcare. Advocate for the Lebanese government to introduce and enforce legislation that explicitly bans conversion therapy, including psychological, medical, and religious-based practices aimed at changing an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Accountability & Victim Support:

- Investigate and prosecute state actors complicit in violence or negligence (e.g., security forces failing to protect LGBTQIA+ events), as mandated under Law 2021/204 (domestic violence protections).
- Strengthen monitoring mechanisms within the Ministry of Interior to track hate crimes and ensure LGBTQIA+ access to justice.

Healthcare & Social Services:

- Develop LGBTQIA+-inclusive healthcare protocols, with updated training for providers on gender-affirming care and mental health support.
- Facilitate access to social security and unemployment benefits for LGBTQIA+ individuals, aligning with ILO Conventions 44 and 190.

To the International Community

Diplomatic Pressure

- Publicly condemn anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation and rhetoric (e.g., Minister Mortada's draft law).
- Advocate for judicial independence and LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in housing, healthcare, and labor policies.
- Condemn Jnoud El Rab and similar groups, designating them as criminal enterprises/hate groups to sanction their funders

Establishing Safe Havens

- Utilize embassy/consulate premises as temporary safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ individuals and organizations facing imminent threats (e.g., raids, violence, or state persecution), drawing on precedents of diplomatic protection under the Vienna Convention.
- Assist the aforementioned coordinated international partnerships for emergency evacuation initiative by facilitating emergency visas for activists, journalists, and community leaders at extreme risk, prioritizing those targeted in 2023 (e.g., victims of Madame Om attacks or forced confinement).

Capacity Building and Community Engagement

- Increase capacity of programs assisting LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon prioritizing mental health, legal aid, and emergency shelters.
- Facilitate the creation of collaborative networks for partnerships between local, regional, and international organizations.

Annex 1: Demographic Analysis of Needs Assessment

Gender

Cis Men

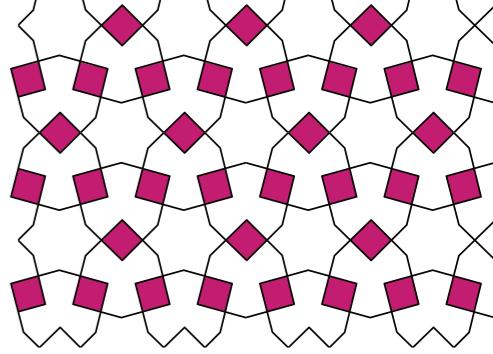
Cis men account for the largest group, with a total of 599 cases, highlighting a broad spectrum of needs. Cash assistance (194 cases) and legal assistance (48 cases) dominate the forms of support provided, indicating economic and legal vulnerability. Psychological support (22 cases), blackmail (14 cases), and UNHCR matters (38 cases) were also prominent. Additionally, there are significant numbers of cases involving violations under «Others» (76 cases). Finally, the relatively high numbers of death threats (30 cases) and asylum from Lebanon (39 cases) suggest heightened personal security concerns.

Trans Women

Trans women represented the second largest group, with a total of 433 cases. The most common form of assistance is cash assistance (305 cases), suggesting severe economic vulnerability. Other key issues include asylum from Lebanon (7 cases), death threats (6 cases), and eviction risk (8 cases). Additionally, trans women reported high rates of physical violence (8 cases) and homelessness (10 cases). UNHCR matters (18 cases) and legal assistance (4 cases) are also significant.

Cis Women

Cis women made up 90 cases, with their primary needs revolving around «Others» (40 cases) and cash assistance (14 cases). Notably, cis women also reported psychological support (7 cases), shelter (homelessness) (4 cases), and asylum from Lebanon (3 cases). The presence of suicide ideation (2 cases) highlights the severe mental health crises some are facing. Cis women also reported a need for medical and legal assistance, though in smaller numbers compared to other groups.



Other and Undisclosed Genders

This category has a total of 47 cases, with the most common types of assistance being «Others» (14 cases) and psychological support (7 cases). Cash assistance (7 cases) and legal assistance (2 cases) are also notable, reflecting the economic hardships and legal challenges faced by this group.

Trans Men

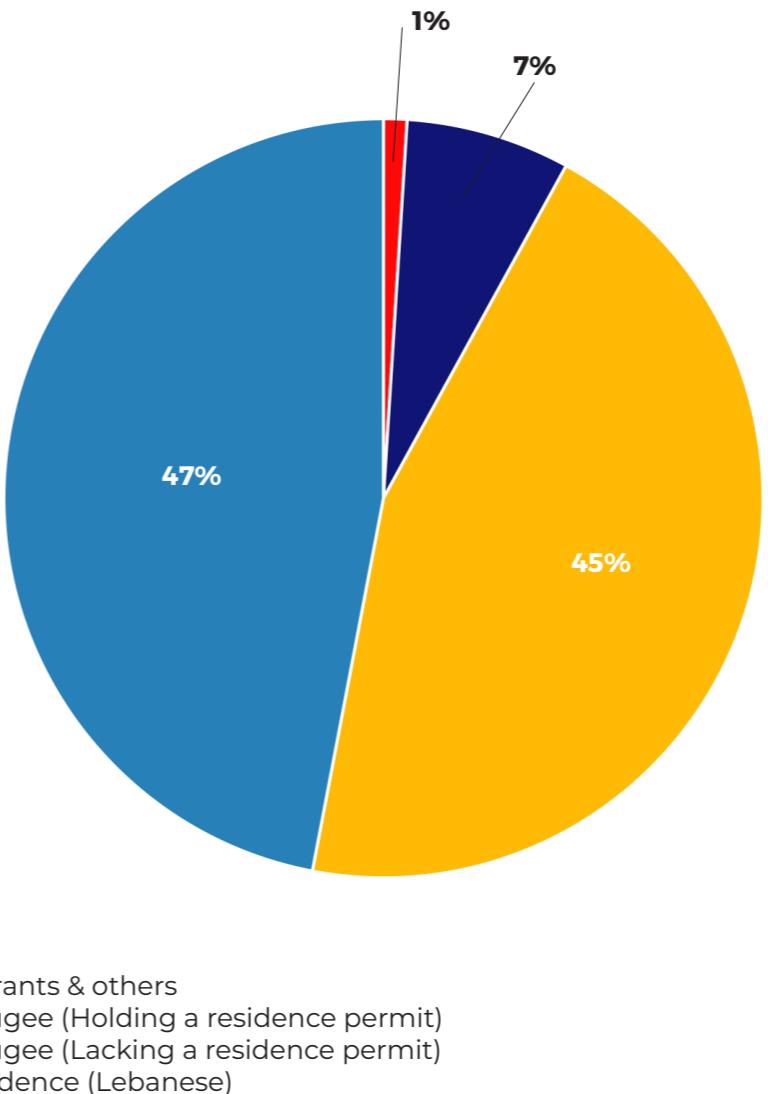
The trans men category included 10 cases, with asylum from Lebanon and cash assistance (2 cases) being the primary forms of support. There are also concerns of death threats (1 case) and physical violence (2 cases), showcasing personal safety risks. There was a presence of UNHCR matters (2 cases) and psychological support (1 case).

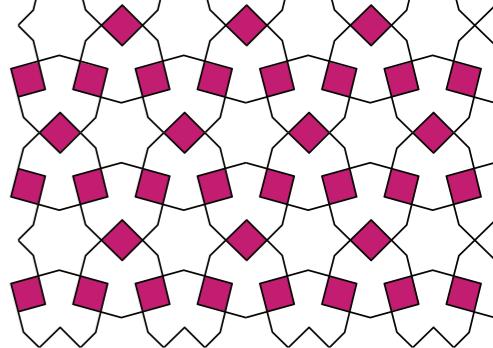
Nonbinary and Genderfluid Individuals

Nonbinary individuals reported 10 cases, with cash assistance (1 case), legal assistance (2 cases), and psychological support (1 case) being the primary forms of support. There are also specific concerns such as death threats (1 case), sex trafficking (1 case), and asylum from Lebanon (1 case).

The data for individuals identifying as gender fluid is minimal, with just 2 cases, both requesting psychological support. This suggests a need for targeted mental health services for this group, though the small sample size makes broader conclusions difficult.

Immigration Status





Other Analysis of Needs Assessment

While the majority of reports came from residents, or members of the Lebanese host community, (490 reports), refugees, particularly those lacking valid legal residency, constituted a significant portion of the LGBTQIA+ community seeking assistance. These individuals are often more vulnerable due to their uncertain legal status, lack of family support, as well as additional risks such as xenophobic attacks and deportation. Migrants (including migrant domestic workers, and others, such as asylum seekers, represent smaller, but highly vulnerable groups.

Nationality

Lebanese Individuals

Lebanese individuals were particularly affected by economic challenges, as shown by the large number of cases requesting cash assistance (60). Other significant issues included death threats (6), legal assistance (10), and shelter (8).

Syrian Refugees

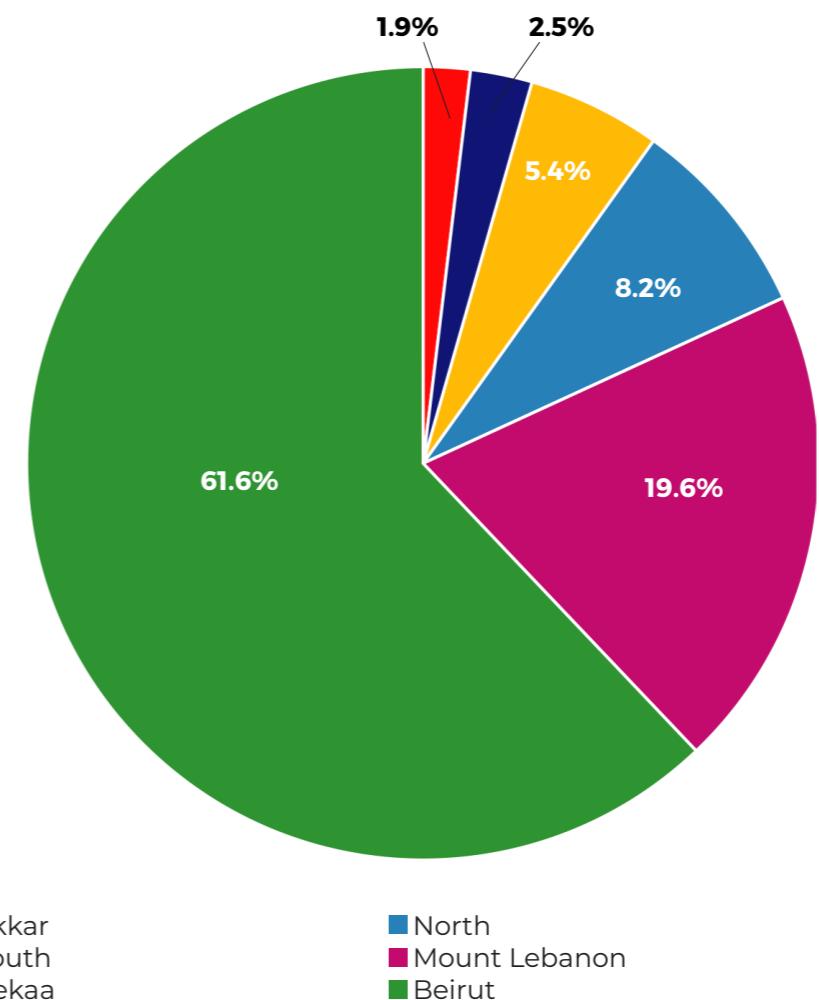
LGBTQIA+ Syrian refugees in Lebanon, especially those lacking valid legal residency, faced significant challenges, navigating dual vulnerabilities as both members of the LGBTQIA+ community and as refugees. Anti-Syrian sentiments and campaigns, fueled by economic and political instability, mirrored anti-LGBTQIA+ campaigns in their emphasis on othering and exclusion. Both groups are scapegoated for Lebanon's ongoing crises, leading to increased discrimination, violence, and marginalization.

These trends were reflected in the needs assessment, as Syrians were the second largest group seeking assistance. The death threat (18) category is particularly alarming, highlighting the high levels of risk faced by Syrian LGBTQ+ refugees in Lebanon due to both their nationality and sexual identity.

Other Nationalities

Within the remaining nationalities, who constituted 28% of assistant cases, Iraqis were the largest nationality (14), mostly involving cash assistance and asylum claims. Egyptians faced eviction risks but had fewer cases overall (2). Palestinians (4) and Moroccans (2) also required varied support like legal aid and cash assistance. Notably, Sudan saw a single rape case reported, while smaller numbers of support went to Algerians, Kenyans, and Pakistanis. These groups primarily sought help for eviction, homelessness, or legal matters.

Trends in Reported Cases based on Geographic Location



Being the capital and primary cultural and population hub in Lebanon, Beirut accounted for 226 of the total cases, making up a significant majority of the cases, especially in comparison to other regions. However, its prominence in the data is not solely due to its size and centrality. Many LGBTQIA+ individuals gravitate toward urban centers like Beirut in search of safety, anonymity, and a sense of community that is often unavailable in more rural areas. The ability to find tolerant spaces, access resources, and navigate daily life with fewer immediate threats contributes to the city's role as both a refuge and a site where violations are more likely to be documented. These cases were broken down into cash assistance (88 cases), legal assistance (18 cases), psychological support (11 cases), and other (33) cases. UNHCR matters constituted 19 cases, showing the need for specialized case assistance for refugees.

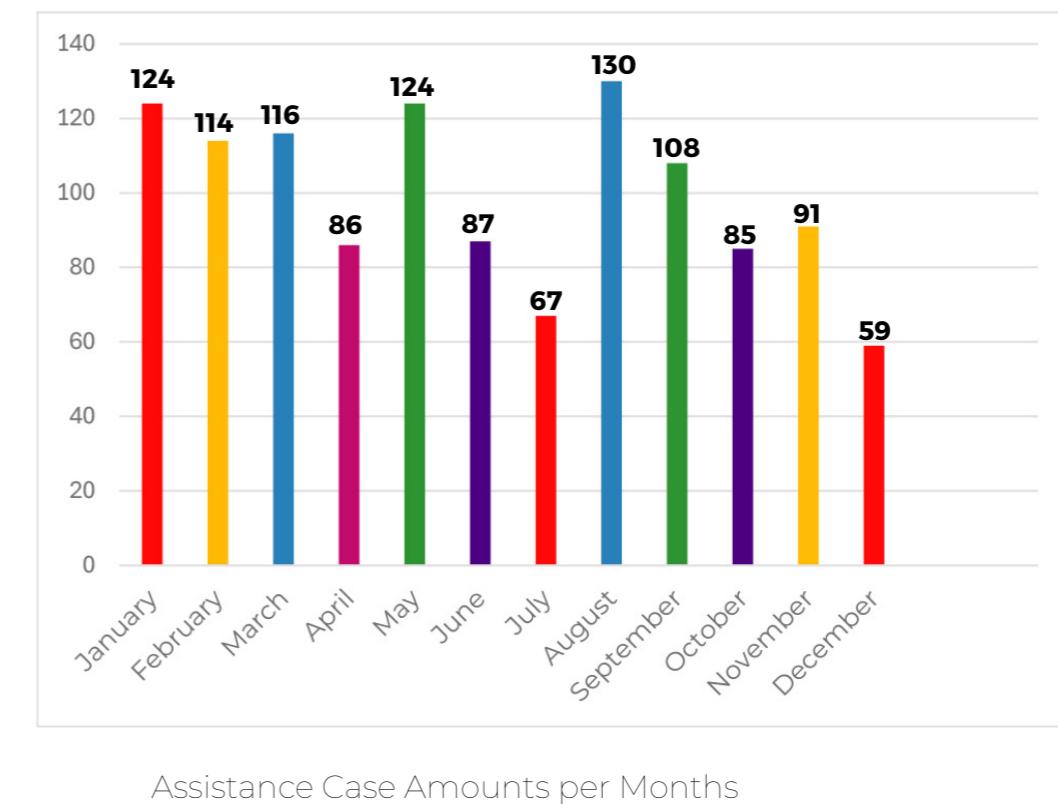
Mount Lebanon followed with 72 cases. This high number may be attributed to its proximity to Beirut, the country's primary urban and economic hub, as well as the presence of other significant urban centers within the region. These factors likely contribute to Mount Lebanon's role as an area with a concentration of reported cases, reflecting its dense population and interconnectedness with Beirut's social and economic activities. Cash assistance again was the most requested form of support with 23 cases, followed by other assistance and psychological support (4 cases). Akkar and North Lebanon show relatively low numbers of cases, with 7 in Akkar and 30 in the North. In both regions, cash assistance plays a major role, reflecting economic hardship. The North shows a more diverse range of issues, including psychological support (2 cases), blackmail (2 cases), and a case of rape, signaling severe social and personal safety challenges. Akkar's cases are primarily economic, with minimal reports of violence or legal assistance needs.

Bekaa reported 20 cases, with cash assistance (4 cases) and «Others» (5 cases) being the most requested forms of support. There are also needs for UNHCR-related matters and psychological support, indicating ongoing struggles related to refugee status and mental health in this region.

South Lebanon, with 9 cases, shows a concerning presence of physical violence (2 cases), child abuse (1 case), and psychological support needs (2 cases). These issues reflect the heightened personal safety and mental health challenges stemming from conflict and insecurity in the region. Lastly, there are 3 cases reported from individuals outside Lebanon, focusing on death threats, legal assistance, and medical issues related to STIs. This indicates that even those who have left the country continue to face significant challenges requiring support.

Across all regions, cash assistance emerges as a critical need, reflecting widespread financial instability. Legal assistance and psychological support are also in demand, especially in areas with higher rates of displacement and social unrest. The data indicates that Beirut remains the center for nearly all forms of assistance, while other regions, particularly the North and South, show signs of gender-based and physical violence.

Trends in Reported Cases and External Influences



Assistance Case Amounts per Months

The fluctuations in assistance provided throughout 2023 must be understood within Lebanon's broader political, economic, and social instability, which has had a profound impact on marginalized communities, particularly LGBTQIA+ individuals. The year began with a high demand for cash assistance and asylum-related support, directly in line with the deepening economic crisis, currency devaluation, and rising cost of living. Many LGBTQIA+ individuals, already facing discrimination in employment and housing, were left without financial stability, leading to an increased reliance on humanitarian aid and attempts to seek refuge abroad.

By mid-year, an alarming escalation in anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric from political and religious leaders fueled both state repression and extremist violence. This period saw increased efforts to legislate against LGBTQIA+ identities, with draft laws introduced to criminalize homosexuality and its so-called «promotion,» reinforcing a climate of fear and institutionalized discrimination. The dissolution case against Helem further signaled an official crackdown on LGBTQIA+ activism and civil society engagement.

Additional Assistance

Simultaneously, violent attacks on LGBTQIA+-friendly spaces intensified, reaching a peak in August. Emboldened by the aforementioned rhetoric, extremist groups launched campaigns targeting spaces associated with the LGBTQIA+ community such as bars, community spaces, and events. These campaigns included raids, attacks, threats, and intimidation. The spike in hostility correlated with an increase in reported cases of death threats, physical violence, forced evictions, and blackmail, as LGBTQIA+ individuals became direct targets of rising societal aggression. The state's failure, or in some cases its active refusal, to protect LGBTQIA+ individuals from these threats further contributed to a sense of lawlessness and vulnerability.

As the year progressed, anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment reduced in predominance as the Israeli aggression on Lebanon began in the wake of October 2023. The war created a crisis in the country that disproportionately affected vulnerable individuals, including members of the LGBTQIA+ community and non-Lebanese. The worsening situation led to a sharp rise in asylum requests and UNHCR-related matters. The surge in individuals seeking international protection painted the picture of the growing perception that Lebanon is no longer a viable or safe place in general, and in particular for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Notably, while case numbers may fluctuate, this does not necessarily indicate improvements in conditions but rather reflects increasing fears of reporting, barriers to accessing support, or the impact of systemic repression silencing marginalized communities. These trends also offer a glimpse into what can be expected in 2024.

Ultimately, the data in 2023 reflects an environment where economic hardship, political scapegoating, escalating violence, and armed conflict intersected to create a worsening crisis for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Without structural changes or international intervention, the situation is likely to deteriorate further, forcing more individuals into precarity, displacement, and social invisibility.

Additional assistance refers to situations where an individual requests or requires further support beyond the initial type of assistance they are already receiving. This typically occurs when the primary aid provided, such as cash assistance, legal support, or housing, proves insufficient to address the individual's full spectrum of needs.

In 2023, around 27% of assistance cases held additional assistance, with eviction risk being the most common additional assistance type. The need for additional assistance reflects the complexity of individual challenges, especially for vulnerable populations like LGBTQIA+ individuals or refugees, who often face multiple, overlapping forms of hardship that cannot be resolved through a single type of intervention.

Gender

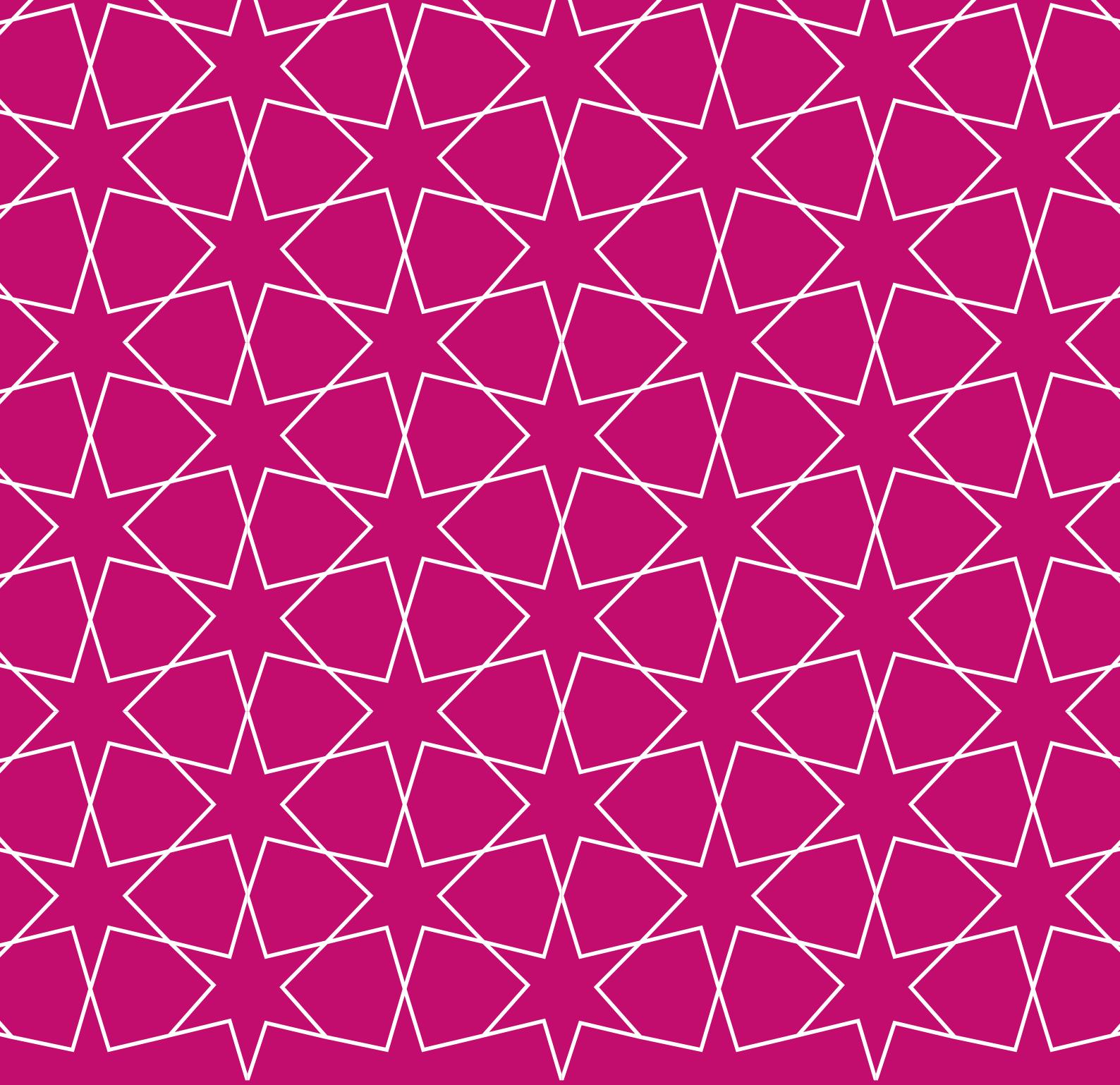
The data on additional assistance shows that cis men (470 cases) and trans women (298 cases) are the two groups most frequently requiring further support. Cis men, particularly Lebanese (175 cases) and Syrian (133 cases), face a wide range of issues including eviction risks (13 cases), death threats (14 cases), and blackmail (9 cases). Additionally, trans women report high rates of eviction risk (46 cases), homelessness (22 cases), and physical violence (12 cases), with Lebanese and Syrian trans women being the most affected.

Other gender groups, such as nonbinary individuals (7 cases) and trans men (7 cases), also face significant challenges, often related to shelter, physical violence, and legal matters, though their numbers are smaller.

Nationality

The nationality breakdown reveals that Lebanese (380 cases) and Syrian (215 cases) individuals most frequently require additional assistance, with the Lebanese group being the largest across all gender categories. Lebanese LGBTQIA+ individuals report high needs for eviction risk, legal support, and cash assistance, reflecting the socioeconomic instability facing both residents and refugees.

Syrians, the second largest group, face significant issues, where requests for asylum, blackmail protection, and psychological support dominate. Additionally, smaller but notable numbers of Iraqis (22 cases) and Palestinians (12 cases) also emerge, particularly among cis men and trans women.



CONTACT US

Helpline

+961 81 478450

www.helem.net

info@helem.com