



## Lebanon

- Population: 5 million
- GDP per capita (in US dollars): 10,057
- Parliamentary regime
- Human development index (HDI): 0.769 (67<sup>th</sup> rank among 187 countries)
- Gender inequality index (GII): 0.385 (78<sup>th</sup> rank among 147 countries)
- Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI): Score of 28 on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean)
- No official national statistics on prostitution. However, in 2013, 11,465 women received “artist visas” to work in Lebanon’s Super Nightclubs
- All current prostitution activities in Lebanon are illegal, and both prostituted persons and procurers are prosecuted. Clients do not face legal consequences.
- Law 164, passed in 2011, made human trafficking illegal in Lebanon
- In 2014, out of 89 people prosecuted for trafficking (trafficking for forced labour and for sexual purposes), 72 of them were convicted. In 2013, there were 14 prosecutions and no convictions
- Sexual exploitation and sex tourism are prevalent at Lebanon’s Super Nightclubs.
- Syrian refugees are a vulnerable population in Lebanon; there has been a recent rise in child marriages among these refugees.
- Lebanon is a source, transit, and destination country for sexual exploitation.
- Victims of sexual exploitation are Lebanese or come from Eastern Europe (Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova), Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Ethiopia) and Asia (Sri Lanka, Philippines)

In Lebanon, sexual exploitation is rampant despite the recent efforts of the government and NGOs to address the problem. Sexually exploited women in Lebanon originate from a wide variety of countries. Many migrant domestic workers come from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Ethiopia, among other African and Asian countries. Eastern European countries such as the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, are major source countries for prostitution at Lebanon’s Super Nightclubs, as are Morocco and Tunisia. The

recent influx of Syrian refugees has led to increasing reports of them being prostituted and sexually abused in Lebanon (*U.S. Department of State*, 2014).

### **Complex Illegality of Prostitution & Trafficking**

Laws on prostitution in Lebanon are dated and convoluted, and law enforcement efforts today are not often based upon these regulations. Technically, prostitution is legal in Lebanon according to a law from 1931, but only in licensed brothels carefully monitored by the government. The government completely stopped granting these licenses in the 1970s, and the existing brothels closed over time. Since Article 523 of the Lebanese Penal Code outlaws “clandestine prostitution,” the prostitution currently taking place in Lebanon is illegal (*KAFA, Jabbour*, 2014).

Likewise, Law 164 adopted in 2011, after the ratification of the Palermo Protocole, has made human trafficking illegal and punishable. Fundamentally, this law offers a definition of trafficking that is similar to that of NGOs and provides the government with more power to enforce current regulations. Having a common definition of trafficking legitimizes victim identification and facilitates the process of victim referral between organizations (*ICMPD*, 2013). Identifying victims is particularly important in Lebanon since women involved in prostitution can be punished if they are not expressly labelled as victims of trafficking. For example, in April of 2015, Lebanese Internal Security Forces arrested three Jordanians, two women and a man, accused of running a prostitution ring in Beirut. The two women acknowledged that they were being prostituted, and one of them said that her husband had forced her into the practice. That woman was not charged because she was “deemed to be a victim of human trafficking,” but the other woman was detained for prostitution (*The Daily Star Lebanon*, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015). Similarly, in March 2014, two Syrian women were arrested for prostitution after being brought to Lebanon under the guise of marriage to a Lebanese man. Col. Elias Asmar, who apprehended the women, acknowledged that bringing women to Lebanon was a “career” for certain men in Lebanon who brought them there, and that many girls are “brought in directly from Syria and are immediately forced to engage in prostitution”. Accordingly, one of the women was released on bail because she was considered a victim of trafficking. However, the other woman was charged with prostitution simply because she had a previous criminal record, and thus, in the words of Col. Asmar, “she knew very well what she came here to do” (*The Daily Star Lebanon*, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014). These examples unfortunately highlight the counter productive anti-trafficking efforts in Lebanon may result in more victims of prostitution being prosecuted. Because of this trend of law enforcement officers somewhat arbitrarily distinguishing between “victims” and “perpetrators” of trafficking, more women may avoid coming forward for fear of being punished. Victims are further discouraged from coming forward because they risk being deported if they do so; as of 2013, Lebanon had not granted residency to any identified victims (*ICMPD*, 2013).

## Vulnerability of Syrian Refugees

As Lebanon is unequipped to adequately care for the massive amount of Syrian refugees that have entered the country in recent years, these refugees are particularly vulnerable. As of 2015, Lebanon is host to over 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees (in addition to many non-registered refugees). Lebanon does not want official refugee camps, so refugees are spread between Lebanese towns and some large, unofficial tented communities. The large number of refugees has had a heavy impact on the Lebanese economy: infrastructure costs total about 3 million US\$ (2,77 million €) so far, and many Lebanese citizens believe that Syrians are taking Lebanese jobs. Most of the Lebanese neighborhoods where refugees live were already impoverished, so the influx of refugees has increased the strain on these vulnerable communities (*International Alert*, 2015).

The large economic toll of refugees has recently led Lebanon to adopt much stricter policies on refugees' admittance to the country. In January 2015, new regulations came into effect requiring Syrians to obtain a visa before entering Lebanon. Moreover, refugees already in Syria must now follow new procedures in order to stay in the country. For example, refugees must either be sponsored by a Lebanese company, or they must sign a contract agreeing not to work in Lebanon and provide a rental agreement signed by their landlord. In addition, they must pay an incredibly high 200 US\$ (185 €) "residency renewal fee". For many refugees, these standards are impossible to meet. Poorer refugees who live in tented settlements do not have a landlord to sign their agreement, and those who do have a landlord are often forced to pay extra bribes before the landlord will sign the housing agreement. As a result of these difficult regulations, the number of refugees living illegally in Lebanon is increasing. According to lawyer Diala Chehade, Deputy Director of the *Center for Defending Civil Rights and Liberties*, many of her Syrian clients "try not to go out at night... Others stay indoors for days to avoid the police" (*Reuters*, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015). Having to avoid Lebanese authorities due to immigration concerns makes refugees more vulnerable because they cannot seek security assistance from the police. Furthermore, increased economic strain caused by the new regulations may result in more refugees turning to child marriage or prostitution as means of supporting themselves.

The United Nations Refugees Agency (UNHCR) provides aid to Syrian refugees, but its relief efforts have been limited by lack of funding. In November 2013, the UNHCR was forced to stop providing refugees with vouchers for necessary items such as food and hygiene products and to instead provide cash assistance to only the most vulnerable 75% of the refugees (*Amnesty International*, 2015). In 2014, in Bekka and Northern Lebanon, the areas with the highest concentration of Syrian refugees, 5-10% of children under the age of 5 faced acute malnutrition. Additionally, 27% of all registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon did not have sufficient access to clean drinking water (*Amnesty International*, 2015). The UNHCR typically funds healthcare for refugees, but in May 2013, the UNHCR was forced to "limit its funding to primary health care and to narrowly-defined emergency treatment" due to inadequate funds. Consequently, refugees suffering from non-life-threatening, but nonetheless severe conditions including burns and bullet wounds, as well as those with long-term illnesses such as cancer, are no longer eligible for subsidized healthcare through the UNHCR (*Amnesty*

*International*, 2015). In such desperate health and living conditions, refugees are especially at risk of exploitation.

One prevalent type of exploitation in Lebanon is sexual harassment and abuse of female refugees at the hands of aid workers or employers. Since most of the women are struggling financially, they are often heavily dependent on the income that they receive from aid workers or their employers and thus are not in a position to easily refuse unwanted sexual contact from these individuals (UNPFA, 2014). For example, Hala, a 53 year old woman with four children, worked cleaning houses just outside of Beirut. She told Human Rights Watch (HRW) that, in 9 of the 10 houses she cleaned, her male employers touched her inappropriately and tried to get both her and her sixteen-year-old daughter to have sex with them. Hala recalls them telling her, “we will give you more money if you perform a sexual favor or give us your daughter” (*Human Rights Watch*, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013). A young woman working in agriculture said that if girls are not responsive to their employers’ advances, they “are not allowed a break or not given water to drink while working.” In large refugee settlements, representatives of aid organizations, such as faith-based or international organizations, sometimes use their positions of power to abuse women, especially those who are divorced or widowed. In April 2014, Human Rights Watch reported the story of Youmna, a “young married woman with two children [whose] husband is missing.” One of the men in charge of her tented settlement pressured her to begin a sexual relationship with him, telling her that if she refused her living conditions would become worse. Having no independent source of income, Youmna eventually gave into the man’s wishes and subsequently began to receive “significantly more aid” (UNPFA, 2014). In each of these examples, men used their control of resources to exploit refugee women’s need for financial security.

Syrian refugees’ precarious financial and security positions have also recently led to an increase in child marriages. Maria Semaan, program coordinator of the Child Protection Program for the NGO KAFA (Enough) Violence and Exploitation, has said that although child marriage does have some cultural significance, for Syrian refugees it is more often the result of economic pressure. Parents with too many mouths to feed can view marrying off a daughter as a means of providing for her while also receiving dowry money themselves. Most early marriages are legal in Lebanon since personal status laws are determined based on each person’s religious faith. Islam is the majority religion, and in Lebanon the usual minimum marriage age for Muslim girls is 17. However, with parental consent girls as young as 13 are allowed to be married (*Middle East Eye*, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015). A UN survey of Syrian refugee youth in Lebanon found that many girls are not opposed to getting married young as a means of achieving financial security. According to the survey responses, since many girls could not continue their education in Lebanon nor find work, they often view marriage as a chance “to have their own space or to escape and stressful living conditions” (UNPFA, 2014). Child marriage may also be perceived as a way to protect girls from the sexual harassment and violence that is prevalent in refugee settlements. Maya, a 14-year-old Syrian refugee, engaged to a 45-year-old man, says that she is “disgusted” by her future husband; but “He is the one who feeds us and protects us, and I’d rather be violated by one man than every man in town” (*The Atlantic*, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

## Super Nightclubs

The economic vulnerability of Syrian refugees and women from a variety of countries is also a driving force in the continued existence of prostitution in Lebanon. “Super Nightclubs” have been a prominent way of prostituting women for years, and they continue to have a significant presence in Lebanon. These nightclubs provide both a way for procurers to circumvent the illegality of prostitution and an unofficial way for the government to contain large portions of the country’s prostitution to specific areas. Super Nightclubs are essentially strip clubs with the addition of thinly veiled prostitution, and they are mainly located in the suburbs of Beirut. Customers can come to the clubs and buy a bottle of champagne for around 80 US\$ (74 €) in order to spend an hour with one of the “dancers”. During this initial hour, no sexual activity other than kissing is allowed, but men may set up a “date” with the woman for sometime the next day or later in the week. These dates typically consist of sex at a nearby hotel, for an added cost. Super Nightclubs can earn over 23 million US\$ (21,25 million €) each year through champagne and other legal sales, but they actually make far more when one factors in the money paid under-the-table for sex with the dancers (*Foreign Policy*, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012).

Despite the technical illegality of prostitution in Lebanon, very little is done to combat the practice in Super Nightclubs because the government itself benefits financially from the clubs. One large source of revenue for the government is taxation of every bottle of champagne sold by Super Nightclubs at 10% (*Foreign Policy*, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012). Furthermore, General Security, the government department in charge of regulating the Super Nightclubs and the visas of foreign girls employed there, often collects “tips” from nightclub owners in exchange for ignoring rules violations. One General Security Officer acknowledged to the Sunday Herald of Scotland that “the business of tourism depends in part on prostitution. Right now it benefits everyone to keep it going... If we wanted to stop it we would stop it” (*The Herald Scotland*, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009).

Not only does the Lebanese government not combat prostitution in Super Nightclubs, but it encourages the continued existence of the Super Nightclub system. The government issues a special category of visa, “artist visas,” specifically to women coming to Lebanon to work as “dancers” at Super Nightclubs. The visas last three months, but can be renewed once. According to the U.S. Department of State, over the course of 2013, 11,465 women were granted this visa, almost twice as many as in 2012. This increase indicates that sexual exploitation at Super Nightclubs is indeed an ongoing problem (*U.S. Department of State*, 2014). The artist visas are harmful to women not just because they lead to prostitution, but also because their strict regulations essentially imprison women during their stay in Lebanon. According to “The Female Artist’s Work Regulations” listed on the General Security website, all recipients of artist visas are required to stay in their rooms whenever they are not working at the clubs, except for between 1:00 and 8:00 PM when they are allowed to leave accompanied by an escort (presumably the male client taking them out on a sex “date”) . As one male client told *Foreign Policy*, “those girls basically live in a prison. They’re locked in their hotels for most of the time, and they don’t leave unless they have a customer. All the girls I meet at clubs are completely depressed” (*Foreign Policy*, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012).

Women from many different Eastern European countries, Morocco, and Tunisia come to Lebanon using artist visas, and recently some Syrian refugees have been turning to prostitution at Super Nightclubs as well. In a 2014 interview with Vice News, a Syrian refugee named Farah explained how she began working at a Super Nightclub. When she first arrived in Lebanon after fleeing Syria, she attempted to survive and support her family by working at a small store, but when that did not provide enough money she began working at a nightclub. She admitted that she does not enjoy her job, but feels stuck because she does not have an alternative source of income, and her procurer is holding her passport (*Vice News*, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014). It remains unclear how many Syrian refugees are actually turning to prostitution as means of survival in Lebanon. Although several media outlets have reported that it is a large trend, a UN survey of Syrian refugee youth concluded that many such media reports have been exaggerated (*UNPFA*, 2014).

### **Male Prostitution**

Outside of Super Nightclubs, male prostitution is a growing issue in Lebanon. In 2014, Al Jazeera interviewed some young male prostitutes in Beirut, who came from places such as Iraq and Syria, looking to find work and to escape different types of oppression in their home countries. One 27-year-old man from Iraq was forced to flee his home when his family discovered that he was gay because they would have killed him. Another man came to Lebanon in order to avoid joining the military. According to Al Jazeera, Syrian male prostitutes generally charge much less than prostituted males of other nationalities, largely because they are often drawn into prostitution by desperate economic circumstances (*Al Jazeera*, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

Male prostitution plays a large role in sex tourism in Lebanon because homosexuality tends to be more accepted in Lebanon than in most other Middle Eastern countries. Many purchasers come from nearby Gulf and North African states, as well as Turkey. Homosexuality is, in fact, illegal in Lebanon, but the police are bribed not to shut down the bathhouses and nightclubs where it is commonly practiced. Furthermore, new technology and social media services including Grindr and Manjam specifically targeting the homosexual community allow prostituted men and their clients to meet more easily and discretely (*Al Jazeera*, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014). With ever-increasing technology, it is likely that male prostitution will continue to grow in Lebanon.

### **Sexual Abuse of Migrant Domestic Workers**

Syrian refugee women are not the only women in Lebanon subject to sexual harassment and abuse at the hands of their employers. Migrant domestic workers, mainly immigrating to Lebanon from Africa and Asia, also frequently suffer sexual exploitation. In order to enter and remain in Lebanon, such domestic workers must be “sponsored” by their employer. This requirement means that the workers immediately become illegal residents if they stop working for their employer, and they cannot switch jobs without their original employer’s permission (*KAFA*, 2014). Any attempts by workers to leave Lebanon are further complicated by the fact that most employers seize workers’ documents and passports. In a 2014 survey of

female migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, conducted by the NGO KAFA, 96% of the women who responded said that their passport was being held by their employer. The sponsorship relationship thus leads to employers having a huge degree of power over migrant domestic workers. 8% of respondents to the survey reported that they had been the victim of sexual violence by their employer. KAFA noted that the real percentage is most likely higher, but many women found the topic difficult to discuss. In theory, workers do have the right to end their contract if their employer breaks a law, assaults or harasses them, or otherwise does not follow the agreed-upon work conditions. However, in order to use this right, workers must make official reports and provide evidence of their employer's misconduct, a procedure that is often very difficult (KAFA, 2014). As a result, many workers are trapped in positions of exploitation and abuse.

### **Client Perspective**

When considering how to reduce sexual exploitation and prostitution in Lebanon, one must consider the demand for prostitution. KAFA recently conducted a study of 55 men who have purchased sex in Lebanon, and asked them their views on a variety of related topics. The majority of men interviewed were Lebanese and fairly young with most in their 20s (KAFA, Jabbour, 2014). During the study, the men gave a number of reasons and justifications for buying sex. One large encouraging factor is that prostitution clients rarely face any legal consequences in Lebanon, despite the fact that prostituted women are often arrested. In fact, the majority of the buyers in KAFA's study believed that prostitution was legal in Lebanon (KAFA, Jabbour, 2014). Another common justification men gave for purchasing sex was that women in prostitution are essentially the equivalent of any other item for sale. As one man described: *"They are just commodities... With the price you pay you by her, meaning you negotiate with her as if you are buying a pair of pants or a jacket...She is a product to satisfy sexual desires"*. Another man expressed similar sentiments: *"The only thing that the woman who works in prostitution does is sex, nothing except this, she does not think of anything else...All she does is take care of the client she is with"* (KAFA, Jabbour, 2014). Both of these remarks highlight clients' highly simplified and objectified view of prostituted women as existing only to fulfill men's desires. Some male clients even used their objectification of women as justification for ignoring clear signs of physical abuse on prostituted women. When discussing having sex with a woman with many visible bruises, one man told KAFA, *"If somebody broke the pinball or poker machine the day before, it wouldn't stop you from playing poker again."* A second man put it even more bluntly: *"I don't care if she was beaten, I just care about my pleasure"* (KAFA, Jabbour, 2014). 40% of the men surveyed said that they knew that prostituted women were "unhappy" with their work, and several of the men even expressed understanding that many women are forced into prostitution and live under the control of a procurer. Thus, even awareness of the hardships faced by victims of prostitution does not seem to be enough to deter clients. When asked what would stop them from buying sex, most of the men responded that the threat of being jailed or having their family and friends find out that they bought sex would be the punishments most likely to discourage them (KAFA, Jabbour, 2014).

## Government Progress

In recent years, the Lebanese government has a mixed record of dealing with issues of sexual exploitation. The last major change of legislation was the passage of the anti-human trafficking Law 164 in 2011, and even that law has been criticized due to its failure to protect prostituted women from prosecution. However, the government has made some progress in identifying victims of trafficking. In the fall of 2014, the Lebanese government, the U.S. Department of State, and the Beirut Bar Association collaborated to produce a “Trafficking in Persons Indicators Handbook” in order to help law enforcement and other individuals learn how to identify victims and respond to situations of trafficking (*US Embassy Lebanon*, 2014). Furthermore, through the Directorate of General Security, the Government led media campaigns to raise human trafficking awareness, and in 2013 created a hotline to receive reports on trafficking incidents. Slight legal progress also occurred in 2013, as 14 alleged traffickers were prosecuted and two were convicted, whereas in the previous year no convictions were made. According to the U.S. Department of State, Lebanon has also recently adopted a written action plan to combat human trafficking.

Despite these advances, the government still does not supply adequate care and shelter to victims of trafficking, and deports many victims, including those who come to Lebanon with artist visas or as migrant domestic workers (*U.S. Department of State*, 2014). Looking forward, the Lebanese government especially needs to focus on tackling issues of sexual exploitation amongst its refugee population. Finally, if Lebanon hopes to truly address the problem of sexual exploitation within its borders, it must develop legislation that protects all prostituted persons, rather than only those who have been identified as victims of trafficking.

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