

Fondation Scelles







Connaitre, Comprendre, Combattre
l'Exploitation Sexuelle

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LEBANON

	POPULATION 6,1 million		GDP PER CAPITA 8,523.7 USD
	POLITICAL SYSTEM Parliamentary Regime		HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX 76 th rank among 187 countries
	GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX 83 rd rank among 147 countries		CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 143 rd rank among 180 countries

Lebanon is facing a growing sex industry on its territory, with different forms and locations of prostitution (streets, super night clubs and via apps). Currently, the most significant increase in Lebanese prostitution is due to the recent war in Syria, which has led to over 1.5 million Syrian taking refuge in Lebanon, 78% of whom are women and children according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Many of these women have been forced into prostitution in order to survive. Others arrived in Lebanon after being misled with false job offers. Within Lebanon's super night clubs, the majority of prostituted persons are from Eastern Europe, particularly Ukraine and Russia. Laws relating to prostitution and human trafficking bring forth many difficulties, making their enforcement and prosecution difficult for the judiciary. Increases in the numbers of child marriage and male prostitution also remain concerning, especially since the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis.

Legislative Issues

Law 164 of 2011 on the Combating Trafficking in Human Beings criminalizes all forms of trafficking, including trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, with sentences of 5 to 15 years of imprisonment. These penalties are sufficiently severe and proportional to those of other crimes, such as rape (*US Department of State*, June 2018). It also states that if a victim can prove that she or he has been exploited, then she/he will not be prosecuted for engaging in prostitution. However, Article 523 in the Lebanese penal code continues to criminalize prostituted persons, equating them to procurers by imposing the same sentences and penalties. This discrepancy between the two laws makes their enforcement by law enforcement officials and judges unpredictable, as they have the power to choose between two different sets of provisions. Adding to the confusion, Article 523 criminalizes "facilitators of prostitution," whereas Law 164 criminalizes traffickers

without specifying what differentiates between those who “facilitate prostitution” and those who “traffic.”

According to the terms of Article 523 as well as Lebanese cultural norms, prostituted persons are negatively viewed by the public and police and are often arrested and jailed with their procurer(s) (BBC, March 23, 2017).

It is difficult for a prostituted person to prove that she has been a victim of trafficking. If victimhood is not expressly stated, the police or a judge will penalize her. Moreover, no support or care is given to victims of trafficking upon release. Some are released from police custody after questioning with no resources or places to go. When a prostituted person wishes to prosecute her trafficker, trials can take up more than 3 years. Many victims prefer to abandon the procedure rather than undergo the ordeal of testifying.

In 2017, the government reported that they had opened 134 investigations into trafficking (compared to 71 in 2016). The Internal Security Forces’ (ISF) Anti Human Trafficking Unit investigated 23 suspected cases of trafficking, involving 55 victims of sexual exploitation and child trafficking (compared to 20 ISF investigations in 2016). Of these 23 cases, the ISF issued 17 arrest warrants and sent 39 alleged traffickers to justice (US Department of State, June 2018).

Lebanese police arrested Nabil Al Halabi, a prominent Lebanese lawyer, following a Facebook post where he was accusing some government officials of being accomplices in a sex trafficking ring where 75 Syrian women were exploited (*The National*, April 24, 2016).

The government has still not reported any investigations, prosecutions or convictions of officials complicit in offences related to human trafficking in recent years. However, there is a consensus among NGOs that officers of the *General Security Directorate* (GSD) have accepted bribes to protect super

night clubs or to deliver artist visas (a program which supports the sex industry and allows sex trafficking). The government has encouraged civil servants to participate in training provided by NGOs, and the GSD has introduced human rights and anti-trafficking training in its curriculum for new recruits (US Department of State, June 2018).

Officers from the General Security Directorate are known to have accepted bribes to protect owners of super night clubs instead of prosecuting them. To date, there have been no investigations, prosecutions or convictions of government officials regarding complicity with sex trafficking (US Department of State, June 2016).

Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

According to UNHCR, there are currently nearly 1.1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, or about a quarter of the total Lebanese population. It is estimated that about two thirds of prostituted people in Lebanon are reported to be Syrian refugees, which shows the significant impact of the crisis on the country (*Le Monde*, July 30, 2016).

Lebanon does not grant political rights to refugees. The government does not allow refugees to work legally, which forces them out of the regulated workplace and into dangerous activities, such as prostitution.

In addition, in 2015, the government made it so that any Syrian refugee coming to Lebanon had to first get a visa as well as a sponsor. Then, every year these refugees must renew their residency papers, for the sum of USD 200. To maintain a legal standing, they must provide a copy of their lease signed by their landlord. Due to high cost and the difficulty of obtaining a visa, many Syrians find themselves in irregular situations in Lebanon. All of these circumstances foster many factors of vulnerability.

First and foremost, many Syrian women are forced to engage in “survival

prostitution". They must engage in sexual relationship with their landlord in order to have their residence certificates renewed or to keep their accommodation. Their stay in Lebanon depends on it and, to avoid getting deported back to Syria's horrific conditions, they have no other alternatives.

The men who have this type of relationship with these Syrian refugee women are taking advantage of their precarious situation within Lebanese society to exploit and control them. If a woman is residing illegally in Lebanon and is being sexually exploited or abused, she does not report it, for fear of being deported. Even if a woman is in Lebanon legally, she remains reluctant as she may still be treated as a criminal by the police and deported regardless.

The more economically desperate an individual is, the more likely they will be drawn into situations of sexual exploitation and/or prostitution. In Syria, traffickers deceive women by promising them visas to Lebanon to become domestic workers or waitresses. In reality, the traffickers smuggle them across the Lebanon-Syria border and force them into prostitution.

These victims have no access to legal recourse, even if they have enough freedom to go to the police. If they go, it is very difficult for them to prove that they have been victims of trafficking since they have technically agreed to come to Lebanon illegally. The Lebanese army will sometimes intervene violently in refugee camps for various reasons, forcing women to resettle. If women are forced to move and if there are no economic opportunities within the refugee camps, the only option available to them is prostitution.

In March 2016, Lebanese police raided a sex trafficking ring in Ma'ameltein, neighborhood in Jounieh, a city well known for its red-light district, and freed 75 women prisoners, most of whom were Syrian, from two brothels called Silver and Chez Maurice.

The women had been brought to Lebanon under the promises of marriage or a job, but instead were sold into sex slavery for about USD 2,000 each.

They were not allowed to leave the brothel except when they had to get forced abortions, and were forced into having 10 to 20 sexual relations per day. If they refused to have sexual intercourse or refused a specific request from a sex buyer, they were beaten and tortured. One victim said: "We couldn't go out, not even to see the light outside. The windows were painted black" (*The Guardian*, August 1, 2016). Another confessed, "We were not treated as human beings. We were nothing but merchandise for sale" (*The National*, April 24, 2016). Another woman recounted her experience, saying, "After a few months, I had forgotten my mother's face. I felt that I was no longer human, but garbage" (*RFI*, June 17, 2017). The narratives of these victims describe the horror they have faced and the dehumanizing and traumatizing experiences they went through. These women require help and support to overcome the traumas they faced for months on end.

A member of an NGO dedicated to fighting slavery said that "75 women being rescued is just the tip of the iceberg... it is very likely that they are many more" (*The National*, April 24, 2016). The 75 women were freed when four of them were able to escape and take refuge in a police station. It was estimated that the brothel was making up to USD 1 million per month in profit off of these women over the last three years, although not all the women had necessarily been there for the entire time (*The Guardian*, August 1, 2016).

In 2011, during a police raid in the Chez Maurice establishment, police forces discovered a 17-year-old Syrian prostituted girl. This forced the brothel to shut down for three months, but it later reopened (*Human Rights Watch*, July 28, 2016). This

demonstrates how even though Lebanon's laws and sentencing guidelines are strict on paper, in practice they are poorly enforced. Following the raid, over a dozen people were arrested and prosecuted for sex trafficking. The women were sent to local NGOs, where they were able to get help and support. The way this case was handled sets a good precedent for future cases, as the women were given assistance and the perpetrators were arrested. However, the investigation is still ongoing and the severity of future sentences is unknown. Since this raid, there has been an increased awareness of the issue of sex trafficking in Lebanon.

Forced child marriages and sex trafficking

Since the beginning of the refugee crisis, child marriage is becoming increasingly more common in Lebanon. Refugees marry their daughters off to Lebanese men in the hope that the young girls will have better lives, protected against poverty and sexual exploitation. One study conducted by the *United Nations Population Fund* (UNPD) found that 24% of refugee girls aged 15 to 17 years old are married, and almost a third of refugee women aged 20 to 24 years old were married before they turned 18 (UNFPA, January 31, 2017).

Marriages of underage girls usually have a devastating impact on the child. Their husbands will often abandon them after just a few months of union, leaving them to fend for themselves and making them more vulnerable to sex trafficking. If their husbands do not abandon them, the marriages will often lead to abuse and rape.

Currently, in Lebanon, no official minimum age for marriage is required. It is left to the discretion of religious services, which sometimes allows girls under the age of 13 to marry. However, a bill was introduced in Parliament in March 2017 that could raise the minimum age 18 years without exceptions

(*Human Rights Watch*, April 12, 2017). Unfortunately, such a law is unlikely to be passed.

Increase in street and online prostitution

As a result of the influx of Syrian refugees, there has been a further increase in street prostitution, as opposed to prostitution in super night clubs and other brothels. Artist visas in Lebanon allow women to work in clubs as performers or bartenders, among other professions. In 2015, 5,120 women were issued artist visas to work in clubs. This is an increase from 2014, when 3,400 visas were issued, but a drastic decrease from 2013, when over 11,000 were issued (*US Department of State*, June 2016). However, the women at these clubs are almost always involved in prostitution. The majority of these women come from Eastern Europe or the Russian Federation. The reason for the decrease in visas may be due to the increase in Syrian refugees, who are involved in street prostitution or brothels more often than in super night clubs. Sex tourism, which feeds super night clubs, may also have decreased in Lebanon due to the political climate in the region.

In recent years, procurers have been developing their traffic via mobile apps and the internet, where communication between them and sex buyers has become easier. This was seen in the case of a Russian woman who was arrested in 2016 after she was found to be running a prostitution ring in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East using WhatsApp.

However, police are also utilizing this technology to arrest procurers by posing as sex buyers seeking women but then subsequently conducting raids. The use of apps also fuels street prostitution. Procurers can take women to the sex buyers or to a hotel by car when requested.

The Artist Visa

Lebanese legislation allows for artist visas, which are valid for 3 months and can be renewed once. The government reported that 10,363 women entered Lebanon with an artist visa in 2017 (compared to 11,284 in 2016). These visa holders, who are generally women, enter Lebanon to work as dancers in night clubs or hotels. However, in reality, this practice actually serves as a way to conceal the trafficking of women, mainly from Eastern Europe or Northern Africa. These women, who are supposed to perform erotic dances in bars, strip clubs or hotels, are in reality victims of physical and sexual violence and forced into prostitution. Thus, the artist visa has accelerated and aggravated the exploitation of these vulnerable women.

Although the law is supposed to fight prostitution, there is a contradiction between Article 164 and Article 523 of the Penal Code. All persons involved in prostitution are supposed to be penalized. According to the Penal Code, the women are charged with prostitution, but according to Article 164, they are victims of sex trafficking. This contradiction creates a huge issue, yet the government is not acting accordingly. It is essential for the law to be amended to be cohesive, consistent and protect victims. Striptease bars, brothels and super night clubs are all tolerated, although they are illegal.

Male Prostitution

Just like female prostitution, male prostitution has increased sharply due to the refugee crisis. Homosexual men are fleeing to Lebanon, not only to escape the persecution in their home country, but also because of the civil war. Many of them turn to prostitution. While the majority of female prostitution takes place on the streets or in super night clubs, male

prostitution is almost exclusively practiced through apps or websites.

Syrian LGBTI refugees continue to be vulnerable to sexual exploitation. An international organization reported in 2017 that some employers force Syrian men to engage in sexual acts by threatening to withhold their salary or terminate their employment (*US Department of State*, June 2018).

For prostituted men, prostitution can have serious health consequences. According to one study, 62% of Syrian homosexual male refugees surveyed said they were engaged in prostitution, as well as 42% of Iraqis surveyed (*AIDS and Behavior*, December 2016). About half of them had never been tested for HIV/AIDS. The study found that male prostitution involves more unprotected sexual intercourse than relations between non-prostituted men.

In conclusion, much remains to be done to end sexual exploitation in Lebanon and ensure that traffickers are prosecuted effectively and systematically.

Lebanon should repeal Article 523 of its Penal Code, so that prostituted persons are no longer criminalized in the same way as the procurers that exploit them. Under Law 164, women should not have to prove they have been trafficked in order to receive help and protection.

The tendency to separate prostituted persons into two different categories those exploited in trafficking networks versus 'immoral' people who have 'chosen' this life) must stop immediately.

It is imperative that Lebanon provide more support to victims of sex trafficking. In practice, the Lebanese government provides no support and relies entirely on NGOs. Currently, the government does not directly provide protection services, but simply refers victims of trafficking to services run and managed by NGOs with

which work collaboratively to try to meet the most basic needs of these victims (*US Department of State*, June 2018). During the investigations conducted in 2017, the *ISF* identified 55 victims, women and children, who had been sent to shelters managed by NGOs (compared to 87 in 2016). Victim support centers run by NGOs target only women and children victims of trafficking, with nothing being provided for male victims. Although initiatives by such organizations are not negligible, it is absolutely necessary for the government to implement state programs to accompany and protect victims of sexual exploitation.

From a judicial perspective, the State should facilitate victims' access to justice and the lodging of complaints.

The government does not directly protect victims and does not fully apply the identification and referral procedures provided for in the law, which lead to arrest, detention or deportation for some. Moreover, the State should develop and implement procedures to specifically identify victims of exploitation among vulnerable populations, such as illegal migrants, women holding artist visas, domestic workers and Syrian refugees (*US Department of State*, June 2018).

The government must ensure that victims can feel safe when seeking police aid, so that no prostituted person fears deportation, or more generally for their lives and those of loved ones.

The main priority for the police should be arresting and convicting traffickers, rather than the expulsion of victims.

Despite an upsurge in police interventions against prostitution networks, it appears that prostitution and sex trafficking will not decrease in the coming years due to the refugee crisis currently taking place in Lebanon.

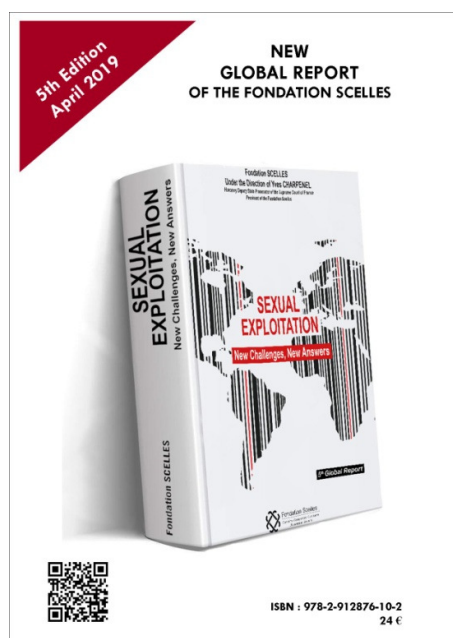
As long as there are women with no other options and men who are willing to

buy sex, women will continue to be forced into prostitution by factors out of their control.

Lebanon has efforts to make towards strengthening the enforcement of the laws relating to sex trafficking and prostitution, as well as reforming them to decriminalize those exploited by the prostitution system.

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The Global Report is produced by the International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation, in collaboration with internal and external experts (magistrates, lawyers, social workers, NGO leaders...), and the support of local NGO correspondents or international researchers.



The **Fondation Jean et Jeanne Scelles**, recognized as a public utility since 1994 and as a consultative status with ECOSOC, is an independent, non-profit organization based in Paris (France) dedicated to fight the system of prostitution and the exploitation of prostituted persons, through information, analysis, advocacy, trainings, awareness initiatives and legal actions. The **Fondation Jean et Jeanne Scelles** is a co-founding member of the Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution (CAP International) which was launched in 2013 and today brings together 28 abolitionist NGOs from 22 countries.

The **International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation** (Observatoire international de l'exploitation sexuelle) is a worldwide hub which allows for information exchange on the system of prostitution. The hub is regularly consulted by French and foreign experts including NGOs, institutions, journalists, lawyers, researchers and those involved in the defense of human rights. The goals of the **International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation** are:

- to analyze all the aspects of the phenomenon: prostitution, sex tourism, procurement, child pornography, sex buyers, human trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation...
- to encourage reflection and to take a stand
- to inform the public who are interested in these issues

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