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Guardians of Equality Movement

## The Multiple Struggles of LGBTQIA+ Individuals Amidst the War in Lebanon

We were beaten because of the way we look.  
They saw us as strange-looking.



## Introduction

For years, LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon and Syria have been living under extremely complex and difficult humanitarian conditions due to various factors. The intensity of these conditions has worsened following the recent military escalation in the region. The displacement crisis resulting from the escalation has exacerbated the daily challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in both countries and has increased the likelihood that they may encounter discrimination, mistreatment, and even life-threatening risks, especially for those displaced to Syria.

Several organizations dedicated to supporting LGBTQIA+ individuals have already rushed to provide an urgent, targeted response for them. However, at best, these efforts have been limited to providing temporary shelter for the displaced or emergency financial assistance, while numerous challenges hinder humanitarian response efforts and often restrict access to those in need.



## The Humanitarian Crisis in Lebanon and the Challenges of Response

UN Secretary-General's spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, stated that the humanitarian situation in Lebanon is 'deteriorating,' and that 'increasing challenges' have led to a reduction in humanitarian response efforts in the south of the country. A few days ago, the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator in Lebanon, Imran Riza, also spoke about the humanitarian situation affecting those impacted by the recent military escalation. He announced that an urgent appeal had already been launched to raise funds 'in an attempt to cover the current response efforts.'

As of October 25, the Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM) has provided cash assistance to 160 LGBTQIA+ individuals who lost their homes due to the military escalation in Lebanon. Additionally, it has received around 400 more requests for help, while 70 people reported that they are homeless and unable to secure their own food.

A [report](#) by the platform *Beirut Today*, which included testimonies from several LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon, highlighted that many were unaware of the response services offered by some organizations and associations dedicated to LGBTQIA+ individuals and issues. Furthermore, the report pointed to the severe and challenging reality faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals during the crisis, underscoring the need for a more adaptive humanitarian response.

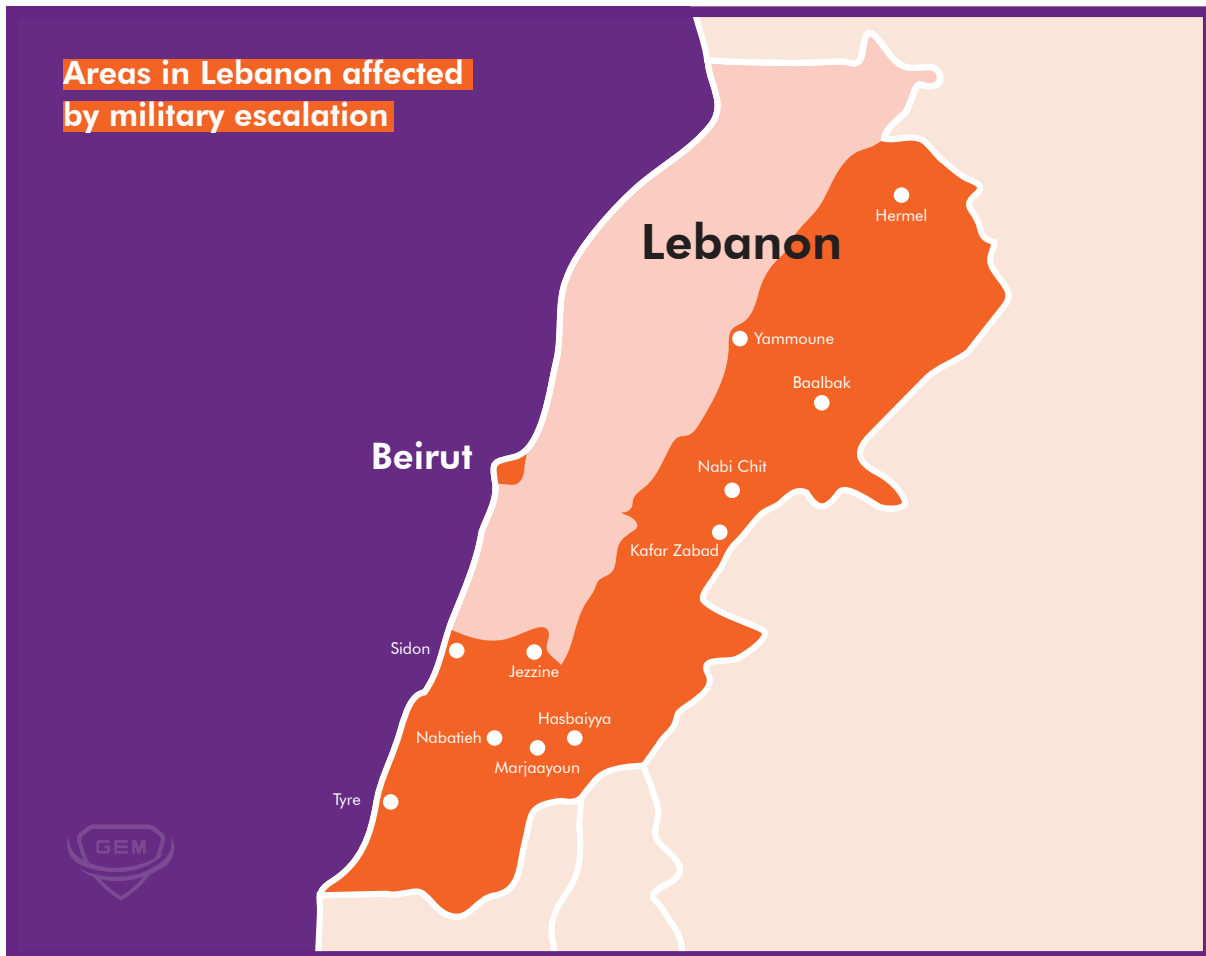
## Lebanon: Humanitarian Disaster Implications

More than a month after the military escalation in Lebanon, the impacts of the humanitarian disaster continue to burden civilians. The United Nations estimates that the number of displaced people exceeds one million civilians, with over 300,000 Syrians and more than 100,000 Lebanese having fled to Syria.

A few days ago, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Lebanon, Imran Riza, reiterated his warning about the 'heavy cost' of the conflict on civilians and infrastructure during an [interview](#). The United Nations also cautioned about the worsening humanitarian crisis in Lebanon, describing the situation as critical. Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, [called](#) for increased support to address the humanitarian disaster sweeping the country.

Since 2019, Lebanon has been experiencing severe economic crises that have significantly impacted the living conditions of its citizens. The situation was exacerbated by the Beirut port explosion, the repercussions of the dollar crisis, and Lebanese banks seizing depositors' funds, along with ongoing protests and political stalemate. This backdrop was further complicated by the recent military escalation, which intensified

the effects of the humanitarian disaster, particularly for LGBTQIA+ individuals, who faced compounded challenges.



Lebanon, which has an area of approximately 10,450 square kilometers, hosts around one and a half million Syrian refugees, in addition to over 13,000 refugees of other nationalities.



## LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Lebanon war: “We were beaten because of the way we look”

Before the war, Lebanon experienced [waves](#) of homophobia and incitement against LGBTQIA+ individuals from politicians and ministers. This sometimes translated into official [measures](#) or violent attacks on gatherings or cafes frequented by LGBTQIA+ individuals by extremist groups. Nevertheless, Lebanon has always been a primary destination for LGBTQIA+ individuals fleeing from Syria.

**“ I fled with my partner to Lebanon after our families found out about our relationship and threatened to kill us. ”**

Ahed - Syrian transgender refugee in Lebanon

A comprehensive [study](#) by the Guardians of Equality Movement indicated a greater likelihood that LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially if they are Syrian refugees, will face mistreatment and discrimination even from official staff, security forces, or border guards.

In recent years, Lebanon has experienced consecutive crises that have burdened its residents with economic and social strains. Instead of entering a phase of recovery from its crises, the country is now facing a new humanitarian disaster, and the effects of this disaster have been compounded for many communities, particularly for LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially Syrian refugees.

After the war and during the recent displacement crisis resulting from the escalation in Lebanon since October, nearly 40% of the beneficiaries of the Guardians of Equality Movement, out of 400 LGBTQIA+ individuals displaced by the escalation, reported experiencing harassment, bullying, discrimination, or even torture during their displacement journey. Additionally, two of them suffered severe beating.

**“ On the third day, we were beaten because of the way we look. They considered us strange-looking. ”**

Ahed - Syrian transgender refugee displaced by the military escalation

As of October 25, the Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM) has provided cash assistance to 160 LGBTQIA+ individuals who lost their homes due to the military escalation in Lebanon. Additionally, it has received around 400 more requests for assistance, with a daily increase in the number of applications.

The organization had documented the suffering of LGBTQIA+ individuals during periods of war or humanitarian disasters, such as during the [earthquake](#) disaster in February 2023 and the [military operations](#) in Syria over the past years.

**The numbers and testimonies in this report highlight the multiple struggles faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals during crises, leading to additional needs for them. The humanitarian system remains insufficiently inclusive to address the unique and exceptional needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals during global crises, particularly in the Middle East.**

These findings also indicate that LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Middle East will inevitably face discrimination during disasters and crises. In addition to discrimination and mistreatment, there is a likelihood of physical and psychological violations while receiving assistance. There is a potential for physical and psychological abuse while receiving assistance, especially for individuals who are transgender, or non-binary.



Ahed and their partner fled to a Syrian refugee camp in southern Lebanon after the escalation began in the area. However, due to their appearance, Ahed says, **“On the third day, we were beaten because of how we looked. They saw us as strange.”** This forced them to leave the camp.

Ahed had previously left Syria after receiving death threats: “My partner and I fled to Lebanon after our families found out about our relationship and threatened to kill us.” Ahed describes their journey to Lebanon as arduous, facing numerous instances of discrimination and violence along the way.



Ahed after being assaulted

**I am a 21-year-old Lebanese lesbian displaced person. I received the warning, so I left immediately, leaving all my belongings behind and fleeing.**

Maya, a young Lebanese lesbian who fled from the southern suburbs of Beirut.

Maya, a pseudonym for a 21-year-old Lebanese lesbian from the southern suburbs of Beirut, says: "I am a 21-year-old Lebanese lesbian refugee. I will have to rent a place in safe areas, but I have faced discrimination because of my religion and where I come from."

The young Lebanese woman points out the high cost of rent due to the displacement crisis, which has left her in a difficult financial situation. "As soon as I received the warning from the Israeli army, I left immediately, leaving all my belongings behind and fleeing" she says.



Dahieh, Beirut Haidar Ramzi/Mussawir al Dar/UNICEF ©

**As a transgender woman, it's easy to be subject to vulnerability.**

Kate, a transgender Syrian refugee in Lebanon.

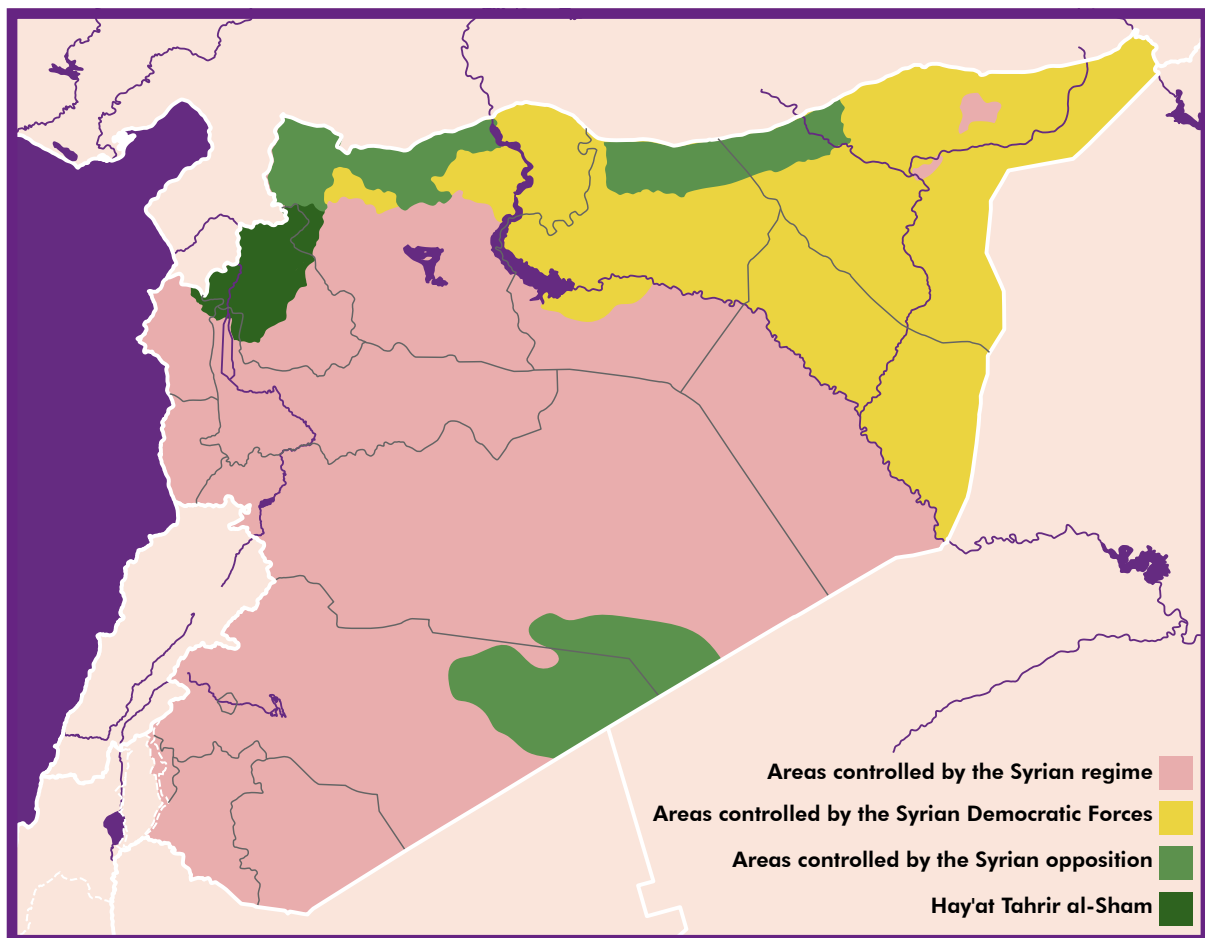
Kate, a pseudonym for a transgender Syrian refugee in Lebanon, was living in a safe area, far from the bombings. However, the calm didn't last; she was evicted from her home due to the displacement crisis. She explains, "**I didn't leave because of the bombing, but I was evicted to make room for displaced Lebanese.**" She believes this happened to her because of her identity as a Syrian refugee and as a transgender woman. "It's easy to be vulnerable as a Syrian refugee and a transgender woman," she says.



## Syria

The military escalation has also impacted Syria. Although the intensity of the bombing was much higher in Lebanon, this has made the situation in the region more unstable than before. In less than a month, the Mazzeh district in the heart of Damascus has witnessed four separate airstrikes.

Syria has been experiencing one of the most complex conflicts of modern times for over a decade, still grappling with the consequences of the devastating war that led to economic contraction, infrastructure collapse, the migration of millions, and rising levels of poverty and hardship. In its latest [report](#) on Syria, the World Bank stated that the already deteriorating economic situation in 2023 continues to decline amidst an increasing “drain on households’ ability to meet their basic needs.” The war has had particularly devastating effects on LGBTQIA+ individuals in Syria, according to [research](#) by the Guardians of Equality Movement.



It is worth noting that Syria is divided into three main areas: those controlled by the Syrian government, the National Army, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, and the Autonomous Administration. Each area has its own rules and laws, but all criminalize homosexuality and actively pursue openly LGBTQIA+ individuals, according to [research](#) by the Guardians of Equality Movement.

## Humanitarian Response in Syria

From the Syrian capital, Damascus, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi launched an appeal to raise funds to assist those displaced from Lebanon to Syria. Referring to Syrian refugees who have been forced to flee once again to Syria, Grandi [said](#) in another statement, “They went to Lebanon to escape the war in Syria, and now they are returning to Syria to escape the war in Lebanon. These are truly extraordinary times, and they require the attention of the international community.”

## Security Risks

Since the beginning of the displacement waves, numerous human rights organizations have documented the arrest of hundreds of people by Syrian government security forces. For LGBTQIA+ individuals, Syria is considered one of the most [dangerous](#) countries. [Research](#) conducted by the Guardians of Equality Movement highlighted the security risks faced by LGBTQIA+ Syrians inside the country, especially those who are openly expressive. Both the law and society criminalize their right to exist.

**“ They also arrested a man in his fifties from the midst of his family; his wife was screaming as he was thrown to the ground. ”**

Firas, a gay Syrian refugee, displaced from Lebanon to Idlib.



Families flee to Syria to escape the air strikes that targeted Lebanon

Hariri Houssam/UNHCR ©

## From Lebanon to Idlib (Northwest Syria) A Game of Death or Arrest

Firas recently arrived with his family at the Syrian-Turkish border in Idlib, northwest Syria, fleeing bombardment in Lebanon. He was met by a member of the Guardians of Equality Movement in the area. Firas and his family endured an exhausting journey across the Syrian-Lebanese border until reaching their destination. He describes it as “draining and tiring” and expresses his astonishment at arriving safely: “We slept out in the open. I don’t really know how we got through that time; we couldn’t believe it.”



The young Syrian’s family had a grocery store and bread shops in Lebanon. “Our life was calm; I would go out with my friends every evening,” Firas says, describing a “wonderful” group of friends, some of whom, like him, shared similar experiences, and all of whom accepted him completely. Now, he plans to migrate to Europe: “It’s impossible to continue my life here.” He mentions that, for now, the area is safe, though a nearby location was recently bombed by Russian forces.

Firas tells us that Syrian regime checkpoints led a number of young men to a large bus after announcing their names. “They also arrested a man in his fifties in front of his family; his wife was screaming as he was thrown to the ground.”

## Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM) Response to the Crisis in Lebanon

Since the early hours of the escalation in Lebanon, Guardians of Equality Movement has taken action to unify efforts, coordinate responses, and support local organizations. GEM initiated contact with its partners in Lebanon, particularly LGBTQIA+ organizations.

Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM) also issued a statement regarding the escalation in Lebanon and its catastrophic effects, launching an international appeal to respond to the humanitarian crisis and advocating for peace and stability in the region.

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In response to the crisis, GEM launched an emergency rapid and emergency program targeting LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon affected by the war. Within 48 hours of the recent escalation, the Guardians of Equality Movement provided cash assistance to displaced LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon to support their urgent needs during temporary displacement.

As the escalation continues, the needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals have intensified, with initial assistance covering only a few days. By October 25, the organization had provided more than 170 emergency cash assistance and received an additional 400 requests.

All requests submitted to the organization came from individuals displaced by the military escalation in Lebanon and the ensuing displacement crisis.

In response to the increasing needs, the Guardians of Equality Movement added an urgent mental health program offering emergency psychological first aid (PFA) sessions in addition to emergency cash assistance.

Donate to Our Campaign:



# Stages of the Guardians of Equality Movement's Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Lebanon

## Rapid Response:

This phase spans from the onset of the crisis in Lebanon and lasts up to three months. During this period, the organization focuses on providing emergency cash assistance, case management, emergency mental health program such as the psychological first aid (PFA) as prevention of PTSD and trauma, as well as short-term food and shelter.

## Emergency Response:

This phase lasts from 9 to 15 months after the onset of the disaster, varying according to the context of the escalation. The Guardians of Equality Movement will focus on providing medium-term assistance, such as shelter and psychosocial support, while expanding the scope of rapid response efforts. Additionally, the organization will create activities similar to the rapid response, including:

- Emergency cash assistance
- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in War settings
- Ready-to-eat meals
- Food baskets
- Safe and innovative shelter solutions

## Recovery:

The Guardians of Equality Movement is currently planning for the recovery phase. Based on previous experiences and the data collected during emergency management, the organization has developed its perspective on the importance of recovery planning, focusing on the following:

- Specialized mental health programs addressing trauma in war settings
- Capacity-building programs for active organizations and service providers to work sensitively with individuals regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and intersex characteristics (SOGIESC)
- Capacity-building and livelihood programs
- Shelter support programs for individuals who have lost their homes
- Social support programs and peacebuilding initiatives among communities



## Recommendations

Lebanon and Syria are currently experiencing some of the most challenging times on all levels. With the worsening of both regional and local crises, hardships facing LGBTQIA+ individuals are intensifying, and there is a growing need to provide a sensitive and effective response. Therefore, we recommend the following:

- Establish mechanisms to increase oversight on the sensitivity to the situation of LGBTQIA+ individuals within local and international humanitarian responses, especially by the United Nations.
- Develop specific financial allocations dedicated to supporting the most affected LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- Create inclusive policies for LGBTQIA+ individuals within emergency response and recovery phases.
- Facilitate asylum and migration processes for LGBTQIA+ individuals to safe countries.
- Implement urgent procedures for asylum and migration to safe countries for LGBTQIA+ individuals facing criminalization, risks of arrest, or threats to their lives upon returning to their countries, such as Syria and Iraq.
- Ensure the inclusion of Lebanese LGBTQIA+ individuals in future dialogues and peace processes within the region.
- Develop early recovery programs that are gender-sensitive and tailored to the needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon and the region.
- Support documentation efforts and provide analysis and data on LGBTQIA+ individuals during wartime.

## Executive Summary

- LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon are facing heightened risks due to the current humanitarian crisis, especially those who are visibly out, non-binary or non-normative.
- These risks are even more severe for LGBTQIA+ Syrians who have been displaced and being returned to Syria, where they face life-threatening dangers.
- Several organizations have documented cases of LGBTQIA+ individuals internally displaced within Lebanon and migrating to Syria, with accounts of violence and torture occurring along their displacement journeys.
- Organizations supporting LGBTQIA+ individuals in Lebanon and Syria are providing essential aid, such as cash assistance and temporary shelter, to those most affected.
- The United Nations has launched a humanitarian response appeal to raise funds for those affected in Lebanon and displaced in Syria.
- Both Syria and Lebanon have been experiencing prolonged instability and insecurity, which has only intensified with recent military escalations.
- A sensitive, effective, and tailored response is urgently needed to meet the unique needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals amid the ongoing crisis.



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