1. ­­­­­ **Does your country have any laws, policies, or practices that, explicitly or implicitly, ban, restrict or make more challenging the exercising of freedom of expression by civil society organizations or activists advocating for LGBT persons’ human rights?**
   1. **This could include, but is not limited to, laws on the so-called propaganda of homosexuality, morality policies or codes, censorship of media content, restrictions on school curriculum, censorship of any content or scenes, censorship of literature, printed materials, blocking of sites or social media platforms, persecution of artists and authors working with the topic, etc.**

While the Lebanese Constitution explicitly guarantees freedom of expression in its preamble and Article 13, certain domestic laws can be used to restrict this freedom when exercised by civil society organizations or activists advocating for the human rights of LGBT individuals. Although these laws do not expressly target such restrictions, their ambiguous language allows for multiple interpretations, resulting in constraints on the freedom of expression of civil society organizations or activists advocating the rights of LGBT individuals. Found within the penal code, Article 531, criminalizes "Violation of public decency” expressed publicly, Article 532 criminalizes "Violation of public morals” expressed publicly, Article 533 criminalizes "any person who manufactures, exports, imports, or acquires writings, drawings, photographs, films, signs, or other indecent objects with the intention of trading or distributing them, or announces or informs about the means of obtaining them”, and Article 534 criminalizes ““any sexual intercourse contrary to nature leads to a sentence of prison up to one year”.

Numerous incidents have occurred that have contributed to the curtailment of freedom of expression for civil society organizations or activists advocating for the rights of LGBT individuals.

* General Security imposes pre-censorship on materials, such as movies, which offend public morals. These include material on topics related to sexual matters or deemed offensive by religious groups[[1]](#footnote-1). Consequently, movies that presumably promote homosexuality is usually prohibited[[2]](#footnote-2).
* In 2018, LebMash initiated an awareness campaign promoting tolerance toward the LGBT community with the slogan "Homosexuality is not a disease." However, General Security removed the campaign ads from public spaces.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* On June 24, 2022, Interior Minister Bassam Al Mawlawi issued a memo that prohibited any assemblies promoting "sexual deviance." The memo, lacking a clear legal basis and employing vague and excessively broad grounds, asserted that such gatherings violated "customs and traditions" and "principles of religion." Although this directive was suspended by the State Council on November 1, the minister issued a second directive on November 18, banning “any conference, activity, or demonstration related to or addressing homosexuality”. The reasoning behind this second directive cited security concerns related to the presence of "extremist groups." Despite being challenged in court, as of now, no decision has been issued.
* On July 22, 2023, Hezbollah's secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, called for Lebanon to "combat homosexuality" and labeled gay individuals as "sexual deviants." This has resulted in cyberstalking and threats against journalists covering SOGI-related issues. Many Hezbollah members made related statements with immediate devastating consequences. To date, no prosecutions or investigations have been initiated. [[4]](#footnote-4)

1. **If there are no such laws or policies, have there been attempts or incentives in the last ten years (2013-2023) to introduce such explicit or implicit restrictions, either nationally or locally? If so, who were the actors/groups/individuals or organizations behind these attempts, and what is the current situation?**

Two draft laws were introduced that would be used against people who touch on LGBT matters.

On August 16, 2023, the Minister of Culture, Mohamad Mortada, presented a proposed law with the purpose of “combatting the promotion of sexual deviance/perversion”. The legislation would criminalize any explicit or implicit efforts to encourage "deviant sexual relations contrary to the order of nature," carrying a potential prison term of up to three years and a minimum fine of 5 million Lebanese pounds. The bill further criminalizes and imposes the same prison sentence on individuals involved in “any act that seeks to promote the possibility of ‘sex change’” or share information directed at minors that would “compel them to change their sex or sexual orientation.”

On August 17, another law proposal was put forward by Achraf Rifi, a member of parliament. This draft law seeks to criminalize the "promotion of homosexuality" and "sexual deviance." It also would criminalize those involved in “promoting, facilitating, hiding or inciting others on committing such acts, through any means possible”, with potential repercussions of imprisonment ranging from one to three years and a maximum fine equivalent to five times the minimum wage at the time of sentencing.[[5]](#footnote-5)

On July 31, 2023, another draft law opposing “sexual deviation” (homosexuality) in Lebanon, issued by the Union Center for Research and Development, affiliated to Hezbollah. This law criminalizes "promotion and advertising of sexual deviation," with penalties ranging from imprisonment for a minimum of 7 years up to 10 years, along with a fine.[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. **Does your country have any laws, policies, or practices that, explicitly or implicitly, ban, restrict or make more challenging the exercising of freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly by civil society organizations or activists advocating for LGBT persons’ human rights?**
   1. **Those can include – but are not limited to – explicit bans on registration of organizations working on LGBT persons’ human rights or related topics, procedures making the registration impossible or almost impossible, obstacles for applying for and receiving funding (foreign or otherwise), ignoring or indirectly encouraging attacks and threats on LGBT-related events and using such attacks as a justification for banning peaceful marches/protests, refusing to guarantee the protection of the peaceful protests by State security forces, etc.**

The Lebanese Constitution guarantees freedom of association and peaceful assembly in its preamble and Article 13. There are no domestic laws that explicitly prohibit or restrict the exercise of these freedoms by civil society organizations or activists advocating the human rights of LGBT individuals. However, certain articles may be used as potential restrictions, including those mentioned in the answer of the first question (articles in the penal code that criminalizes "Violation of public decency publicly," and "Violation of public morals publicly and “sexual intercourse against nature”). In addition to that, Article 3 of the Law of Association (1909), which stipulates that "Founding an association on any unlawful basis that violates the provisions of laws and public morals is not permitted”, may be interpreted to ban or restrict any peaceful assembly or association relating to advocating LGBT rights.

Numerous instances have occurred wherein there were prohibitions or limitations on the freedom of association and peaceful assembly in connection to the advocacy of LGBT rights. Here are some notable occurrences:

* Lebanon has not approved the registration to any non-governmental organization or entity target LGBTIQ+ individuals, irrespective of reasons such as humanitarian aid, protection, and basic services.[[7]](#footnote-7)
* Since 2017, Lebanese security forces have regularly interfered with human rights events related to gender and sexuality.
* On September 29, 2018, General Security forces raided and unlawfully attempted to shut down an annual conference on advancing LGBT rights and issued entry bans for the non-Lebanese participants. In 2021, the State Council annulled the entry bans and stated that participation in a conference related to LGBTI rights falls under freedom of expression.
* In 2020, a mob attacked a group of LGBTQI+ activists in Beirut as they demonstrated against Article 534. Although human rights organizations denounced the assault, no arrests or charges have been made by the authorities. [[8]](#footnote-8)
* On June 24, 2022, Interior Minister Bassam Al Mawlawi issued a memo that prohibited any assemblies promoting "sexual deviance." The memo, lacking a clear legal basis and employing vague and excessively broad grounds, asserted that such gatherings violated "customs and traditions" and "principles of religion." Although this directive was suspended by the State Council on November 1, the minister issued a second directive on November 18, banning “any conference, activity, or demonstration related to or addressing homosexuality”. The reasoning behind this second directive cited security concerns related to the presence of "extremist groups." Despite being challenged in court, as of now, no decision has been issued.
* In 2022, a private workshop organized by a group of seven LGBT and feminist activists at a cultural center had to be cancelled for not having a permit.[[9]](#footnote-9)
* Since June 2022, LGBTI activists have reported facing repeated harassment by the Internal Security Forces, General Security, and Internal Security’s Information Branch. These authorities have made unannounced visits to activists' offices, questioning their activities, indicating surveillance of their social media accounts, and directing them to cancel various events related to gender and sexuality, citing the ministerial directive.

Activists claimed that the security forces tried to explain their intervention by stating that the organizers "did not obtain prior approval from the authorities," referencing the 1911 Lebanese Law on Public Meetings. However, this law is only relevant to public meetings.[[10]](#footnote-10)

* On August 23, 2023, men from a group that calls itself “Soldiers of God'', known for their hostility towards the LGBTI community, assaulted attendees at a Beirut bar hosting a drag event. The attackers beat some attendees while leaving and issued threats against the LGBTI community. Despite the presence of Internal Security Forces, no intervention occurred. Instead, they questioned the bar owner and guests about the event's nature. To date, no arrests have been made in connection with the attack.[[11]](#footnote-11)

1. **If there are no such laws or policies, have there been attempts or incentives in the last ten years (2013-2023) to introduce such explicit or implicit restrictions, either nationally or locally? If so, who were the actors/groups/individuals or organizations behind these attempts and what is the current situation?**

Due to the proposed laws mentioned earlier (in question 2), the exercising of freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly by civil society organizations or activists advocating for the human rights of LGBT persons may be impacted. The first draft, proposed on August 16, 2023, by the Minister of Culture, Mohamad Mortada, aims to criminalize explicit or implicit efforts to encourage "deviant sexual relations contrary to the order of nature" and any acts promoting the possibility of 'sex change' or sharing information directed at minors that would "compel them to change their sex or sexual orientation." Similarly, the second draft law proposed by Achraf Rifi, a member of parliament on August 17, criminalizes the "promotion of homosexuality" and "sexual deviance,” targeting individuals involved in “promoting, facilitating, hiding, or inciting others to commit such acts, through any means possible.”

1. **Are there practices, procedures, groups or actors, societal and political trends, incentives, civil society and constituency mobilization, laws, bills or policies, which you have not mentioned above but that already affect or are likely to affect in the future, directly or indirectly, the exercising of the human rights to freedom of expression, association and/or peaceful assembly by LGBT people, activists and civil society organizations in your country, nationally or locally?**

* Hate speech on social media unfolded following the memo issued by the Minister of Interior in 2022, originating from individuals, politicians, and specific religious groups. These instances of hate speech involved incitements to violence, death threats, and calls to forcibly prevent the scheduled events associated with the LGBT community. Politicians have publicly condemned the "promotion of homosexuality." Consequently, activists, initially planning a peaceful march on June 26 against the minister's ban, have announced the postponement of the protest due to the perceived threats of violent counter-protests and concerns that security forces might not offer sufficient protection.[[12]](#footnote-12)
* On March 4, 2023, Minister of Culture Judge Mohammed Wissam Al-Murtada launched a conference against the LGBT community under the pretext of protecting family values. The conference, titled "Challenges of the Family in Lebanon," was organized by the Lebanese Forum for Family Preservation and Values. The Ministry of Culture took part in the official and widely attended celebration held at the UNESCO Palace in Beirut. The event was attended by religious figures, deputies, political entities, social figures, and cultural personalities.[[13]](#footnote-13)
* On January 31, 2024, under the patronage of the Minister of Culture, the Lebanese Women's Council, and the General Workers' Union, a workshop on "Challenges Facing the Lebanese Society in Family Protection” was organized. This workshop targeted the LGBT community as it is considered a threat to family values.[[14]](#footnote-14)

1. **Given that laws and policies regulating internet use, access and content can have especially restrictive effects on the protection of the human rights of LGBT persons, are there laws, policies and practices which appear neutral or otherwise not specifically addressed to LGBT or SOGI issues, which nonetheless have discriminatory effects on the exercising of the human rights to freedom of expression, association and/or peaceful assembly by LGBT people, activists and civil society organizations in your country, nationally or locally?**

* Law 81/2018 relating to Electronic Transaction and Personal Data[[15]](#footnote-15) lacks sufficient data protection as its provisions are overly broad and outdated.[[16]](#footnote-16) For instance, Article 94 exempts public legal entities from seeking a license for processing personal data, allowing unrestricted collection and processing by any public entity. Additionally, Article 103 restricts data subjects' access to personal data processed for foreign and national security purposes if it jeopardizes the state's security. Data processing requests, handled by the Ministry of Economy and Trade of Lebanon, lack proper guidelines due to the non-issuance of necessary circulars to date. Moreover, the Ministries of Interior and National Defence have authority to oversee individuals' data processing when it pertains to “internal and external state security.”

The law lacks the establishment of an independent authority to oversee data protection, leaving Lebanon without an independent data protection authority.

Law 81/2018 allows for potential restrictions on freedom of expression. Article 118, which amended article 209 of the Penal Code, stipulates that publishing can occur through electronic means, deeming social media platforms and internet-based media outlets as publishing platforms. This raises concerns, as individuals can be arrested under Article 532, which criminalizes "Violation of public morals” when expressed through electronic means.

According to article 126 of law 81/2018 provides that “The Public Prosecution may decide to temporarily suspend certain electronic services, block websites or freeze accounts in such websites for no more than thirty days. Such a period may be renewable only once through a justified decision and this action will legally cease to have effect upon expiry of the time limit.”

This article permits the blocking of websites and online accounts without specifying the conditions for such actions, thereby granting discretionary power to the public prosecutor.

* Concerning internet usage in Lebanon as of February 2022, 68.3% of the population utilized mobile devices. The recorded number of internet users at that time stood at 6.01 million, representing 89.3% of the population, with 5.06 million active social media users, constituting 75.2% of the population. Figures for 2023 are pending publication.[[17]](#footnote-17)
* In 2019, the Minister of Telecommunications in Lebanon issued a decision to block access to the app, Grindr, used by LGBTI individuals.[[18]](#footnote-18)

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