

Crimes of kidnapping and human trafficking following the forced deportation of refugees from Lebanon

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR)

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Executive Summary

Throughout the past years, the Lebanese authorities represented by the "Internal Security Forces" have been warning civilians about the widespread kidnapping gangs that lure victims within the country, demanding ransom in exchange for their release. The relevant authorities have also frequently announced that they have uncovered several kidnapping gangs while admitting¹ that the kidnapping of civilians in Lebanon has become a phenomenon that increased in 2021 and 2022, especially in border areas which have turned into a "lawless zone beyond the authority of the state"². The increase in the recorded rates of kidnapping crimes in Lebanon indicated by the statistical figures provided by "Information International"³, shows how the rate of kidnapping for ransom increased by 300% in 2022, in addition to the registration of 44 kidnapping crimes for ransom since the beginning of the year 2022 until September of the same year⁴. These numbers indicate that the economic crisis, accompanied by a security and financial collapse, as well as the high unemployment rates in the country are among the main factors leading to the spread of kidnapping crimes.

The numbers reflecting the extent of kidnappings in Lebanon do not necessarily represent the actual crimes that have occurred but are rather an indicator based on the figures announced by the Internal Security Forces and the statistical authorities. These numbers would increase if we took into consideration the rest of the cases that are not reported or detected by security authorities.

Syrian refugees in Lebanon were not immune to the concerning spread of kidnappings in the country. Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR)'s field team has documented several cases of kidnappings where victims have been subjected to beating and other forms of mistreatment at the hands of kidnapers. The list of victims also includes children who suffered inhumane treatment.

Since the beginning of the civil protests in Syria in 2011, which escalated into an armed conflict in 2012, the Syrian political and security situation has had repercussions on Lebanon, reflected by several security confrontations between factions loyal to the Syrian regime and opposing Lebanese factions. During these confrontations, dozens of Syrian refugees were kidnapped as a form of retaliation for the kidnapping or disappearance of Lebanese individuals in Syria⁵. These waves of kidnappings were driven by sectarian motives⁶. The Lebanese authorities did not take any concrete measures to track down the kidnapers and hold them accountable⁷. One crime cannot be justified by another. These kidnapping operations were widely covered by local or international media, but the state of impunity in Lebanon is still present.

The kidnappings monitored by ACHR target Syrian civilian refugees; the perpetrators demand a ransom from the victims' families in exchange for their release. Kidnapping gangs use social media to lure their victims, deceiving them with false promises of assistance related to seeking asylum in European countries in some cases. This leads victims to fall into the kidnapping trap, and subsequently, perpetrators request ransom from their families in exchange for their release.

According to ACHR's documentation, some cases that were forcibly deported during the recent arbitrary security crackdown that started in April 2023 by the Lebanese authorities against Syrian refugees were exposed to the risk of kidnapping by human traffickers and smugglers. The Lebanese authorities left some of the forcibly deported refugees randomly near the "Wadi Khaled" border crossing, at the Lebanese-Syrian border, which increased their vulnerability to danger and financial extortion.

In border areas, **kidnapping gangs exploit their victims to achieve financial gains**, depriving them of their freedom to blackmail their relatives and demand ransom. According to testimonies and information received by ACHR, the detained refugees who are deprived of their freedom are subjected to heinous and brutal acts of violence. These acts include severe physical violence and sexual assaults, including rape. Some victims are even killed or go missing if they are unable to pay the requested ransom. The treatment of the victims is cruel and inhumane, as they are tortured to intensify their suffering and force their relatives to quickly pay the ransom for their release.

44

kidnapping crimes for ransom

since the beginning of the year 2022
until September of the same year



It is important to highlight that the information received by ACHR is sometimes relayed from one witness to another; these pieces of information may be circulated among more than five individuals at times. It is challenging to fully verify their accuracy according to the documentation methodology followed by ACHR unless the victims are able to provide detailed testimonies.

The recent security campaign targeting Syrian refugees in Lebanon, resulting in their forced deportation, has contributed to the escalation of financial extortion cases across the border by human traffickers. As a result, kidnapping crimes for ransom continue to occur within border areas between Lebanon and Syria. The majority of victims were forcibly deported; their fate remains uncertain as there are no systematic mechanisms supported by the Lebanese authorities to monitor and track the situation of Syrian refugees after their forced deportation. Several factors contribute to the increase of kidnapping crimes targeting Syrian refugees in Lebanon, including economic, social, security, and political factors.

During the security campaign in April 2023, ACHR recorded at least 82 cases of deported refugees who were handed over by the Fourth Division of the Syrian Army to human smugglers across the border via the "Wadi Khaled" border crossing in northern Lebanon. The victims were handed over to human smugglers to extort monetary sums from the refugees in exchange for their return to Lebanon, while others were left within the Syrian borders.

This report does not cover all aspects of this complex issue but merely sheds light on this issue of human rights abuse and grave violations that Syrian refugees are subjected to at the hands of criminal gangs, smugglers, and human traffickers. The report also includes recommendations aimed at enhancing urgent efforts to stop these crimes.

The Lebanese government should enhance the investigation and criminal prosecution of cases of kidnappings and unlawful detention of refugees, provide the necessary support to victims based on the principle of reparation, ensure fair trials for the perpetrators and the security of Syrian refugees who are at risk of kidnapping by criminal gangs and human trafficking networks. The measures taken should prioritize sufficient security measures in the areas of the Beqaa, Northern Lebanon, Akkar, and both sides of the Lebanese-Syrian border, specifically in the Wadi Khaled area, the Hermel-Houch El Sayyed area, Aarsal area, and the Masnaa area. These measures should be promptly implemented and sustained. It is also crucial to facilitate the access of kidnapped refugees to impartial redress and compensation mechanisms and protect them from forced deportation during the investigation process related to their kidnapping cases.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Lebanon must actively work to combat kidnapping crimes and prevent incitement to such crimes while providing support and cooperation with relevant Lebanese authorities to urge them to apprehend the perpetrators and prosecute them before the competent judicial entities. The UNHCR should improve the protection of the most vulnerable refugees, including unaccompanied children, women, and the elderly, and provide them with the necessary psychological and social support in cases where they have been subjected to any psychological or physical harm.

82

of the 365 syrian deportees who were handed over
by The Fourth Division r to human smugglers





Introduction

Kidnapping is one of the most serious crimes that violate human rights and disregard the principles of law and justice. It is a multifaceted crime comprised of distinct actions, each of which constitutes a separate offense under the law. These acts combined form a single crime, involving kidnapping and the transfer and removal of the abducted individual from the crime scene to another location, to control them. The motives behind this crime vary, with political and security reasons being at the forefront.

Kidnapping crimes are not a new phenomenon in Lebanon, but the country has witnessed a troubling increase in these crimes during the past years, especially in areas bordering Syria. These areas are often described as “lawless zones”, beyond the control of the Lebanese state⁸. Currently, the Baalbek-Hermel region is witnessing an unprecedented state of security chaos⁹, creating a conducive environment for the operations of kidnapping gangs.

In the recent security campaign, ACHR’s team has observed an increase in cases of extortion and kidnapping targeting Syrian refugees who have been forcibly deported beyond the Lebanese borders. This is particularly concerning for refugees who fear that returning to Syria would expose them to the risks of enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and torture at the hands of Syrian authorities.

On May 19, 2023, ACHR issued a report titled “Lebanon Violates Human Rights through Forced Deportation of Refugees”. The report summarized its findings, revealing that the Lebanese army initiated random security campaigns across various Lebanese areas in order to implement a decision issued by the Higher Defense Council in 2019. The campaigns involved 22 security raids on residential houses and refugee camps, resulting in the arbitrary detention of 808 Syrian refugees. Among the detainees were 17 individuals with valid residency permits, 13 women, 24 minors, and 2 LGBTQ+ individuals. Some of them were subjected to physical abuse, mistreatment, and cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment by members of the Lebanese army. Additionally, at least 336 detainees were forcibly deported beyond the Lebanese borders, including 12 refugees with valid residency permits, 13 women, 22 minors, and 2 LGBTQ+ individuals.

Through intensified field monitoring of the deportations conducted by the field team, spanning from random security raids and detention in various security centers to their forced deportation beyond the Lebanese borders or handover to the Syrian authorities, the team has focused on the fate of the deported individuals, primarily on refugees who have security concerns that make them believe there are direct risks to themselves and their families upon their return to Syria or while passing through Syrian security checkpoints. These individuals constitute the largest percentage of refugees affected, in addition to political reasons refugees consider as a primary reason for their refusal to go back to Syria, as well as those who deserted compulsory, mandatory, or reserve military service, and those who failed to complete it.

With the presence of a field team of activists and human rights defenders on various Lebanese territories, who contributed significantly to the preparation of the report published on May 19, 2023, ACHR’s team conducted a second interview with a sample of 13 refugees. Five of these refugees were among the 75 refugees who were previously deported and said to have been handed over to human smugglers. The sample confirmed in the second interview, in detail, the process of their handover at the Lebanese borders after being received by the Lebanese army and/or after their arrest in the free zone in the area near the borders. The remaining eight interviews were conducted with victims of other kidnapping incidents, including the case of the kidnapping of refugees at the Syrian embassy in Beirut.

The growing number of victims affected by the security campaigns, leading to an upsurge in smuggling and financial extortion activities at the border, has increased during the documentation period between May 16th and June 13th, 2023. Two more security raids were documented throughout this period, leading to an additional 33 cases of arrest and 29 cases of deportation. Seven individuals were handed over to smugglers.

Security and Political Challenges

Lebanon is currently facing security and political challenges resulting from regional tensions and conflicts in the area, in addition to internal power struggles among political party authorities which have led to increased tensions, violence, and weakened government authorities, creating a favorable environment for armed groups and criminals to exploit the political chaos and commit kidnapping operations. These operations may be shielded or even facilitated by political parties in many areas publicly under the control of these parties.

Furthermore, the negligence of successive Lebanese governments to address the economic and political consequences of internal political conflict, and their failure to prioritize the refugee crisis, has placed refugees amid escalating security breakdown. This has led to the growing exploitation of refugees by armed groups and political parties alike, without any efforts to enforce laws and hold criminals accountable.

ACHR has published numerous reports and joint statements with local and international partners over the past five years, in which it has repeatedly warned against the politicization of the refugee file. However, the Lebanese government has been unwilling to consider or act upon these recommendations, and no positive direct responses or changes have been witnessed.

Government decisions have been and continue to be a major factor in legitimizing forced deportation campaigns against refugees in Lebanon, which laid the grounds for an increase in smuggling operations and human trafficking. These actions are a result of the irresponsible actions of the Lebanese authorities during the implementation of these campaigns. Several times, ACHR has mentioned that the General Directorate of General Security's decision in 2015 and the Higher Defense Council's decision on April 24, 2019, have weakened the refugees' legal standing. This has allowed smugglers to exploit their legal vulnerability, making it impossible for them to regularize their legal status or obtain legal residency documents through legitimate channels. Moreover, the hate speech emanating from political parties and some Lebanese figures encourages the financial and moral exploitation of refugees at the hand of smugglers and kidnapers.

The arbitrary security campaign which started in April 2023 and included the forced arbitrary deportation of refugees through the "Wadi Khaled" and "Masnaa" border crossings, leaving refugees at a random point of the Lebanese-Syrian borders without ensuring their safety, placed them at a high risk of kidnapping and monetary extortion by criminal kidnapping groups who take advantage of the legal vacuum, the absence of state authority, and the lack of regulation to increase their human smuggling activities.

ACHR has documented 365 cases of forced deportation since the beginning of the security campaign in April until June 13th (including 12 refugees with legal residency permits, 13 women, 22 minors, and 2 members of the LGBTQ+ community). Additionally, 841 arbitrary arrests were documented (including 17 refugees with legal residency documents, 13 women, 25 minors, and 2 members of the LGBTQ+ community). During the security campaign that started in April 2023 until June 13th, 2023, ACHR has recorded 82 cases of deported refugees handed over by Lebanese authorities to the Syrian side, specifically the Fourth Division who then handed them to human smugglers across the border through the "Wadi Khaled" border crossing, all to extort money from victims. Syrian political activists have been specifically targeted by kidnappings, particularly in a previous incident where six Syrian refugee activists were kidnapped by the Syrian embassy in Beirut. ACHR strongly believes that kidnapping crimes will continue to increase unless the Lebanese government seriously addresses the need to establish a clear mechanism to hold criminals accountable.

365

cases of forced deportation

since the beginning of the security campaign in April until June 13th



841

cases of arbitrary arrests

since the beginning of the security campaign in April until June 13th



Testimony 1

Ahmed (an alias), was visiting his daughter and her husband in Qubba Shamra. On Tuesday morning, April 11, 2023, Lebanese army elements and military intelligence raided the Kfardebian area and the building where the family lived, along with four other buildings. They arrested Ahmed, his son-in-law, and several other men, totaling 32 people. They were registered with UNHCR, had entered Lebanon regularly, and some of them had valid residency permits.

They were handcuffed and transported in military vehicles to the Sarba center- in Keserwan district. Military intelligence officers filmed all the detainees without interrogating them and recorded their personal belongings. At 4 PM, they were all transferred to the Shadra border crossing near Wadi Khaled crossing, and a soldier told them, "You will be handed over to the Fourth Division at the Syrian border." Indeed, they were handed over after the crossing at Wadi Khaled to two young men wearing Syrian army uniforms. They then took them to a human trafficking center, and negotiations, blackmail, and intimidation tactics began. The smugglers contacted the victims' families and demanded sums ranging from \$150 to \$200 US dollars per person to bring them back to Lebanon irregularly.

Testimony 2

On April 27, 2023, Camp 001 in western Bekaa was raided by the Lebanese army. Adham (alias) and his family were arrested because they didn't have valid residency papers. They were later transferred with a large group of deportees to the Sahmara military barracks in West Bekaa. After several hours, they were all transported toward the Syrian border and thrown by the Lebanese army behind the border near a checkpoint belonging to the Fourth Division of the Syrian Army. Adham managed to escape after paying \$3,000 to members of the Fourth Division for his release and returned to Lebanon through human smugglers.

Upon his return to Lebanon, and due to the fear of being arrested and deported again, Adham and his family, consisting of his wife and four children, decided to leave for Idlib in northern Syria. As a result, he started selling the furniture of his house and continued communicating with a smuggler to transport them to Idlib at his father's house. On May 11, 2023, they set off with their family towards Idlib, and in the Bab area, east of Aleppo, they were intercepted by a checkpoint belonging to the Syrian army's military security. They arrested him and transferred him to the Khan Shaykhun branch in Idlib for questioning (according to close sources). He is still in detention and under investigation to this day, with no further information available about him.

As for his family, they continued their journey to Idlib and arrived at Adham's father's house in northern Syria. His wife is worried about Adham due to his arrest by Syrian military security and the potential risks that may endanger his life.

Testimony 3

On Tuesday, August 24, 2021, around 10 AM, "Jamal" (alias) was abducted in front of the Syrian embassy in Lebanon, after leaving it. He was taken to an unknown location by individuals wearing official uniforms in a private car, while the car continued its path for hundreds of meters and returned to the Syrian embassy, with the security officer supervising the kidnapping being an officer of the Syrian embassy.

"Jamal" was transferred to the Lebanese Army Intelligence Unit, where he was interrogated and then transferred to the Lebanese Ministry of Defense for further investigation. He noticed that the interrogator spoke with a Syrian accent. After three days of the investigation and under media and human rights pressure that spread at the time, he was transferred to the General Security along with five other people who were abducted the same way.

On October 12, 2021, he was released from General Security and granted a temporary residence permit, subject to being reviewed every 15 days for renewal. He moved to a new place of residence, and his fears of being arrested again, abducted, or deported to Syria in his new place of residence persisted. At that time, his lawyer sent a request to the Syrian embassy to obtain a passport, but the request was denied, and the lawyer was informed that the applicant should obtain the passport by order of the Syrian Interior Minister. "Jamal" and those with him are still seeking a way to leave and secure a route for travel outside Lebanon.

Economic challenges

The crisis in Lebanon has worsened due to the security and political challenges which have further exacerbated the worsening economic situation. Lebanon has recorded the highest inflation rate in food prices worldwide, reaching 350% in just one year until the end of April 2023 according to data from the Food Security Report released by the World Bank. A report¹⁰ published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on June 8th, 2023, stated that cash transfers accounted for approximately 37.8% of the gross domestic product in 2022.

The absence of oversight and anti-corruption measures, coupled with growing political divisions among Lebanese political factions, has caused the depreciation of the Lebanese Lira to 93,000 against the dollar. The lack of internal regulation in Lebanon has allowed traders, manufacturers, and wealthy individuals to monopolize exchange rates in all buying and selling activities, resulting in an estimated 80% of Lebanese people living in poverty, according to a report¹¹ by the European Union also indicating a staggering 36% extreme poverty rate and the inability of refugees to meet their basic needs.

This gap has created a sense of insecurity among Lebanese citizens. With the continued hate speech against Syrian refugees by politicians, tensions have escalated and refugees have been unjustly blamed for the economic and security downturn, without any factual basis to back this argument. The proliferation of groups targeting refugees for economic gains, both within and outside the ruling political parties, has further exacerbated the situation.

ACHR team documented several cases where individuals were kidnapped by armed groups for financial purposes. Following the kidnapping, the perpetrators directly demand a specific ransom amount from the victim's relatives or pursue demands linked to monetary gains. Often, refugees from well-off backgrounds are targeted, and deceitful tactics and fraudulent schemes are employed to lure victims through a false assurance of job prospects, legal residency, or opportunities for resettlement or migration abroad.

Testimony

In June 2022, "Bilal" (alias) met a person on Facebook who promised to help him and his family travel outside Lebanon with the condition of providing \$8,000 for the costs of sea departure towards Europe. On the 17th of the same month, that person requested a meeting with "Bilal" and his family, consisting of three children and his wife, in Choueifat, in order to embark on the Mediterranean Sea. They headed north by taxi to Baalbek, claiming that they needed to gather other people who would embark on the same journey.

Near Baalbek, there was a black Range Rover car waiting for their arrival, driven by an armed group that accompanied them throughout the road towards Hermel in a border area with Syria. Upon their arrival at a cattle farm, "Bilal" and his family were informed that they were kidnapped, and several other people were also kidnapped in the same way, including women.

The couple was subjected to physical assault, and the kidnappers searched the wife for any hidden money or valuable items. At the same time, one of the gang members attempted to remove her clothes and sexually assault her. On the second day, the wife was subjected to rape and sexual violence.

The kidnappers contacted "Bilal's" relatives through his mobile phone via WhatsApp to extort them by sending pictures and videos documenting their beatings and harsh treatment. They demanded a ransom of \$9,000 for their release. After negotiating for three days, a payment of \$6,000 was made. Once the payment was made, the kidnappers left "Bilal" and his family in the Baalbek-Riyak area, after the amount was received by a mediator between the parties.

"Bilal" was unable to file a complaint due to death threats. However, he informed the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who only listened to his testimony. He attempted to document the evidence of the beatings and rape at a hospital in the Beqaa region and requested the presence of a forensic doctor. However, the hospital rejected him upon learning about the kidnapping incident, fearing that the gang would discover any medical services provided to the victims. Meanwhile, the wife is suffering from severe psychological disorders as she has experienced several suicide attempts.





Refugees suffer deprivation of fundamental human rights due to the absence of a serious solution to their legal status, leaving them vulnerable to economic exploitation, extortion, and undermining their legal standing



The law weakens victims of kidnappings

Refugees suffer deprivation of fundamental human rights due to the absence of a serious solution to their legal status, leaving them vulnerable to economic exploitation, extortion, and undermining their legal standing.

It is important to highlight that since April 24, 2019, all Syrian refugees who entered Lebanon through irregular means have been suffering from a lack of legal protection against any claims. This is due to the denial of legal residency permits, enforced by the decision¹² of the Lebanese Higher Defense Council, which mandates the deportation of these refugees to Syria based on a decision issued in April 2019. The decision stipulates the deportation of Syrian refugees who entered Lebanon without going through official border crossings. The Council has not disclosed any information regarding the deportation procedures, but the evidence suggests that the implementation of deportation measures extends beyond cases of irregular entry, encompassing all Syrian refugees without assessing the potential risks to their lives and freedoms upon their return to Syria. Consequently, they face a severe lack of necessary protection and security.

At the same time, the majority of government procedures concerning refugees filing complaints against kidnapping gangs are linked to obtaining valid residency documents. Therefore, the decision of the Lebanese Higher Defense Council deprives refugees of their right to defend themselves in ways defined by the law and overlooks any practices that may violate their rights. This widespread culture of impunity contributes to the prevalence of kidnapping incidents targeting refugees in many areas.

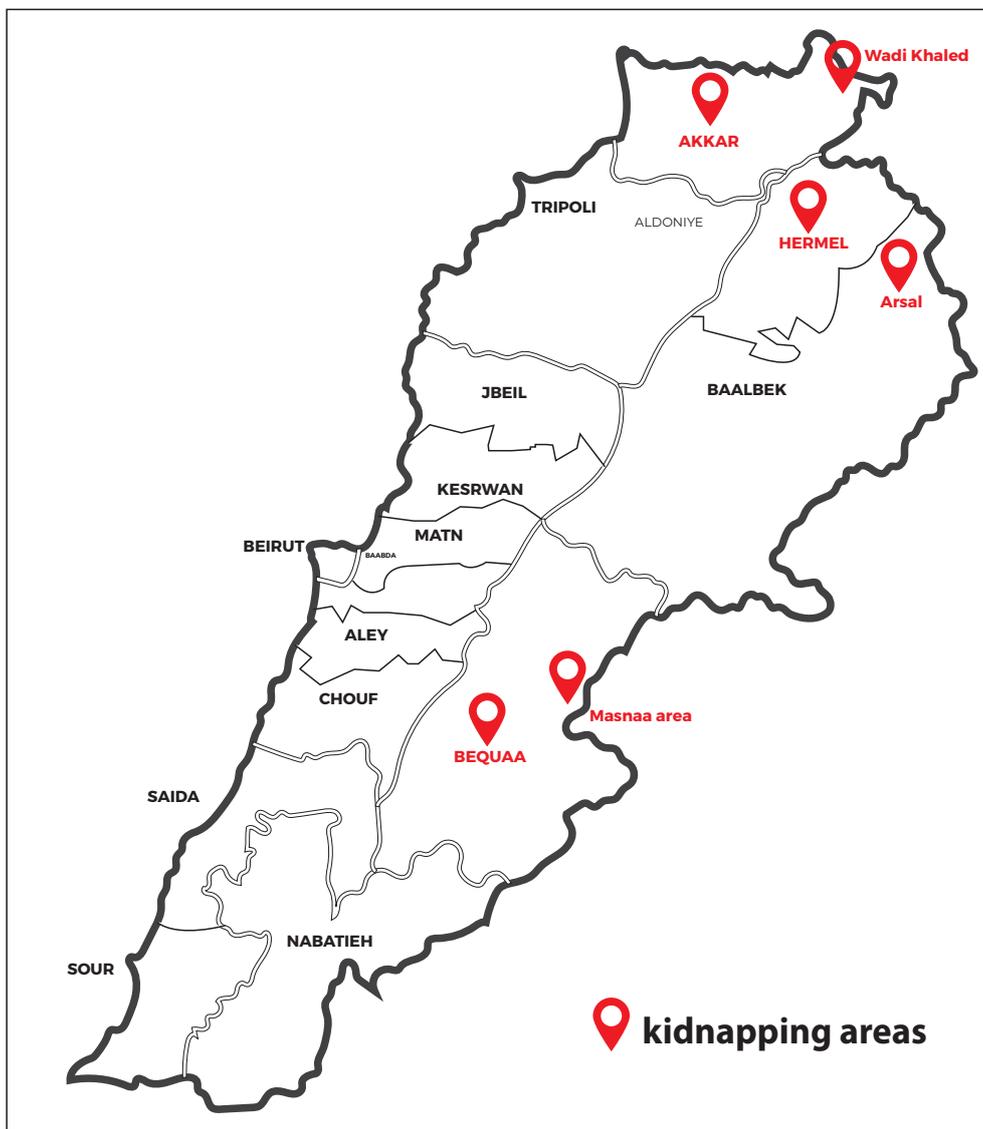


Transnational Criminal Networks

According to the information received by ACHR, criminal networks involved in kidnapping operations are affiliated with a Lebanese political party and drug trafficking gangs closely associated with or under its protection. These groups are responsible for kidnapping Syrian refugees for ransom in several areas of Lebanon, including central and northern Beqaa, Akkar in northern Lebanon, and along the Syrian-Lebanese border, specifically in the Wadi Khaled region, the Hermel-Housh Al-Sayyed area, Aarsal area, and Masnaa area. On the Syrian side, these areas border the towns of Al-Qusayr, rural Homs, and Damascus.

The duration of the kidnappings ranges from one week to three months, during which the kidnapped individuals are subjected to physical abuse, exploitation, and inhumane treatment. The demands of the kidnappers include financial ransoms ranging from \$2,000 to \$15,000 US dollars in some cases. After the ransom is paid, the release locations of the hostages are determined based on their proximity to the border areas with Syria, and an agreement is reached between the kidnappers and the victims' relatives. The release of the kidnapped victims takes place in public areas away from the control of security authorities, including areas such as Hermel, Baalbek, Shatila, and Beirut.

The available information to ACHR indicates the existence of extensive kidnapping networks across various regions, some of which are linked to individuals within government entities. These networks include agents responsible for collecting ransom payments. Furthermore, recent forced deportation campaigns carried out by the Lebanese authorities have contributed to an increase in the activities of border gangs, who exploit forcibly deported Syrian refugees from Lebanon in smuggling operations. Due to their vulnerable situation and the lack of border control by the Lebanese authorities, refugees become easy targets for gangs and smugglers who extort them for illegal border crossings. Refugees are smuggled through dangerous routes and unsafe methods, putting them at great risk and exposing them to exploitation and harm, which can endanger their lives.



Duration of Kidnappings

ranges from one week to three months



The financial ransoms

ranges from \$2,000 to \$15,000 US dollars



The relevant local and international laws include

According to the Lebanese Penal Code, the act of kidnapping or unlawfully depriving individuals of their freedom is a criminal offense. Article 569 of the law stipulates that "whoever deprives another of their personal freedom by kidnapping or any other means shall be punished by temporary hard labor." The perpetrator is punished with life imprisonment¹³ if: the period of deprivation of liberty exceeds one month, the kidnapped person is physically or mentally tortured, the perpetrator uses the victim to demand ransom, or the kidnapping is committed by a group of two or more individuals.

Lebanon is also internationally committed to combating torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. This commitment is outlined in the international convention¹⁴ which require each state party to ensure that all acts of torture are crimes under its domestic law. The same applies to any individual who attempts to practice torture or engage in any other act that constitutes complicity or participation in torture.

International human rights law prohibits all forms of kidnapping, including political kidnapping and mass abductions. Member states of relevant international agreements are obligated to implement measures to protect individuals from these illegal acts.

Several provisions within international agreements specifically address the prohibition of kidnapping in Lebanon and worldwide. For example, Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile,"¹⁵ explicitly guaranteeing the right not to be subjected to arbitrary detention.

Furthermore, Article 17 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance¹⁶ states that "No one shall be held in secret detention," prohibiting the arbitrary disappearance of individuals. States are obligated to investigate complaints from families and relatives and take necessary measures to ascertain the fate of the missing persons.

Article 13 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights criminalizes forced deportation, stating that "It is not permissible to deport a legally resident foreigner in the territory of a state party to this covenant, except by a decision made per the law, and after enabling them, unless national security considerations otherwise require, presenting the reasons supporting their non-deportation and presenting their case to the competent authority or to those specifically designated for that purpose, and authorizing someone to represent them before them."

Conclusion and Recommendations

The crime of kidnapping constitutes a grave violation of human rights, going beyond the scope of law and justice. Effectively tackling this crime phenomenon requires collaborative efforts from the Lebanese authorities, civil society, and the implementation of enhanced legal and security measures. The Lebanese government must shoulder its responsibilities in protecting Syrian refugees and strengthen decisions and legislative regulations aiming at combating kidnapping crimes.

ACHR recognizes the efforts made by Lebanese authorities so far in addressing kidnapping operations, including the arrest and prosecution of some suspects. However, ACHR expresses concern about the persistent kidnappings targeting Syrian refugees and the inadequate security and safety measures in refugee camps. Additionally, there are concerns regarding allegations of involvement or complicity of individuals from security agencies in the kidnapping of Syrian refugees in the country. We urge the Lebanese authorities to ensure the protection of all individuals under their jurisdiction, irrespective of nationality, from violence, deprivation of liberty, and other serious violations.

Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) calls on the Lebanese government to make decisive decisions to actively pursue the issue of kidnapping to enhance human rights in the country.

Recommendations to the Lebanese government:

- Revoke all resolutions allowing the deportation of refugees, including decision no. 50/ع/أ/م/س/د ا ج م/ع/أ/م/س/د ا ج م issued by the Higher Defense Council on the 15h of April 2019, and decision no. 43830/ع.م.ق/ع.م.ق issued by the GDGS on the 13th of May 2019
- Immediately implement the decision of the State Council number 421/2017-2018 dated February 8, 2018, to ensure legitimacy and public order in Lebanon, and announce the suspension of the procedures issued by the General Security Directorate in 2015 and its amendments regarding the conditions of entry and residence of Syrian citizens in Lebanon.
- Enhance criminal investigation and prosecution in cases of kidnapping and unlawful detention of refugees, provide the necessary support to the victims, ensure fair trials for the perpetrators, facilitate access for kidnapped refugees to fair mechanisms of compensation and redress, and protect them from forced repatriation during the investigation process regarding kidnapping cases.
- Continuously raise legal awareness among the public regarding the rights of refugees and the available legal measures to protect them from kidnapping. Enhance awareness in host communities about the importance of protecting refugee rights and the non-tolerance of kidnapping crimes.
- Ensure the protection of Syrian refugees and those at risk of kidnapping by gangs and human trafficking networks. The measures taken should prioritize providing sufficient security in the Beqaa and Akkar regions on both sides of the Syrian-Lebanese border, particularly in the Wadi Khaled area, Hermel Houche Al Sayed area, Aرسال area, and Al-Masnaa area, and implement these measures immediately and consistently.

- Conduct prompt, effective, and impartial investigations with all individuals involved in the kidnapping of refugees. When acceptable and sufficient evidence is available, charges should be brought against suspects and they should be tried per Lebanese law.
- Make genuine efforts to bring all individuals involved and suspected in kidnapping crimes to justice and investigate their crimes.
- Enhance efforts to combat poverty and unemployment and improve the economic and social conditions of the Lebanese society and Syrian refugees, to reduce the need for irregular migration, and therefore kidnapping and exploitation operations.

Recommendations to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

- The UNHCR in Lebanon should work diligently to combat and prevent the crime of kidnapping and incitement to it, providing support and cooperation with the relevant authorities in Lebanon to prevent such crimes and urging them to apprehend the perpetrators and hold them accountable before the judiciary.
- The UNHCR should enhance the legal awareness of refugees regarding their rights and the available legal procedures in case of kidnapping and facilitate their access to necessary legal measures. Legal support should be provided to the victims, and cooperation with local and international authorities in this regard should be strengthened.
- Additionally, the UNHCR should work on improving security, including enhancing security measures and surveillance in collaboration and coordination with local authorities.
- The UNHCR should enhance the protection of refugees who are most vulnerable to kidnapping, including unaccompanied children, women, and the elderly. Necessary psychological and social support should be provided to them in cases where they have experienced psychological or physical harm.

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Crimes of kidnapping and human trafficking following the forced deportation of refugees from Lebanon



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