

Useful Information

Beirut Port Explosion, 4 August 2020

The explosion marked a devastating and tragic event in Lebanon's history. A fire at the Beirut port triggered the detonation of 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate, which had been improperly stored in a port warehouse for six years. The blast resulted in widespread destruction, causing loss of lives, injuries, and extensive damage to infrastructure. The impact was felt far beyond the port, with shockwaves reaching across the city, shattering windows, collapsing buildings, and leaving three hundred thousand residents homeless overnight. The destruction was greatest in the eastern parts of the city. The explosion exacerbated the economic and political challenges already facing Lebanon, leading to widespread protests and international calls for accountability and support. In July 2022, parts of the damaged Beirut port silos collapsed after weeks-long fire.

Kafala system: A migration sponsorship system that began in the 1950s. The word means "to take care of" in Arabic. According to Amnesty International, Lebanon is home to over 250,000 migrant domestic workers (MDWs), mostly women, who come primarily from Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asian countries and work in private households. Within the system, the legal residency of domestic workers is intricately linked to their contractual relationship with employers. The domestic workers are not protected by the Lebanese Labour Law, thus are subject to abuse and exploitation by their employers.

Syrian refugees in Lebanon: Lebanon is host to the largest number of refugees per capita in the world and since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, 1.5 million Syrian refugees have been living in Lebanon, almost one-fourth of the Lebanese population today. Having illegal status, most Syrian refugees constitute an informal and exploitative labor force. Resentment among the general Lebanese public toward Syrian refugees is getting worse by rising prices and unemployment. Recently, there has been a surge in the campaign of incitement against Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Drag and queer life in Beirut: Queer life is experienced on a spectrum in Beirut, due to the wide range of religious beliefs, educational backgrounds, and ethnic and global populations all coexisting in the city. Some queer adults live openly gay lives while others are only out among their inner circle, and some folks have accepting families while others fare similarly to Diva Aziza. Nevertheless, Beirut is known as a major center for queer life in the MENA world, with openly operating gay bars, and it held the first LGBTQ+ Pride in the region in 2017. While crossdressing is a part of Lebanese history (the male belly-dancing *köçek* have been popular as early as the sixteenth century for their ability to convey femininity in their dancing and comportment), modern Western-inspired drag was birthed in Beirut in 2013 thanks to the efforts of the Lebanese American drag artist Anya Kneez. Leading up to the explosion, there were roughly 30-40 drag artists in Beirut, and they largely worked and lived in the Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh neighborhoods, which are the queer hubs of the city, as well as two of the neighborhoods closest to (and most devastatingly impacted by) the explosion.

Timeline

- 1920:** Following the partition of the Ottoman Empire, the State of Greater Lebanon is declared by a French Mandate.
- 1943:** The country achieves independence in 1943.
- 1948-49:** The Arab Israeli war leads to migration of tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees in southern Lebanon.
- 1975-1990:** Civil war caused by communal rivalries over political power and among Lebanon's Christian-dominated government and oppositional forces of Muslims, pan-Arabists, and several left-wing groups. The war leads to the destruction of the country's infrastructure.
- 2005:** Prime Minister Rafik Hariri is killed by a car bomb in Beirut. The attack sparks anti-Syrian rallies.
- 2008:** Lebanon establishes diplomatic relations with Syria for the first time since both countries gained independence in the 1940s.
- 2012:** The Syrian conflict that began in March 2011 spills over into Lebanon. Massive influx of Syrian refugees to the country overwhelming the infrastructure and public institutions.
- 2017:** Beirut holds the first LGBTQ Pride Parade in the MENA world.
- 2019 (October):** Nationwide protests begin, in response to economic stagnation, corruption, unemployment, and legislation shielding the ruling class from accountability. This is the beginning of a political and economic crisis.
- 2020 (March):** The banking system collapses, and the value of the currency rapidly depreciates. The country locks down due to COVID-19.
- 2020 (August):** Beirut port explosion. **The events of *Cheating Fate* are currently happening.**
- 2022:** Interior minister issues an unlawful directive banning any “conference, activity, or demonstration related to or addressing homosexuality.”
- 2022 (April):** The Lebanese government orders the demolition of grain silos which are at risk of collapsing. In July, parts of the damaged Beirut port silos collapse after weeks-long fire.

Interested in supporting Lebanon and the reconstructions after the explosion? Refer to the following links:

[Beirut Emergency Fund](#) (Funds for reconstruction after the port blast)

[Lebanon Humanitarian Fund](#)

[Lebanese Red Cross](#)

[Lebanese Food Bank](#)