

# U.S. Country Commercial Guides



## Lebanon 2020

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## **Doing Business in Lebanon**

### **Market Overview**

Lebanon's economy is in crisis. GDP contraction could top 20 percent in 2020, the local currency has lost more than 80 percent of its value on secondary exchange markets, and most banks are dollar insolvent. Since October 2019, Lebanon's financial sector imposed *ad hoc* capital controls, preventing most Lebanese from transferring any money overseas or withdrawing dollars from their bank accounts, despite the fact that more than 75 percent of accounts in Lebanese banks are denominated in dollars. On March 7, 2020, Lebanon announced it would default on and restructure its nearly \$31 billion in dollar-denominated debt, the first such default in Lebanon's history. On April 30, the government published an economic plan with a focus on restructuring its financial sector and attracting foreign assistance; the next day Lebanon signed an official request for IMF assistance. As of the end of August 2020, formal negotiations had yet to begin. On August 4, an explosion at the Port of Beirut killed more than 180 people and incurred nearly \$15 billion in damages in the city. The Port of Beirut was responsible for handling nearly 70 percent of Lebanon's trade in goods. Most analysts assess that Lebanon's near- and medium-term economic future is bleak, with likely fiscal austerity, increased inflation, continuing capital controls, further devaluation, and a potential loss of value applied to wealthy account holders to recapitalize the banking sector. The Minister of Finance in May said Lebanon needs \$28 billion in financial assistance over the next four years. The World Bank projected that the poverty rate will be higher than 50 percent of the population by the end of this year.

These developments hold consequences for Lebanon's potential as a market for U.S. goods and services. Much depends on how Lebanon implements overdue economic and governance reforms, including in connection with its negotiation and implementation of a potential IMF program. If the country is able to implement necessary reforms, attract foreign capital, stabilize the exchange rate, and recapitalize its financial sector, opportunities remain for U.S. companies. Despite its small size, Lebanon has offered unique market opportunities for U.S. firms. U.S. products and services enjoy relatively excellent receptivity and although the market is price sensitive, when it comes to quality, Lebanese consumers enjoy name brands, exceptional quality, and after-sales support. For these reasons, several U.S. corporations chose to open offices in Beirut.

The Lebanese Customs Administration reported that Lebanon's total imports in 2019 reached \$19.239 billion, of which \$1.705 billion (8.9 percent) originated in the United States. The United States was Lebanon's largest supplier of imported goods, followed by China, Greece, Russia and Italy. According to Lebanese Customs statistics, major U.S. exports to Lebanon were mineral fuel and oil (\$841 million), automotive (\$253 million), chemical industrial products (\$192 million), machinery and electrical instruments (\$98 million), prepared foodstuffs, vegetable products (\$96 million), and beverages and tobacco (\$54 million).

The U.S. government has neither a bilateral investment treaty (BIT) with Lebanon, nor an agreement on the avoidance of double taxation. The U.S. government signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) with Lebanon in 2006, but the TIFA never came into force. Since 1999, Lebanon has

had observer status at the World Trade Organization (WTO) but has yet to accede to the organization. In 2002, Lebanon signed an association agreement with the European Union that entered into force in 2006.

## **Market Challenges**

Lebanon has the legal underpinnings of a free-market economy, a highly-educated labor force, and limited restrictions on investors. But Lebanon's economic crisis, which is likely to be long and painful, represents a huge market challenge. Insolvent banks have banned most overseas transfers, meaning that U.S. and other international firms cannot transfer any profits earned overseas. Many U.S. companies have complained about millions of dollars stuck in the local financial system. A lack of hard currency means that contracts once paid in U.S. dollars are now fulfilled in a devalued and volatile local currency. The local currency's continued depreciation has resulted in a year-on-year increase in inflation of 90 percent, which has hurt consumers and driven an increasing number of Lebanese below the poverty line. Businesses have been forced to close or change prices on a near daily basis to keep up with the fluctuating currency. According to research from InfoPro, as of July 2020, 550,000 out of 1.8 million workers have lost their jobs; nearly 20 percent of companies closed their doors from January 2019 to July 2020. Recovery can only be accelerated through quick but careful implementation of reforms. If Lebanon is able to reform its business environment – a likely condition as part of an overarching IMF program – it may one day regain its role as a hub for foreign investment in the Middle East. The potential for social unrest in the wake of this crisis, however, remains high.

Corruption and a lack of transparency have continued to cause frustration among local and foreign businesses. According to the 2019 Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Lebanon ranked 137 of 180 countries worldwide, making Lebanon among the 50 most corrupt countries in the world. Foreign and local companies have complained about numerous impediments, namely institutionalized corruption, bureaucratic over-regulation, arbitrary licensing, complex customs procedures, outdated legislation, an ineffectual judicial system, high taxes and fees, high telecommunication charges, slow internet speeds, poor electricity provision, inconsistent interpretation of laws, and inadequate protection of intellectual property. Lebanon also has fragmented and opaque tendering and procurement processes, which has deterred foreign investment.

Lebanon adheres to the Arab League Boycott of Israel. The Arab League's Central Boycott Office maintains a blacklist of firms that are believed to contribute to Israel's military or economic development. As of August 2020, the U.S. Embassy in Beirut is not aware of any U.S. firms on this list. As per U.S. anti-boycott regulations, U.S. companies must refrain from certifying that their products do not come from Israel. If there appears to be any request that might be in support of boycotts, companies should contact the Bureau of Industrial Security (BIS) at the U.S. Department of Commerce. Finally, international companies should be mindful about sanctioned individuals and entities when conducting business in Lebanon.

## **Market Opportunities**

Lebanon's outlook is bleak; projections include a large GDP contraction: further unemployment and poverty; greater currency devaluation and inflation: and a continuation of bank-imposed capital controls. The state's revenues are close to zero, and it has fallen behind on payments to private companies. As of August 2020, few U.S. and international firms were interested in investing in Lebanon, and Lebanese government officials admitted the state was bankrupt.

In the long-term, however, there may be opportunities for international companies in the energy, water and wastewater, safety and security, fast-food franchising, healthcare and medical technologies, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sectors. Within the energy sector, there may be opportunities for power generation and renewable energy projects. Although Lebanon is looking to issue additional licenses for offshore hydrocarbon exploration, its second licensing round has been postponed indefinitely given global economic conditions.

The Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) is the Lebanese government's executive body responsible for soliciting contracts for major infrastructure projects and supervising their award and execution. CDR projects target the transportation, electricity, telecommunications, education, water, and sanitation sectors. A list of CDR projects can be found [here](#). Large infrastructure projects may be possible if Lebanon accedes to an IMF program, restructures its debt, and returns to international capital markets.

## **Market Entry Strategy**

U.S. companies interested in doing business in Lebanon are advised to hire a Lebanese agent or distributor. While working through an agent is common practice in Lebanon, networking and lengthy investigations are equally important for finding an appropriate local partner.

The U.S. Commercial Service may assist U.S. companies to find the right partner through the International Partner Search (IPS) service. Information on this service is available on [Export.gov](#).

The Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (IDAL) is the national authority responsible for promoting investments in Lebanon. IDAL covers eight priority sectors: agriculture, agro-industry, industry, technology, IT, media, telecommunications, and tourism. IDAL has the authority to award licenses and permits for new investments in specific sectors. IDAL's website ([IDAL](#)) is a one-stop-shop for investors and provides information on investment legislations, regulations, and starting a business.

## Leading Sectors for U.S. Exports & Investments

### Apparel

#### Overview

Traditionally, Arab tourists and Lebanese expatriates drove robust retail apparel sales in Lebanon. However, Lebanon's economic crisis and global travel restrictions due to the spread of COVID-19 have discouraged tourists from traveling to Lebanon; the number of passengers traveling to the Beirut airport in the first half of 2020 fell by over 70 percent compared to the first half of 2019.

According to Lebanese Customs statistics, U.S. apparel exports to Lebanon reached \$7.9 million in 2019, compared to \$7.3 million in 2018, constituting around 1.3 percent of total apparel imports to Lebanon. A range of U.S. brands are available in the Lebanese market, including: American Eagle Outfitters, GAP, Gymboree, Juicy Couture, Michael Kors, Marc Jacobs, Nautica, Nike, Polo Ralph Lauren, Rock and Republic, 7 for All Mankind, Steve Madden, Tommy Hilfiger, Tory Burch, True Religion and Under Armour.

Given that the local financial sector has imposed strict controls on capital outflows, experts predict a major decrease in apparel exports to Lebanon and a slight increase in local production. Imports in the first half of 2020 have already fallen by 50 percent compared to the same period in 2019. With the destruction of the Port of Beirut, analysts expect imports to fall even further.

Table 1: Apparel Chart

	2018	2019	2020(Estimate)	2021 (Projection)
Total Local Production	\$210 million	\$210 million	\$100 million	\$80 million
Total Exports	\$33 million	\$49 million	\$32 million	\$25 million
Total Imports	\$504 million	\$607 million	\$208 million	\$104 million
Imports from the U.S.	\$7.3 million	\$7.9 million	\$2 million	\$1 million
Total Market Size	\$681 million	\$768 million	\$276 million	\$152 million
Exchange Rates	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5

(total market size = (total local production + imports) - exports)

Units: \$ millions

Source: Lebanese Customs statistics – Section 11 / Chapters 61, 62

#### Leading Sub-Sectors

Demand for casual wear in Lebanon is high. Consequently, there is demand for U.S. apparel, as many Lebanese consider U.S. brands to be the leader in casual wear, according to industry experts.

Lebanese buyers regularly travel to the Magic Apparel Show in Las Vegas and the Coterie Show in New York to explore the latest trends in the U.S. fashion industry.

## **Opportunities**

The U.S. Commercial Service provides a wide range of services, including [Gold Key Service](#) (GKS) and [International Partner Search](#) (IPS), which help U.S. companies explore opportunities in Lebanon. Moreover, the U.S. Commercial Service organizes events and exhibitions, including "Taste of America," to promote U.S. products and services in Lebanon.

## **Web Resources**

[Lebanese Customs Administration](#)

[Lebanese Franchise Association](#)

[U.S. Commercial Service](#)

Contact for the Commercial Section that covers the apparel sector: Naaman Tayyar, Head of Commercial Section, Email: [Naaman.Tayyar@trade.gov](mailto:Naaman.Tayyar@trade.gov).



## Automotive

### Overview

The size of the automotive market in Lebanon decreased by 30 percent in 2019, with total imports valued at \$1.175 billion. U.S. automotive exports to Lebanon decreased by 27 percent in 2019 to reach \$253 million, representing 21 percent of total Lebanese automotive imports.

Given that the local financial sector has imposed strict controls on capital outflows, experts predict a major decrease in automotive exports to Lebanon. Imports in the first half of 2020 have already fallen by 50 percent compared to the same period in 2019. With the destruction of the Port of Beirut, analysts expect imports to fall even further. New car sales declined by over 70 percent in the first half of 2020 relative to the first half of 2019, per official customs data.

Table 2: Automotive Chart

	2018	2019	2020 (Estimate)	2021 (Projection)
Total Local Production	0	0	0	0
Total Exports	\$23 million	\$28 million	\$34 million	\$17 million
Total Imports	\$1.659 billion	\$1.175 billion	\$320 million	\$160 million
Imports from the U.S.	\$343 million	\$253 million	\$66 million	\$33 million
Total Market Size	\$1.636 billion	\$1.147 billion	\$286 million	\$143 million
Exchange Rates	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5

(total market size = (total local production + imports) - exports)

Units: \$ millions

Source: Lebanese Customs statistics – Section 17

### Leading Sub-Sectors

Some industry analysts predict demand for U.S.-made sport-utility vehicles (SUVs) will remain constant. SUVs can withstand poor road quality conditions throughout the country. Lebanese have traditionally purchased U.S. SUVs because of their competitive price, high quality, and long record of success in the market. Moreover, demand for U.S. automotive parts such as brakes, clutches, engine lubricants, and safety accessories will exist because of the demonstrated quality advantage of U.S. parts as compared to foreign competitors.

### Opportunities

The U.S. Commercial Service provides a wide range of services, including [Gold Key Service \(GKS\)](#) and [International Partner Search \(IPS\)](#), which help U.S. companies explore and identify opportunities in Lebanon. Moreover, the U.S. Commercial Service organizes events and exhibitions to promote U.S. products and services in Beirut.

## **Web Resources**

[Lebanese Customs Administration](#)

[U.S. Commercial Service](#)

Contact for the Commercial Section that covers the automotive sector: Naaman Tayyar, Head of Commercial section, Email: [Naaman.Tayyar@trade.gov](mailto:Naaman.Tayyar@trade.gov).

## Medical Equipment

### Overview

According to the Lebanese Customs Authority, Lebanon imported medical equipment valued at \$337 million in 2019, of which \$71 million, or 21 percent, was of U.S. origin. Total medical equipment imports to Lebanon decreased by 8 percent in 2019 compared to 2018.

Given that the local financial sector has imposed strict controls on capital outflows, experts predict a major decrease in imports in general to Lebanon. Imports in the first half of 2020 have already fallen by 50 percent compared to the same period in 2019. With the destruction of the Port of Beirut, analysts expect imports to fall even further. However, there is still high demand for medical equipment in the aftermath of the August 4 explosion and the spread of COVID-19. The Central Bank of Lebanon has promised to essentially subsidize (by making hard currency from its foreign reserves available) the imports of medicine and medical equipment until October 2020.

Table 3: Medical Equipment Chart

	2018	2019	2020 (Estimate)	2021 (Projection)
Total Local Production	\$1 million	\$1 million	\$2 million	\$2 million
Total Exports	\$17 million	\$15 million	\$16 million	\$10 million
Total Imports	\$366 million	\$337 million	\$152 million	\$125 million
Imports from the U.S.	\$73 million	\$71 million	\$44 million	\$30 million
Total Market Size	\$350 million	\$323 million	\$138 million	\$117 million
Exchange Rates	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5

(total market size = (total local production + imports) - exports)

Units: \$ U.S. Dollars, LBP Lebanese Pounds

Source: Lebanese Customs statistics – Section 18

### Leading Sub-Sectors

According to local experts, U.S. medical equipment products are characterized by their high quality and competitive value.

### Opportunities

Lebanon is an ideal location to establish a regional office to cover the Levant, including Iraq, although controls on the flow of capital may make this difficult. The Lebanese market has traditionally been used as a platform for testing U.S. products prior to introducing them to the rest of the Levant market.

The U.S. Commercial Service provides a wide range of services including, [Gold Key Service](#) (GKS) and [International Partner Search](#) (IPS), which help U.S. companies explore opportunities in Lebanon.

## **Web Resources**

[Ministry of Public Health](#)

[Lebanese Customs Administration](#)

[U.S. Commercial Service](#)

Contact for the Commercial Section that covers the medical equipment sector: Naaman Tayyar, Head of Commercial Section, Email: [Naaman.Tayyar@trade.gov](mailto:Naaman.Tayyar@trade.gov).

## Pharmaceuticals

### Overview

With more than 50 pharmaceutical importers, Lebanon is the leading market for imported pharmaceutical drugs in the Levant. The pharmaceutical market in Lebanon is valued at around \$1 billion. Patented drugs constitute around 50 percent of the market, and over-the-counter (OTC) and generic drugs constitute around 25 percent each. Lebanon-based pharmaceutical production is weak due to high local production costs. As a result, imports constitute over 95 percent of the total available pharmaceutical products in the market.

According to the Lebanese Customs Authority, total pharmaceutical imports into Lebanon reached \$1.242 billion in 2019, of which \$147 million were imported from the United States. Local production covers five percent of market demand and is mainly focused on manufacturing drugs under license for international companies. Lebanon's main sources of pharmaceutical imports are Germany (17.1%), the United States (11.8%), France (10.8%), Switzerland (10.5%), Italy (5.8%), and Ireland (6.2%).

A large portion of Lebanon's population receives healthcare from the Ministry of Public Health, which purchases pharmaceutical from local importers, offers them to patients, and reimburses hospital bills. High production costs, a weak regulatory framework, and counterfeit drugs are the main challenges facing the pharmaceutical industry in Lebanon.

Given that the local financial sector has imposed strict controls on capital outflows, experts predict a major decrease in imports in general to Lebanon. Imports in the first half of 2020 have already fallen by 50 percent compared to the same period in 2019. With the destruction of the Port of Beirut, analysts expect imports to fall even further. The Central Bank of Lebanon has promised to essentially subsidize (by making hard currency from its foreign reserves available) the imports of medicines and medical equipment until October 2020.

Table 4: Pharmaceuticals

	2018	2019	2020 (Estimate)	2021 (Projection)
Total Local Production	\$69 million	\$65 million	\$48 million	\$48 million
Total Exports	\$57 million	\$58 million	\$38 million	\$38 million
Total Imports	\$1.329 billion	\$1.242 billion	\$926 million	\$926 million
Imports from the U.S.	\$151 million	\$147 million	\$96 million	\$96 million
Total Market Size	\$1.341 billion	\$1.249 billion	\$936 million	\$936million
Exchange Rates	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5	LBP1507.5

(total market size = (total local production + imports) - exports)

Units: \$ U.S. Dollars, LBP Lebanese Pounds

Source: Lebanese Customs statistics –Chapter 30

### **Leading Sub-Sectors**

According to local experts, U.S. pharmaceutical products have an advantage over European and Asian products in the biotechnology, high-tech, anti-cancer, and cardiovascular fields. Moreover, new leading American drugs that are not yet manufactured in Europe are typically well received in Lebanon.

### **Opportunities**

There are no specific opportunities or trade events in Lebanon geared to promote U.S. pharmaceutical products. The U.S. Commercial Service provides a wide range of services including, [Gold Key Service](#) (GKS) and [International Partner Search](#) (IPS), which help U.S. companies explore opportunities in Lebanon.

### **Web Resources**

[Ministry of Public Health](#)

[Lebanese Customs Administration](#)

[U.S. Commercial Service](#)

Contact for the Commercial Section that covers the pharmaceuticals/drugs sector: Naaman Tayyar, Head of Commercial Section, Email: [Naaman.Tayyar@trade.gov](mailto:Naaman.Tayyar@trade.gov).

## **Agricultural Sector**

### **Overview**

According to Lebanese Customs statistics (chapters 1-24), Lebanon's total agricultural imports reached \$3.112 billion in 2019, of which \$159 million, or 5 percent, was purchased from the United States. Major U.S. agricultural exports to Lebanon include oil seeds and oleaginous fruits (46 million), edible fruits and nuts (\$38 million), miscellaneous edible preparations (\$25 million), and cereals (\$8 million).

Given that the local financial sector has imposed strict controls on capital outflows, experts predict a major decrease in imports in general to Lebanon. There have been some local attempts at import substitution in the agricultural sector. Imports in the first half of 2020 have already fallen by 50 percent compared to the same period in 2019. With the destruction of the Port of Beirut, analysts expect imports to fall even further, although Lebanon will continue to rely on imports for approximately 80 percent of its food needs.

### **Web Resources**

[Lebanese Customs Administration](#)

Contact for the Commercial Section that covers the agriculture sector: Naaman Tayyar, Head of Commercial Section, Email: [Naaman.Tayyar@trade.gov](mailto:Naaman.Tayyar@trade.gov).

## **Customs, Regulations & Standards**

### **Trade Barriers**

Barriers to trade affect less than one percent of Lebanon's import/export goods. However, numerous Lebanese government agencies may impose licensing requirements such as technical, veterinary, or phytosanitary (plant health) certificates. A limited number of goods (e.g., weapons) are subject to more than one trade measure. All goods subject to import and export prohibitions could also be prohibited from transiting Lebanon. To determine whether a specific product is subject to non-tariff barriers, consult the [Lebanese Customs Administration](#)'s website.

For more information and help with trade barriers please contact:

International Trade Administration  
Enforcement and Compliance  
(202) 482-0063  
ECCommunications@trade.gov  
[Trade Enforcement and Compliance](#)

### **Import Tariffs**

More than 83 percent of imported goods are subject to duties equal to or below five percent. The [Lebanese Customs Administration](#)'s website provides a searchable database that displays import duties by tariff number.

With minor exceptions, European goods are exempted from customs fees in accordance with the European Mediterranean Association Agreement and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) agreement, effective March 1, 2015. In addition, goods from several Arab countries are also exempted from customs fees in accordance with the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) Agreement. Produce traders have reported that the Ministry of Agriculture does not grant import licenses for fruit.

### **Import Requirements & Documentation**

Import processing requires the following documents:

- Declaration form based on the Single Administrative Document (SAD)
- Bill of lading
- Packing list
- Commercial invoice (original)
- Delivery order (to prove ownership of goods)
- Quietus (a statement that all dues are paid) from the Social Security Office (must not have expired at the day of registration of SAD), required only for commercial and trade establishments



- Contract of sale between importer and seller in the country of exportation, or a letter of credit from the bank stating that the invoice value is paid or will be paid in a specified time limit (may be requested for value verification only in case customs officers doubt the invoice value)
- Certificate of origin issued by the authorized party of the country of exportation if the invoice does not mention the origin of the goods, or in case the importer wishes to benefit from preferential treatment if the exporter is not approved by the customs authorities of the exporting country
- Depending on the type of imported good, a number of other documents may also be required, including import licenses, certificates of conformity to mandatory standards, or phyto-sanitary certificates.

Export processing requires the following documents:

- Declaration form based on the Single Administrative Document (SAD)
- Packing list
- Commercial invoice (original)
- Export order
- Quietus (a statement that all dues are paid) from the Social Security Office (must not have expired at the day of registration of SAD), required only for commercial and trade establishments
- Certificate of origin issued by the Ministry of Industry and certified by the Lebanese Customs Authorities for exporting goods to Europe in accordance with protocol number 4 with the EU

Depending on the type of exported good, a number of other documents may also be required including export licenses, certificates of conformity, and export certificates for quality verification for all food products of plant origin, and agricultural health certificates.

### **Labeling/Marking Requirements**

Labels should include the net weight of the product, the manufacturer, production and expiry date, ingredients, and the country of origin. Labels should be printed on the imported goods in Arabic, English or French. Products with labels in Hebrew are not accepted. For more information, please consult the [Ministry of Economy and Trade](#)'s website.

### **U.S. Export Controls**

The United States imposes export controls to protect national security interests and promote foreign policy objectives related to dual-use goods through implementation of the Export Administration Regulations (EAR). The Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) is comprised of two elements: Export Administration (EA), which is responsible for processing license applications, counselling exporters, and drafting and publishing changes to the [Export Administration Regulations](#); and Export Enforcement (EE), which is responsible for the enforcement of the EAR. BIS works closely with U.S. embassies, foreign governments, industry, and trade associations to ensure that exports from the United States are secure and comply with the EAR. BIS officials conduct site visits, known as End-Use Checks (EUCs), globally with end-users, consignees, and/or other parties to transactions involving items subject to the EAR to verify compliance.

An EUC is an on-site verification of a non-U.S. party to a transaction to determine whether the party is a reliable recipient of U.S. items. EUCs are conducted as part of BIS's licensing process, as well as its compliance program, to determine if items were exported in accordance with a valid BIS authorization or otherwise consistent with the EAR. Specifically, an EUC verifies the *bona fides* of transactions subject to the EAR, to include: confirming the legitimacy and reliability of the end use and end user; monitoring compliance with license conditions; and ensuring items are used, re-exported or transferred (in-country) in accordance with the EAR. These checks might be completed prior to the export of items pursuant to a BIS export license in the form of a Pre-License Check (PLC), or following an export from the U.S. during a Post-Shipment Verification (PSV).

BIS officials rely on EUCs to safeguard items subject to the EAR from diversion to unauthorized end uses/users. The verification of a foreign party's reliability facilitates future trade, including pursuant to BIS license reviews. If BIS is unable to verify the reliability of the company or is prevented from accomplishing an EUC, the company may receive, for example, more regulatory scrutiny during license application reviews or be designated on BIS's Unverified List or Entity List, as applicable.

BIS has developed a list of "red flags", or warning signs, and compiled "Know Your Customer" guidance intended to aid exporters in identifying possible violations of the EAR. Both of these resources are publicly available, and their dissemination to industry members is highly encouraged to help promote EAR compliance.

BIS also provides a variety of training sessions to U.S. exporters throughout the year. These sessions range from one to two-day seminars that focus on the basics of exporting to coverage of more advanced, industry specific topics. Interested parties can check [This is a best prospect industry sector for this country](#). Includes a market overview and trade data [list of upcoming seminars and webinars](#) or reference BIS provided [online training](#).

BIS and the EAR regulate transactions involving the export of "dual-use" U.S. goods, services, and technologies. For advice and regulatory requirements, exporters should consult the other U.S. Government agencies which regulate more specialized items. For example, the U.S. Department of State's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls has authority over defense articles and services, or munitions. A list of other agencies involved in export control can be found on the [BIS website](#) or in Supplement No. 3 to Part 730 of the EAR.

The EAR is available on the [BIS website](#) and on the [e-CFR](#) (Electronic Code of Federal Regulations) and is updated as needed. The [Consolidated Screening List](#) (CSL) is a list of parties for which the United States Government maintains restrictions on certain exports, reexports or transfers of items. The CSL consolidates eleven export screening lists of the Departments of Commerce, State and the Treasury into a single data feed as an aid to industry in conducting electronic screens of parties to regulated transactions. Exporters are encouraged to classify their items prior to export, as well as consult the CSL to determine if any parties to the transaction may be subject to specific license requirements.

### **Temporary Entry**

There are two types of permits for the temporary entry of goods into Lebanon. Customs grants a regular temporary entry permit to foreign products that will be manufactured or under processing in Lebanon and then re-exported from Lebanon or displayed in free zones. This permit is valid for six months and is renewable, provided that the total period shall not be for more than two years.

The Director General of Customs may also grant a special temporary entry permit for a range of products intended for temporary use. However, the period of the permit is limited to three months. Goods subject to the special permit, as noted in Article 278 of the Lebanese Customs Law, may include the following:

- Equipment and machinery used in public works, archeology, cinema, and journalism
- Items intended or used for maintenance and repair
- Items temporarily imported for display or use in public or private exhibitions, seasonal fairs, forums, theaters, artistic shows, and playgrounds
- Jewelry and ornaments intended for display in public exhibitions.
- Empty containers or packages to be filled in Lebanon and re-exported or full containers or packages to be emptied in Lebanon and then re-exported

The items should be re-exported or stored in the free zone or a public warehouse at the end of the authorized period of temporary entry status.

The products mentioned above may be temporarily imported for a period of six months by using “Admission Temporaire/Temporary Admission” (ATA) procedure rather than regular entry declarations.

In addition, foreigners and Lebanese citizens whose place of residence is outside Lebanon may benefit from temporary entry for their personal effects and cars in accordance with Articles 282 and 283 of the Lebanese Customs Law.

### **Prohibited & Restricted Imports**

Strictly prohibited imports include the following:

- Cedar seeds and seedlings (to protect Lebanese cedar species)
- Chemical additives used in bread making (health measure)
- Table salt not containing iodine (health measure)
- Waste/slag/ash/scrap of many chemical, mineral, and metal products (environmental measure)
- Clinker and black cement (protection of local industry)
- Passenger vehicles older than eight years and transport vehicles older than five years (environmental measure)
- Used medical and radiological apparatuses (health measure)
- Gas-fueled pocket lighters (safety measure)
- Wireless phone sets that function on the 900 Megahertz bandwidth (technical measure)
- Goods bearing false marks and labels indicating their origin (intellectual property)
- Goods manufactured in or originating from Israel (Arab Boycott measure)

Monopolized and restricted goods must be treated similarly to prohibited goods upon import and export. Such goods will be seized whenever a license, permit, or any other legal document is not attached or whenever irrelevant documents are attached.

### **Customs Regulations**

Lebanon employs a harmonized tariff schedule for the valuation of goods and the levying of customs duties. In 2018, the High Customs Council proposed a reform strategy to improve operations, although this has not been implemented. The reforms focus on 1) simplifying procedures, 2) accepting e-payments, 3) enhancing electronic data entry, and 4) establishing an online e-single window for coordinated service with all of Lebanon’s border agencies. When fully implemented, users will be able to register online, as well as assess and pay declarations directly from their bank accounts. Local customs agents may assist exporters to navigate the clearance process.

For further information on customs procedures, please refer to the [Lebanese Customs Administration](#)'s website.

Key contacts:

General Directorate of Customs  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-980060/1/2/3

Higher Council for Customs  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-988510/1

## **Standards for Trade**

### **Overview**

The Lebanese Standards Institution (LIBNOR) is a public institution under the Ministry of Industry. Established in 1962, LIBNOR is the sole authority in Lebanon charged with issuing, publishing, and amending Lebanese standards as well as granting the Lebanese Conformity Mark "NL." A number of state bodies (including the Ministries of Telecommunications, Energy and Water, Industry, Public Health, Environment, Agriculture, Economy and Trade, and Public Works and Transport) issue technical regulations related to products in the form of ministerial decisions and decrees issued by the cabinet.

### **Standards**

LIBNOR has accepted and adheres to the World Trade Organization's TBT (Technical Barriers to Trade) code of good practice for the preparation, adoption, and application of standards and is taking an active role in international standardization activities, even though Lebanon is not a member of the WTO. Programs for drafting standards are set annually. LIBNOR's Board of Directors approves the annual plans, submitted by LIBNOR's Director General, for preparing new standards or amending existing ones. The annual program for drafting standards is available on [LIBNOR](#)'s website.

LIBNOR is a member of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO), and an affiliate member of the European Committee for Standardization (CEN).

### **Testing, Inspection and Certification**

The following laboratories are the main national testing bodies in Lebanon:

- The laboratories of the Industrial Research Institute (IRI), affiliated with the Ministry of Industry, test for all types of products. For more information, visit the [IRI](#) website.
- The laboratory of the Agricultural Research Institute (LARI) at the Ministry of Agriculture (for food products). For more information, visit the [LARI](#) website.
- The Quality Control Center laboratory at the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture of Tripoli and North Lebanon (CCIAT). For more information, visit the [CCIAT](#) website.

- The Food Quality Center laboratory at the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture of Zahle and the Bekaa (CCIAZ). For more information, visit the [CCIAZ](#) website.
- The American University of Beirut; laboratory of chemistry and pharmacology. For more information, visit the [AUB](#) website.
- The French Medical Institute laboratory of chemistry and pharmacology at Saint Joseph University (USJ). For more information, visit the [USJ](#) website.
- The National Council for Scientific Research (CNSR); laboratory under the Lebanese Atomic Energy Commission. For more information, visit the [CNRS](#) website.

LIBNOR is the sole authority to grant the right to use the Lebanese Conformity Mark (NL Mark). This mark attests to the compliance of products to Lebanese standards and is based on a scheme combining quality management system and product standards. The Industrial Research Institute provides certificates of conformity with standards and purchase requirements. Certificates of conformity or quality issued by foreign companies, such as SGS and Veritas, are also honored in Lebanon.

In addition, several ministries issue certificates of conformity. The Ministry of Agriculture has the authority to issue certificates of conformity for exported agricultural products. The Ministry of Economy and Trade issues conformity and export certificates at the request of the exporter. The Ministry of Public Health issues health certificates at the request of the exporter. There are no mutual recognition agreements with U.S. organizations.

The Lebanese Accreditation Council (Conseil Libanais D'Accréditation - COLIBAC), under the Ministry of Industry, is the only accreditation body in Lebanon. COLIBAC is not yet functional, and some of the Lebanese laboratories are accredited by foreign accreditation bodies. The IRI chemical and microbiological laboratories are accredited.

### **Publication of Technical Regulations**

Lebanese standards are voluntary, but when approving Lebanese standards based on the recommendation of the technical committees, LIBNOR's Board of Directors may ask for the mandatory application of a standard if it affects public health or safety. In this case, a decree from the Council of Ministers (i.e. the Cabinet) is published based on the request of the Ministry of Industry. There is no formal procedure for notification, as Lebanon is not yet a WTO member. U.S. entities can comment on technical regulations via e-mail to [LIBNOR](#). LIBNOR established a WTO/Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) point of contact for inquiries in 2012.

“Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are required under the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) to notify to the WTO proposed technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures that could affect trade. **Notify U.S.** ([www.nist.gov/notifyus](http://www.nist.gov/notifyus)) is a free, web-based e-mail registration service that captures and makes available for review and comment key information on draft regulations and conformity assessment procedures. Users receive customized e-mail alerts when new notifications are added by selected country(ies) and industry sector(s) of interest, and can also request full texts of regulations. This service and its associated web site are managed and operated by the USA WTO

TBT Inquiry Point housed within the National Institute of Standards and Technology, part of the U.S. Department of Commerce.”

### **Contact Information**

LIBNOR is the point of contact for inquiries in Lebanon on standards and technical regulations resulting from conversion of standards.

LIBNOR  
Maatouk Bldg  
City Rama Street, Sin El-Fil  
PO Box 55120  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-485 927/8  
Fax: 961-1-485 929  
E-mail: [info@libnor.org](mailto:info@libnor.org)  
[Website](#)

### **Trade Agreements**

Lebanon has traditionally been a country with a free and open trade regime. Efforts towards trade liberalization have focused on the European Union (EU), the WTO, and the Arab world.

Lebanon has neither a free trade arrangement nor a bilateral investment treaty with the United States. On December 1, 2006, the two countries signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), but the TIFA never came into force.

Lebanon gained observer status to the WTO in 1999, but the accession process has stalled since then.

Lebanon’s Euro-Mediterranean Partnership agreement came into force in April 2006. The agreement provides for reciprocal free trade on the majority of industrial goods. It also liberalizes trade on a large basket of agricultural and processed agricultural goods. The Euro-Med Partnership aims at establishing a free trade area for the Mediterranean region; efforts to achieve this goal are ongoing.

Lebanon and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2004. In November 2010, Lebanon and Turkey signed an association agreement to establish a free trade area and reduce barriers to the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people between the two countries over the subsequent ten years. The agreement is not yet ratified. Lebanon also signed the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement, which gradually replaced the bilateral FTAs signed with Arab countries including Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Sudan and the Gulf Cooperation Council states. A regional Economic and Trade Association Council between Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Turkey was announced in July 2010. However, given the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, this agreement did not enter into force. Lebanon launched free trade agreement negotiations with MERCOSUR countries in 2016.

Lebanon has signed bilateral investment agreements with the following (in alphabetical order, as of January 2012): Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Belgium/Luxemburg, Benin, Bulgaria, Canada, Chad, Chile, China, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Egypt, Finland, France, Gabon, Germany, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, Iceland, Iran, Italy, Jordan, Korea (South), Kuwait, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Netherlands, OPEC Fund, Pakistan, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sudan, Sultanate of

Oman, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and Yemen. For more information, please visit the [Ministry of Finance](#)'s website.

Lebanon does not have a bilateral taxation treaty with the United States. A full list of all the countries with which Lebanon has signed taxation agreements can be found on the [Ministry of Finance](#)'s website.

### **Licensing Requirements for Professional Services**

There are no specific licensing requirements to open a professional service/consultancy company in Lebanon.

## **Selling U.S. Products & Services**

### **Distribution & Sales Channels**

Most imported products enter Lebanon via the Port of Beirut or Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport (RHIA). After the August 4 explosion at the port, goods were rerouted to the Port of Tripoli. As of August 10, the Port of Beirut resumed partial operations, with 12 out of 16 cranes at the container port fully or partially working. Foreign exporters rely on local companies to clear imported products and to distribute them domestically. Most consumer goods are distributed through modern retail stores, shopping malls, department stores, and supermarket chains.

Major shopping malls and department stores in Lebanon include ABC Malls, Beirut City Center, Beirut Mall, Beirut Souks, CityMall, and Le Mall. The main supermarket chains include Carrefour, Le Charcutier Aoun, Fahed Supermarket, Metro Superstore, Monoprix, and Spinneys.

### **Using an Agent to Sell U.S. Products and Services**

U.S. companies generally work with a Lebanese agent or distributor when doing business in Lebanon. The agent may take the form of a partnership, a sole proprietorship, a joint-stock company, or a limited liability company. The agent may act on behalf of the U.S. company to bid on government contracts and to market its products. The U.S. Commercial Service can assist U.S. companies with finding reliable agents through the [International Partner Search](#) (IPS).

### **Establishing an Office**

A foreigner who would like to establish a business branch in Lebanon must first apply for a residency permit from the Directorate of General Security (Sûreté Générale in French) and a work permit from the Ministry of Labor. Foreign companies also require a license to operate from the Ministry of Economy and Trade. U.S. companies may operate through local branches, provided they obtain a “receipt of acknowledgement” from the Ministry of Economy and Trade and register in a local commercial court. For trade activity, the company must register at one of the four regional chambers of commerce and industry.

[The Investment Development Authority of Lebanon](#) (IDAL) has a one-stop shop service to issue permits and licenses in investors for all the key sectors.

### **Franchising**

Franchising in Lebanon has experienced notable growth since the late 1990s with the successful establishment of international brand names across the country. According to the Lebanese Franchise Association (LAF), the franchising sector employs nearly 100,000 employees, or an estimated nine percent of total workers in the country. However, due to Lebanon’s current economic crisis and restrictions imposed after the spread of COVID-19, the franchising sector has experienced major decreased in activity, especially in the hospitality and retail sectors.

Before the crisis, there were approximately 744 companies in the franchising sector in Lebanon constituting around 6% of total companies operating in Lebanon. The industry contributed close to \$1.5 billion to the national economy, or about four percent of the entire GDP. Approximately 44 percent of franchises in Lebanon originate in Europe, 38 percent from the United States and Canada, and 13 percent by local Lebanese franchisors.



Franchising opportunities are extensive in the food service industry. Major U.S. brands present in Lebanon include: Burger King, Chili's, Domino's Pizza, Dunkin Donuts, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), McDonald's, Pinkberry, Pizza Hut, and Starbucks. Lebanese consumers value U.S. brand-names in clothing and professional service companies. These include Berlitz Languages, Florsheim, Century 21 Real Estate, Coldwell Banker, Hertz, Avis, New Horizons, RE/MAX International, Ziebart, and Regus.

Hotel franchises have also witnessed growth in Lebanon. Many local hotels are partnering with international chains to the benefit of local proprietors who capitalize on the chains' name recognition and international reservation networks. U.S. brands Hilton and Sheraton compete in Lebanon with major international chains, such as Four Seasons, Movenpick, Crowne Plaza, and InterContinental hotels. However, hotel occupancy was extremely low in the wake of Lebanon's economic crisis and the spread of COVID-19. Occupancy of four and five-star hotels in Lebanon reached only 14 percent in the first five months of 2020 versus 68 percent during the same period in 2019.

The Lebanese Franchise Association (LFA) was established in 2006 in response to the needs of a fast-growing franchise industry, with the mission to develop franchising in Lebanon, and to promote Lebanese franchises worldwide. LFA hosts the annual Beirut International Franchise Forum (BIFEX), which offers significant opportunities for U.S. businesses to meet franchisors and potential franchisees from around the Middle East. More information is available on [LFA's website](#).

### **Direct Marketing**

Lebanon's annual advertising expenditures consistently rank amongst the highest in the region. After having peaked in 2010 at \$161.4 million, advertising spending slumped in the following years as Lebanon's economic situation worsened. However, a gradual recovery occurred in 2014 when annual advertising expenditures rose to \$160.1 million. Now, given the economic crisis, experts predict a major decrease in advertising expenditures in the coming few years. Television advertising represents the largest share of total advertising with a value annually exceeding \$50 million. Out-of-home and cinema advertising represents the second largest share of total advertising, exceeding \$25 million, of which cinema advertising remains below \$2 million per year. Newspaper advertising represents approximately 15 percent of total advertising spending and exceeds \$20 million per year. Magazines account for seven percent of total advertising expenditures. Digital advertising has steadily expanded over the past several years with over \$15 million in spending, and radio advertising surpassed \$5 million.

International fairs offer additional marketing opportunities. Please visit [Trade Fairs in Lebanon](#).

### **Joint Ventures/Licensing**

Joint ventures in Lebanon are established through the following six steps:

- 1 - Completion of preliminary legal tasks
- 2 - Payment of share capital
- 3 - Registration at the Trade Register
- 4 - Registration at the Bar Association
- 5 - Payment of duties at the Ministry of Finance
- 6 - Release of capital

Please find detailed information at [IDAL's website](#).

## **Express Delivery**

Local and international express delivery companies are common and reliable in Lebanon. LibanPost provides national postal service.

There are several local and international freight service companies such as Expeditors, FedEx, Beirut Cargo Center, UPS, Aramex, TNT, and DHL that provide air, ocean, and ground transportation shipments to and from Lebanon. Air shipping time from the United States to Lebanon is estimated to be between one to three days, whereas ocean shipping time from the U.S. to Lebanon is in the range of 25 to 45 days.

## **Due Diligence**

U.S. firms should conduct due diligence on potential business partners in Lebanon. To verify the bona fides of Lebanese companies, U.S. firms may request the U.S. Commercial Service [International Company Profile](#) (ICP) service. The ICP report includes factual data on the Lebanese firm's management, business activities, product lines, financial condition, credit-worthiness, trading experience, market coverage, and business connections in the country, as well as an embassy evaluation to help U.S. firms assess risks, reliability, and capability.

## **eCommerce**

Due to slow internet speeds and high connectivity costs, eCommerce has not significantly penetrated the Lebanese market. Nevertheless, eCommerce ventures have emerged in retail fashion, food and beverage, banking, electronics, and ticketing. eCommerce platforms accept credit cards and cash upon delivery.

## **Selling Factors & Techniques**

The Lebanese market is generally considered to be open and price sensitive. Sales materials can be in English, French, or Arabic. Many European and Asian brands have gained market shares, but Lebanese consumers value high-quality U.S. products for their quality, technology, and innovation.

Lebanese companies usually request exclusive representational rights when signing agency agreements with foreign companies. U.S. companies should partner with an exclusive agent to represent their products in Lebanon. Moreover, U.S. companies should seek local legal counsel when doing business in Lebanon. A list of local lawyers is available at the [United States Embassy](#) website.

## **Trade Promotion & Advertising**

Lebanon is considered a regional hub for the advertising industry, with offices serving most of the Arab region. Lebanon enjoys a sophisticated domestic audience and a thriving media sector. There are eight television stations in Lebanon, over 40 printed and online newspapers, and more than 20 magazines, and more than 20 radio stations.

Television remains the favored medium of advertising and captures half of the advertising market. Other media used for advertising include print, billboards, social media, and radio.

There are more than 12 Arabic-language dailies in Lebanon, as well as the English-language Daily Star (The Daily Star) and the French-language L'Orient Le Jour (L'Orient Le Jour). The Daily Star is no longer available in print form; most newspapers are available primarily online.

The major trade fairs organizers in Lebanon are listed below:

- [Biel Center](#)
- [Seaside Developments](#)
- [Confex International](#)
- [ESquare](#)
- [Hospitality Services](#)
- [Iktissad Events](#)
- [International Fairs and Promotion](#)
- [Promofair](#)

Major business magazines include:

- [Lebanon Opportunities](#)
- [Executive Magazine](#)
- [Arab Ad](#)
- [Le Commerce du Levant](#)

### **Pricing**

Imported goods are subject to customs duties and a value-added tax (VAT) of 11 percent. The Consumer Protection Department at the Ministry of Economy and Trade sets the price of local Lebanese flat bread. Other types of bread are not affected by this price control. The Ministry of Energy and Water sets the prices of petroleum derivatives, and the Ministry of Public Health sets the prices of pharmaceuticals. The Technical Center for Price Control at the Ministry of Economy and Trade surveys supermarket prices of consumer goods every two months.

### **Sales Service/Customer Support**

A number of leading Lebanese companies have sales service and customer support units. Lebanon has a Consumer Protection Law, and the Consumer Protection Directorate at the Ministry of Economy and Trade has a call-center hotline (1739) to receive consumer claims.

### **Local Professional Services**

[Khalil Masri & Fils Sarl](#): Risk advisory, information provider, studies and valuation, recovery

[Kompass](#): Leading worldwide business directory

[5 Index](#): Database information services

### **Principal Business Associations**

[American Lebanese Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount Lebanon](#)

[Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Sidon and South Lebanon](#)

[Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Tripoli and North Lebanon](#)

[Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Zahle and Bekaa](#)

[Association of Lebanese Industrialists](#)

[Lebanese Franchise Association](#)

The primary role of those associations is to represent the interests of the private sector, contribute to the formulation of economic policies and the elaboration of legislation that impacts business activity, develop partnership and dialogue between the private sector and the government, and provide a broad array of services to enterprises.

### **Limitations on Selling U.S. Products and Services**

There are no limitations on selling U.S. products and services to Lebanon.

### **Trade Financing**

#### **Methods of Payment**

For many years, U.S. dollars and Lebanese lira were used interchangeably in Lebanon, and Lebanon did not restrict currency conversions or foreign fund transfers. However, banks are no longer allowing either. Credit rating and collections agencies do not currently operate in Lebanon. International rating agencies, however, do evaluate sovereign Eurobond instruments issued by the Lebanese government. Mastercard, Visa, and American Express are the primary credit or charge cards used in Lebanon. Lebanese banks are no longer confirming lines of credits for importers without a 100 percent cash collateral up front; an onerous restriction they say has been imposed by international correspondent banks.

As of August 2020, Lebanon had several different exchange rates in practice. Since 1997, the LBP has been pegged to the U.S. dollar at 1,507.5 LBP to USD. However, as Lebanese continued to demand scarce dollars in the Lebanese financial system, the currency depreciated on secondary markets, reaching values ranging from 6,000 to 10,000 LBP/1 USD during the first half of 2020. This was on the black market, the source of U.S. dollars for most Lebanese. Licensed money exchange houses, after a government crackdown on purported price gouging, held rates firm at 3,900 LBP/1 USD as of August 2020, and were not selling U.S. dollars, only buying. The Central Bank only made dollars available to importers at the official rate for imports of fuel, wheat, and medicine; it announced in August 2020 that it would end this subsidy in October 2020. Banks allowed clients to withdraw LBP from their dollar-denominated accounts at the same rate. Finally, banks offered another preferential exchange rate for those willing to bring new dollar banknotes to bank counters. Different stores and shops offered varying exchange rate conversions at *ad hoc* rates as well.

### **Banking Systems**

Lebanon's financial sector entered an unprecedented crisis in late-2019. Lebanon relied on dollar inflows from abroad to finance imports and public spending and to maintain the Lebanese lira-to-USD peg, in place since 1997. Those dollars were deposited in Lebanese banks, which in turn lent them to the state in the

form of deposits at the Central Bank or Lebanese debt instruments. Nearly 70 percent of bank assets are tied to the sovereign in those two forms. As dollar inflows dried up and banking sector assets were tied to long-term deposits at the Central Bank and illiquid debt instruments, banks had trouble meeting their dollar obligations to clients.

This illiquidity continued for rest of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, during which most banks stopped providing any dollars to clients. Banks are no longer serving their core functions: making productive loans or allowing those with dollar deposits to withdraw them. Clients cannot transfer money overseas, except in “emergency” cases, as determined by individual banks. Lebanon has yet to adopt formal capital controls legislation, but most economic analysts believe such a law is necessary to preserve what limited foreign currency is left in the country and provide a level playing field to all Lebanese. At the behest of the Central Bank, in April 2020, banks began providing Lebanese lira at rates double the official pegged rate to customers with dollar-denominated accounts.

Lebanon’s default on its dollar-denominated debt in March 2020 – Lebanese banks at the time held \$12.7 billion in Lebanon’s dollar bonds – further eroded the balance sheets of Lebanese banks. Analysts estimate that perhaps 30 percent of loans from Lebanese banks are non-performing. This number is expected to rise in 2020. Bankers report that correspondent banks overseas have stopped providing them with lines of credits – or only provide facilities with onerous conditions – further hampering bank efficacy in Lebanon. On April 30, the Cabinet approved an economic rescue plan, which noted the Lebanese financial sector experienced losses of nearly \$80 billion, meaning that it will be unable to repay all what it owes to Lebanese with dollar-denominated accounts. The economic plan hints at a potential “haircut” on dollar deposits, in which wealthy account holders could lose some of their deposits to help recapitalize banks after shareholders “bail-in” (convert their deposits into bank shares) their financial institutions.

The Lebanese banking sector covers the entire country with 1,051 operating commercial and investment bank branches as of November 2019. There are 4,757 residents per branch in Lebanon (assuming five million inhabitants), which compares favorably to regional and emerging markets. According to World Bank Development indicators, there are 534 depositors with commercial banks per 1,000 adults, 215 borrowers from commercial banks per 1,000 adults, and 38 ATMs per 100,000 adults. The total domestic assets of Lebanon’s five largest commercial banks reached approximately \$115 billion as of the end of 2019 (about 51.4 percent of total banking assets), according to Central Bank data.

Lebanon’s Central Bank was established in 1963. Lebanon’s Central Bank imposes strict compliance with regulations on banks and financial institutions, and commercial banks, in turn, maintain strict compliance regimes. However, the United States designated Jammal Trust Bank in August 2019 as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist for its role in financing Foreign Terrorist Organization Hizballah. Foreign banks and branches need the Central Bank’s approval to establish operations in Lebanon. Moreover, any shareholder with more than five percent of a bank’s share capital must obtain prior approval from the Central Bank to acquire additional shares in that bank, and must inform the Central Bank when selling shares. In addition, any shareholder needs to obtain prior approval from the Central Bank if he/she wants to become a board member. The use of cryptocurrencies is prohibited in Lebanon by the Central Bank. The Central Bank announced that it is developing a digital currency that it plans to issue in Lebanese Pounds for domestic use only.

There are no restrictions in Lebanon on a foreigner or non-resident's ability to open a bank account in local currency or foreign currencies, provided they abide by Lebanese compliance rules and regulations; however, anecdotal evidence revealed that in the wake of Lebanon's economic crisis, few local banks were accepting new clients. Banks claim they have stringent inquiry mechanisms to ensure compliance with international and domestic regulations and implement Lebanon's anti-money laundering and counter-terror finance laws. Banks inform customers of Know-Your-Customer requirements and ask them about the purpose of opening new accounts and about the sources of funds to be deposited. Lebanese banks note they are compliant with the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA). Lebanon adopted the OECD Common Reporting Standards since January 1, 2018.

### **Foreign Exchange Controls**

For the first time in Lebanon's history, commercial banks in late 2019 introduced *ad hoc* capital controls on Lebanese depositors to stem the outflow of foreign currency. Depending on a client's individual bank and account size, he or she is subject to strict limits on foreign transfers for "emergency" purposes only, as defined by a client's bank. In August 2020, the Central Bank agreed to allow parents to transfer up to \$10,000 for children's tuition payments overseas. Most international and local firms have been unable to transfer U.S. dollars in their bank accounts overseas. Clients with Lebanese lira (LBP) denominated accounts could only convert their lira to dollars outside of banks at licensed and unlicensed money exchange houses.

### **U.S. Banks & Local Correspondent Banks**

Below is a list of U.S. banks operating in Lebanon:

#### **CITIBANK N.A.**

Berytus Park, Bloc A, 3rd floor  
Park Avenue, Beirut Central District  
P.O. Box 11-1535  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-962440  
Fax: 961-1-962444

#### **BANK of NEW YORK MELLON (The) (Representative Office)**

Atrium Bldg, 3rd floor  
Corner Maarad-Weygand Street  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-988788  
Fax: 961-1-989001

#### **JPMORGAN CHASE BANK NA (Representative Office)**

Gefinor Center, Bloc B, 16th floor, Suite No.1601  
Clemenceau Street,  
P.O. Box 11-5133  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-739583  
Fax: 961-1-739581

Below is a list of the largest banks (ranked by assets as of December 2018) that have correspondent U.S. banking relationships:

**BANK AUDI S.A.L.**

Bank Audi Plaza, Bab Idriss  
P.O. Box 11-2560  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-994000  
Fax: 961-1-990555

**BLOM BANK S.A.L.**

BLOM Bank Bldg.  
Rashid Karamah Ave., Verdun  
P.O. Box: 11-1912 Riad ElSolh,  
Beirut 1107-2807, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-738938

**SOCIETE GENERALE DE BANQUE AU LIBAN S.A.L. (SGBL)**

Sehnaoui Bldg,  
Riad ElSolh Street, Beirut Central District  
P.O. Box: 11-2955  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-980783  
Fax: 961-1-980785

**BYBLOS BANK S.A.L.**

Byblos Bank Headquarters,  
Elias Sarkis Avenue, Ashrafieh  
P.O. Box: 11-5605 Riad ElSolh,  
Beirut 1107-2811, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-335200  
Fax: 961-1-334554

**FRANSABANK S.A.L.**

Fransabank Center,  
Hamra Street  
P.O. Box: 11-0393 Riad ElSolh,  
Beirut 1107-2803, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-340180  
Fax: 961-1-354572

**BANKMED S.A.L.**

BankMed Center  
482 Clemenceau Street  
P.O. Box: 11-0348 Riad ElSolh,  
Beirut 1107-2030, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-373937  
Fax: 961-1-362706

**BANK OF BEIRUT S.A.L.**

Bank of Beirut Bldg  
Foch Street, Beirut Central District,  
P.O. Box: 11-7354  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-958000

**BANQUE LIBANO-FRANCAISE S.A.L.**

Beirut Liberty Plaza  
Rome Street, Hamra  
P.O.Box 11-0808  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-791332  
Fax: 961-1-440183

**CREDIT LIBANAIS S.A.L.**

Credit Libanais Tower  
Corniche El Nahr, Adlieh Roundabout  
P.O.Box: 16-6729  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-608000  
Fax: 961-1-608126

**BBAC S.A.L.**

BBAC Bldg., 250 Clemenceau Street  
P.O.Box 11-1536 Riad ElSolh,  
Beirut 1107 2080, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-366630  
Fax: 961-1-365200

**IBL BANK S.A.L.**

Al Ittihadiyah Bldg  
Charles Malek Avenue, Rmeil  
P.O.Box 11-5292 Riad ElSolh,  
Beirut 1107-2190, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-200350  
Fax: 961-1-204505

**LEBANON AND GULF BANK S.A.L.**

Lebanon and Gulf Bank Bldg,  
Allenby Street, Beirut Central District  
P.O. Box 11-3600  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-965000  
Fax: 961-1-965699

**FIRST NATIONAL BANK S.A.L.**

Allenby Street, Marfaa 147 Bldg,  
Beirut Central District



P.O.Box 11-435 Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-963000  
Fax: 961-1-973090

**CREDITBANK S.A.L.**

Freeway Center,  
Sin El Fil Blvd.  
P.O.Box: 16-5795  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-501600  
Fax: 961-1-485245

**SARADAR BANK S.A.L.**

Saradar Building,  
Charles Malek Avenue, Achrafieh  
P.O.Box: 16-5766  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-200770

**LEBANESE SWISS BANK S.A.L.**

Hoss Building, 6<sup>th</sup> floor,  
Emile Edde Street, Hamra  
P.O.Box: 11-9552  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel: 961-1-346244  
Source: Bankdata Financial Services

**Protecting Intellectual Property**

In any foreign market, companies should consider several general principles for effective protection of their intellectual property. For background, please access our article on [Protecting Intellectual Property](#) and [Stopfakes.gov](#) or contact ITA's Office of Intellectual Property Rights Director, Stevan Mitchell at [Stevan.Mitchell@trade.gov](mailto:Stevan.Mitchell@trade.gov).

Although Lebanon is not a member of the WTO, its intellectual property rights (IPR) legislation is generally compliant with Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) standards. However, IPR enforcement is weak. Counterfeit products found in the local market generally fall in the following categories: alcoholic beverages, cosmetics, apparel, luxury consumer goods, CDs/DVDs, and pharmaceuticals. There is no evidence that counterfeits have substantially affected imports or production of these categories of goods. The Ministry of Economy and Trade's Intellectual Property Protection Office (IPPO) has led efforts to improve the IPR regime but suffers from limited financial and human resources, and insufficient political will within the Lebanese government. IPR enforcement by Lebanon's Internal Security Forces (ISF) and Customs is relatively weak. The understanding of IPR within the Lebanese judiciary has improved in recent years but gaps remain in awareness of the economic repercussions of IPR violations, judicial prosecution of IPR cases, and strong court decisions with punishments prohibitive enough to deter future infringements. The Ministry of Economy and Trade's draft laws and amendments to existing laws designed to improve the IPR environment await parliamentary approval.

## **IP Attaché Contact Information**

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## **Selling to the Public Sector**

Many governments finance public works projects through borrowing from the Multilateral Development Banks. Please refer to “Project Financing” Section for more information.

The Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR), a public authority established in 1977, is the government body responsible for major public infrastructure projects in Lebanon. The CDR reports to the Council of Ministers (i.e. cabinet) and coordinates its sector-based actions with the relevant ministries. Generally, the CDR publicly solicits offers before awarding major construction contracts.

Ministries may solicit for services valued below LBP 100 million (\$66,357). Ministries publish these requirements online and in local newspapers. However, for works that exceed the threshold, the public tendering department is responsible for launching these tenders, unless the cabinet authorizes the relevant ministry to launch the tender directly. U.S. companies can apply directly for these tenders or can rely on local agents to bid on their behalf.

Lebanon does not abide by the World Trade Organization (WTO) - Government Procurement Agreement (Lebanon is not a WTO member). Lebanon lacks unified public procurement legislation, and a modernized law is with Parliament for its consideration.

U.S. companies bidding on Government tenders may also qualify for U.S. Government advocacy. A unit of the U.S. Commerce Department’s International Trade Administration, the Advocacy Center coordinates U.S. Government interagency advocacy efforts on behalf of U.S. exporters bidding on public sector contracts with international governments and government agencies. The Advocacy Center works closely with our network of the U.S. Commercial Service worldwide and inter-agency partners to ensure that exporters of U.S. products and services have the best possible chance of winning government contracts. Advocacy assistance can take many forms but often involves the U.S. Embassy or other U.S. Government agencies expressing support for the U.S. bidders directly to the foreign government. Consult [Advocacy for Foreign Government Contracts](#) for additional information

## **Project Financing**

The Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR), the government's executive body for redevelopment, has a total of \$2.8 billion in loans and agreements ratified by Parliament but not yet disbursed. An additional \$670 million in loans from international donors and development banks await Parliament's approval. The CDR has a limited absorptive capacity and targets annual spending at approximately \$750 million. Since 1992, CDR completed 4,936 contracts valued at USD 12.3 billion mainly in infrastructure projects all over Lebanon. CDR has currently ongoing contracts valued at USD 3.6 billion.

About 15 foreign financing sources are involved in CDR's development plan, with 11 sources contributing to over 90 percent of the CDR's total foreign financing. Primary contributors include the World Bank, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFAED), the Kuwaiti Fund (KFAED), the European Union (EU) and the European Investment Bank (EIB), the Islamic Development Bank, the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD), and the Governments of Saudi Arabia, Italy, and France. For more information about CDR, you can visit [CDR's website](#).

## **Multilateral Development Banks and Financing Government Sales**

- The U.S. Commercial Service maintains Commercial Liaison Offices in each of the main Multilateral Development Banks, including the World Bank. These institutions lend billions of dollars to developing countries on projects aimed at accelerating economic growth and social development by reducing poverty and inequality, improving health and education, and advancing infrastructure development. The Commercial Liaison Offices help American businesses participate in bank-funded projects, and advocate on behalf of American bidders. Learn more by contacting the [Advocacy Liaison Website for World Bank](#) and [World Bank](#).

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private sector focused wing of the World Bank Group, has invested over \$1 billion in supporting Lebanese firms. The IFC also works to streamline business registration and improve access to finance for MSMEs (micro and small and medium enterprises) and women-led businesses. The IFC also provides assistance to develop the regulatory framework for the Tripoli Special Economic Zone (TSEZ). Moreover, the IFC supported local commercial banks in the initial issuance of "green bonds" for projects that have positive climate impacts. The IFC advises the High Council for Privatization and Partnerships (HCP) for the expansion of the Rafic Hariri Beirut International Airport and has an advisory role with the Ministry of Energy and Water for the construction of two gas power plants.

The EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) began operations in Lebanon in September 2017. It focuses support for private sector competitiveness, sustainable energy supply, and the quality and efficiency of public service delivery. As of March 2019, EBRD has invested around 300 million Euros, primarily through top Lebanese banks, including a Green Economy Financing Facility, a green bond, an SME credit line, an equity stake in a local bank, and in trade finance. EBRD has also signed a direct corporate loan to a private electricity distribution services provider and is exploring investments in the power, agribusiness, manufacturing, natural resources, industrial zones, and municipal and infrastructure projects. EBRD forecasts a pipeline of Euros 1.1 billion over six years for CIP infrastructure projects and other sectors beyond the CIP. In 2018, EBRD launched its EU-funded Advice for Small Business program

to provide businesses with the knowledge needed to reach their growth potential, ranging from strategy and marketing to financial management to energy efficiency improvements.

Learn more by contacting the:

[Trade Finance Guide](#)

[Export-Import Bank of the United States](#)

[Country Limitation Schedule](#)

[DFC](#)

[U.S. Trade and Development Agency](#)

[SBA's Office of International Trade](#)

[USDA Commodity Credit Corporation](#)

[U.S. Agency for International Development](#)

[Association of Lebanese Banks](#)

[Banking Control Commission of Lebanon](#)

[Banque du Liban - Lebanon's Central Bank](#)

## **Business Travel**

### **Business Customs**

Lebanese business dealings are formal yet hospitable. Handshakes with direct eye contact are appropriate greetings. Punctuality is generally expected for business meetings, and the three working languages are Lebanese Arabic, French, or English.

Business cards are commonly used. Dress code is formal in most business and official settings. Gifts are **common and are accepted on most occasions.**

### **Travel Advisory**

U.S. companies and visitors are advised to carefully assess the situation in Lebanon by consulting the Department of State Travel Advisories at [Travel State](#).

U.S. citizens are advised to maintain valid travel documents and enroll with the Department of State or the U.S. Embassy in Beirut through the State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program [STEP](#).

### **Visa Requirements**

Visas are required for entry into Lebanon and may be obtained at Lebanese embassies and consulates ([Lebanese Embassy in the United States](#)). Citizens of the following countries can obtain a free one-month validity visa renewable for three months upon arrival at the Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport (Beirut-RHIA):

European Union European Union / EFTA, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Bhutan, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Georgia, Hong Kong, Iran, Ireland, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macao, Macedonia, Malaysia, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, Russia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Samoa, San Marino, Serbia, Singapore, South Korea, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Uzbekistan, Venezuela.

More information is available at the [Lebanese General Security](#)'s website.

Travelers who hold passports that contain visas or entry/exit stamps for Israel will likely be denied entry into Lebanon and may be subject to arrest or detention. Even if their travel documents currently do not have Israeli stamps or visas, persons seeking entry into Lebanon who have previously traveled to Israel may still face arrest and/or detention if this travel is disclosed. The Government of Lebanon has the authority to refuse admission to U.S. citizens and to detain U.S. citizen travelers for further inspection. Travelers who have previously worked in Lebanon without the appropriate work visa may be denied entry, or subject to detention or deportation. Travelers who have overstayed their entry visa validity in Lebanon must adjust their status with General Security's Department of Passport and Immigration and receive an exit visa prior to their departure. Individuals who are detained pending deportation are expected to pay the cost of their own airline ticket and will remain under detention until they have gathered the necessary funds.

U.S. Companies that require travel of foreign businesspersons to the United States are advised that security evaluations are handled via an interagency process. Visa applicants should go to the following link(s): [State Department Visa Website](#).

## **Currency**

The monetary unit in Lebanon is the Lebanese Pound (LBP), also called the lira. As of October 2019, there are *ad hoc* controls on foreign exchange while U.S. dollars were in short supply, but high demand, forcing a volatile depreciation of the LBP. Cash and credit cards are the most common method of payment in Lebanon, but payment by check or bank transfer is also possible. Bank ATM machines are widespread, and cash may be withdrawn in Lebanese pounds or U.S. dollars.

## **Telecommunications/Electronics**

International calls are expensive. The public phone network managed by public operator OGERO is generally reliable. Lebanon has two GSM networks that are owned by the government: Touch and Alpha. Various private cellular telephones and fax facilities exist. Prepaid cellular cards are available at a monthly subscription fee of around \$25.00 (including internet service and 11 percent Value Added Tax (VAT) charges. Internet service is available for limited access, and is also accessible to visitors at many hotels and internet cafes. DSL, ADSL, HDSL and wireless broadband internet connections are available in most of the hotels in Lebanon, though the service is slower than what is commonly available in the United States. 4G services are available across the country, while 5G services are limited.

The standard voltage in Lebanon is between 220V - 240V, as in Europe. This requires a power converter since the standard voltage in the U.S. is in the range of 100V - 120V. The frequency in Lebanon is 50 Hz and the power sockets used are of type C / D / G.

## **Transportation**

Lebanon lacks adequate public transportation, but private, un-metered taxis and shared cabs are abundant in and around the capital. Rental cars are readily available at a daily cost starting at \$25.00, depending on the type and model of the car. Although many international airlines serve Beirut, a 1984 U.S. Presidential Determination prohibits direct air links between the United States and Lebanon.

## **Language**

Arabic is the official language in Lebanon, but French and English are widely spoken.

## **Health**

Most pharmaceuticals and health-related products are readily available in the local market. American companies such as Abbott Laboratories, Eli Lilly, Janssen-Cilag, Pfizer, and Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSD) have representative offices in Lebanon. Private hospitals in Beirut and surrounding areas provide modern care, but doctors and hospitals normally expect immediate cash payment for services if a client does not show evidence of a locally accepted health insurance coverage.

## **Local Time, Business Hours and Holidays**

Local time is GMT +3 from March 21 to October 31, 2020, and GMT +2 from November 1 to March 20, 2021.

Government offices hours are as follows:

- 8:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday
- 8:00 a.m. - 13:00 p.m. Friday

Bank counters are generally open on the following schedule:

- 8:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. Monday through Friday
- 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Saturday

Private office hours vary and some exceed the 40-hour workweek.

Public holidays in 2020 are as follows:

January 1:	New Year's Day
January 06:	Armenian Christmas
January 20:	Martin Luther King Day
February 14:	Rafic Harir Memorial Day
February 17:	Washington's Birthday
March 25:	Annunciation Day
April 10:	Good Friday (Western)
April 17:	Good Friday (Eastern)
May 1:	Labor Day
May 25:	Memorial Day/Eid El Fitr
July 3:	Independence Day
July 31:	Al Adha
August 20:	Islamic New Year (Al-Hejra)
September 7:	Labor Day
October 12:	Columbus Day
October 29:	Prophet's Birthday
November 11:	Veteran's Day
November 26:	Thanksgiving
December 25:	Christmas Day

#### **Temporary Entry of Materials or Personal Belongings**

There are no restrictions on the temporary entry of goods and equipment. Temporary importation of commercial samples, professional equipment and goods for use at trade fairs and exhibitions such as computers, repair tools, photographic and film equipment, musical instruments, industrial machinery, vehicles, jewelry, clothing, medical appliances, aircraft, race horses, art work, prehistoric relics, ballet costumes, and rock group sound systems require a temporary admission document known as the ATA (Admission Temporaire) carnet. This is obtained exclusively from the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount Lebanon (CCIB - BML).

By presenting an ATA carnet to Lebanese Customs, the imported products and equipment pass duty and tax-free into the country for up to one year. At the end of the year, all the items listed on the carnet must be returned to the temporary exportation country. Video, audio disks, and tapes may be subject to search and seizure.

More information is available on [Chamber of Commerce Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount Lebanon](#).

## **Investment Climate Statement**

The U.S. Department of State's Investment Climate Statements, prepared annually by U.S. embassies and diplomatic missions abroad, provide country-specific information and assessments of the investment climate in foreign markets. Topics include: market barriers, business risk, legal and regulatory system, dispute resolution, corruption, political violence, labor issues, and intellectual property rights. The statement is available [here](#).



## **Political Environment**

For background information on the political and economic environment of Lebanon, please U.S. Department of State [Countries & Areas](#) website.