

IBBY-Yamada Fund

Project reports 2025

IBBY Lebanon

Establishing a Juvenile Detention Center Library



Every child has the right to become a reader



BUILDING HOPE BEHIND BARS

LIBRARY FOR JUVENILE PRISONERS IN LEBANON

Building Hope Behind Bars: Library for Juvenile Prisoners in Lebanon

-Yamada Fund | UNODC -

Prison conditions in Lebanon have significantly worsened due to the country's economic crisis (2). It is stated that overcrowding is prevalent, healthcare is inadequate, and the government's failure to settle outstanding debts has jeopardized the overall conditions for prisons in Lebanon. To quote the Human Rights Watch "most prisons across Lebanon's governorates, including those in Zahleh, Tripoli, and women's prisons in Baabda and Barbar Khazen, among others, are overcrowded beyond their capacities,"(2). This overcrowding, coupled with poor detention conditions, has led to a severe decline in the health of inmates, with an increasing risk of starvation. The depreciating currency and soaring inflation have drastically reduced resources for healthcare, food, and education. The crisis in Lebanese prisons is a direct result of the country's economic collapse, with the government unable to pay suppliers and contractors who provide for the prisons (3).

That said, one of the main causes of Lebanon's dire prison conditions is the ongoing economic crisis and rising poverty (1). A survey by Human Rights Watch from November 2021 to January 2022, involving 1,209 households, revealed that about 70% struggled to meet financial obligations or consistently fell behind on basic expenses. These findings highlight the gravity of the situation and its impact on prison conditions (1).

Despite nominal increases in the interior ministry's budget for prison management, the lira's devaluation since 2019 and widespread inflation have diminished its purchasing power. This inflation only increases difficulties for families trying to support their imprisoned family members. (1).

Lebanon's juvenile justice system faces significant challenges, particularly in facilities such as Roumieh Prison. Juveniles in Lebanese prisons often encounter overcrowded conditions and inadequate facilities. The environment is typically cramped and unsanitary, contributing to heightened stress and potential conflicts among inmates (4). The children, who are currently in contact with the law, endure the worst health and psychological conditions (5).

Educational opportunities for juvenile detainees are insufficient (4; 5). Many young inmates miss out on crucial learning opportunities, which significantly impacts their prospects and increases the likelihood of reoffending. Additionally, there is a scarcity in the educational and training tools necessary for rehabilitating these young individuals, hindering their preparation for future societal reintegration as workers, students, professionals, and citizens (5).

UNODC has been actively working on the construction of a new facility to relocate juvenile prisoners, aiming to provide them with improved conditions and greater opportunities for personal growth and rehabilitation. While the move has not yet taken place, this new center represents a significant step toward creating an environment that prioritizes the well-being and development of young offenders. This new space will serve as a dedicated area for young offenders, aiming to provide a more suitable environment for them. In support of this initiative, the Lebanese Board on Books for Young People (LBBY) planned on to establishing a library within the center. The library was made to offer educational resources and reading material. Such initiatives can provide young inmates with the tools they need for personal growth, literacy development, and rehabilitation.

This transformative project, supported by the IBBY Yamada Fund and enriched with book donations from Book Aid International, showcased the power of books to change lives. Libraries in prisons are more than just spaces for reading, they are gateways to knowledge, self-reflection, and rehabilitation. For young prisoners, access to books provides tools to dream, learn, and build brighter futures. It fosters literacy, sparks imagination, and offers hope and humanity in challenging circumstances.

Partners and Human Resources

- LBBY (Lebanese Board on Books for Young People)
- UNESCO in collaboration with UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)
- Book Aid International
- SPAZI for designers and furniture developers as they have the expertise in working on the ground

Objectives and Results

Objectives:

- The primary aim of this project was to establish a fully functional library within a juvenile detention center, providing young inmates with access to books and educational resources to foster their personal development, literacy skills, and rehabilitation .

Results Achieved:

- We successfully installed a library environment equipped with 5 bookshelves, 4 tables, and 25 chairs, creating a dedicated space for learning within the detention center .
- A total of 1,100 books (1,000 donated and 100 purchased) are now available to the juvenile inmates, covering a range of genres and educational levels .
- Short-term results show enhanced literacy and educational engagement among the juveniles, who have begun utilizing the space for reading.

Activities and Methods

In collaboration with UNESCO's regional bureau in Beirut and UNODC, the project was implemented through the following methods :

- Shelves and tables were provided by SPAZI, with an interior designer ensuring the furniture met the specific requirements of the prison environment . This included installing securely attached tables and selecting furnishings that were both durable and safe for the inmates.
- A diverse collection of books suitable for various age groups and interests was provided. To ensure cultural and linguistic relevance, 100 Arabic books were specifically purchased to complement the 1,000 books donated by Book Aid International .
- The project utilized a multi partner approach, coordinating with UNODC to align the library's physical setup with the security protocols of the new juvenile facility.

Challenges and Adjustments

- **Main Challenges:** The primary obstacles included the depreciating currency and inflation in Lebanon, and the unstable situation in the area (war).
- **Actions Taken:** LBBY prioritized acquiring of essential furniture and Arabic books to mitigate rising costs. Coordination with UNODC was essential to ensure all steps complied with strict prison security protocols during the installation phase.

Target Groups and Reach

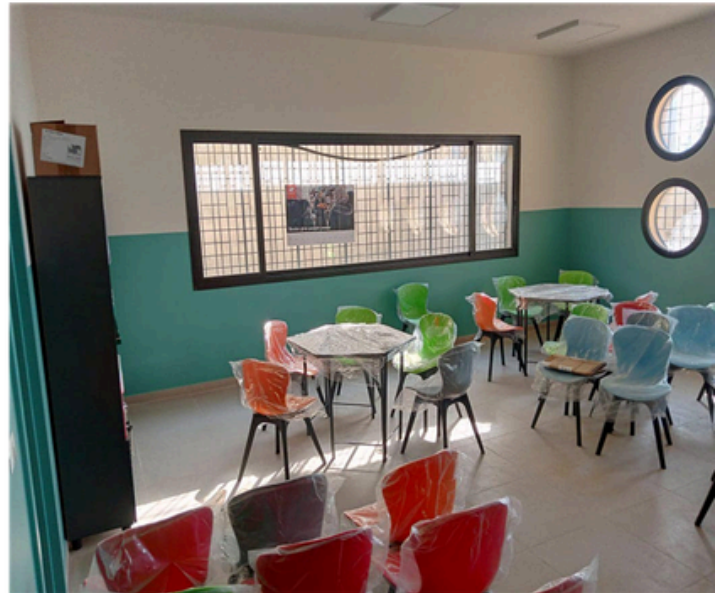
- **Direct Beneficiaries:** Juvenile inmates, ages 11 to 18, who now have full access to the library resources.
- **Secondary Groups:** Social workers and security forces who received specialized training to manage the facility

Quantitative Outputs

Category	Planned	Achieved
Book Donations	1000	1000
Arabic Books Purchased	100	100
Bookshelves	5	5
Seating (Chairs)	25	25
Tables	4	4

Visibility

We made sure to show that the IBBY-Yamada Fund supported this project by putting their logos in all our reports and during the implementation to show their contribution for this project.



References

1. Andryan. (2023, November 28). Addressing Dire Prison Conditions in Lebanon. The Borgen Project. <https://borgenproject.org/prison-conditions-in-lebanon/>
2. Human Rights Watch. (2023, August 23). Lebanon: Harrowing Prison Conditions | Human Rights Watch. Humanrightswatch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/23/lebanon-harrowing-prison-conditions>
3. Rando, V. (2024, February 16). Starving prisons. Nowlebanon. <https://nowlebanon.com/starving-prisons/#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20Lebanese%20prisons>
4. Rizk, E. (2020). La survie des établissements de santé durant la guerre du Liban. Le cas de l'hôpital Rizk. *Confluences Méditerranée*, N°112(1), 93. <https://doi.org/10.3917/come.112.0093>
5. Yazbek, B. (2022). Juvenile Detention in Lebanon: 200 Minors Cramped in Cells of Disease and Drugs. *Al Modon*.