

# Diversity Awareness & Understanding

## LEBANON

### Macomb County Defining Business + Life

#### Many Cultures, One Home

#### Map of Lebanon



#### Geography

Lebanon is a relatively small country of only 4,036 sq mi (Compared to Macomb County 482 sq mi). Located in the Middle East on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Lebanon's coastal location, high mountain backbone, and climate have greatly influenced the country's history, peoples, and economy. Beirut is Lebanon's capital, principal port, and largest city.

#### Introduction

Amidst the highly volatile Middle Eastern region, Lebanon has continually strived to be a nation of societal and economic stability. Since the end of a devastating 25-year civil war, ending in 1990, Lebanon has focused on unifying its people. Valuing individualism and creativity, Lebanese culture has sustained many bitter conflicts, which has resulted in a way of life that is distinctively Lebanese combining Eastern and Western civilization both old and new. With an emerging service sector and increased foreign trade, Lebanon has focused much of its energy on restoring an economy which was devastated due to years of domestic fighting. Even though much of the progress has been hampered due to the growth of other nations in the region, Lebanon continues to support social and economic opportunities nationally and abroad.

#### Macomb County Profile: Persons of Lebanon Descent

Total population .....	8,380
Male.....	4,078
Female.....	4,302
Under 18 years old.....	2,496
18 to 64 years.....	5,001
65 years and over.....	883
Speak a language other than English at home (population 5 years and over).....	1,556



Lebanon's Flag

#### Languages

The official language of Lebanon is Arabic, however French is commonly used, especially in government and among the upper class. Minority languages include English, which is utilized in business and education, and Armenian is spoken by a small percentage of the population.

#### Society, Culture & Religion

Lebanon has an Arab culture with Western influences. Lebanese people value individualism, which contributes to their creativity and inventiveness. Close family relationships, loyalty to family and friends, and honor are extremely important. Fathers and elder males are the heads of the family. Shame is avoided at all costs and insults are taken very seriously. Lebanese people are hospitable and generous. Generally they will insist on paying for a meal, in which case it would be inappropriate to decline the invitation. Humor is always welcomed even in first encounters. Religion is highly respected and coveted in Lebanese society. Muslims are the majority religious group in Lebanon with 70 percent of the population practicing. Most of the remaining Lebanese people, about 30 percent, practice some form of Christianity. In Lebanon the government supports a policy of confessionalism, which is the grouping of people by religion, and this practice has played a critical role in Lebanon's political and social life.

#### Etiquette & Customs

- To make a good impression, observe the following: smile and say 'MARHABA' (Hi); give a firm handshake and, occasionally, 3 kisses on the cheeks (alternating from one side to the other). The exception to these rules is a person of the opposite gender who displays an Islamic dress code (i.e. veil for women, beard for men) in this case it is enough to nod with the head while saying 'SALAM' (peace). Including a slight bow with this greeting is also a sign of respect.
- Conservative Muslim men will not shake a woman's hand, but rather cross their hand over their chest to indicate a polite greeting to you.
- Social interaction and conversation occurs at a much closer distance than in the Western world; it is considered offensive to step or lean away.
- Touching a person's shoulder or holding their hand is common act of friendship between people of the same gender.
- It is important to avoid prolonged eye contact, especially with elders, as it is a sign of defiance.
- It is considered rude to decline the offer of drink.
- Only use the right hand to eat, pass or accept food/drink, as the left is considered unclean in Arabic culture.

#### General Business Practices

- Plan a light agenda for an initial meeting.
- You should arrive on time to all engagements.
- Spend double the time with greetings, and greet in the rough order of seniority.
- In negotiations consult and involve all parties that have the ability to affect your project.
- People will expect "special privileges" because of a personal connection or relationship that you have with them.
- Do not have your guests/hosts make a definite commitment or decision.
- Keep any verbal commitment you make.
- Exaggeration is common in speech.
- Exposing the sole of the foot is considered offensive; sit with both feet on the floor.
- Dress formally and conservatively.
- Women are not restricted from any job, but are expected to balance work and family life.
- Be open to sudden changes in work plans and ambiguity in work situations.
- The hiring process may tend to favor those of similar religious affiliation.
- Formal business meetings are often followed by informal, social activities.



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#### Sources:

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