



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Egypt: Christians

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Executive summary

Egypt is a majority Muslim country, but as an estimated 10% of the population, or around 10 million people, Christians represent a significant and established minority. Ninety percent of these are members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, but the terms 'Copt' and 'Coptic' are often used to refer to Christians of all denominations.

In general, Christians are not at risk of persecution from state or non-state actors. However, Christians with a particular profile – including Muslim converts to Christianity, those who proselytise, those involved in church construction or reconstruction/repair of churches that were previously attacked and those who engage in a relationship with a Muslim woman – will generally be able to show a real risk of persecution, particularly from non-state actors. In addition, Christians living in Upper Egypt, rural areas and some poor urban areas, and Christian women aged 14 to 25 years old without a male protector, may be at risk of persecution.

The Constitution states that 'freedom of belief is absolute' and Christian canonical laws form the basis of legislation governing Christians' personal status, religious affairs and choice of spiritual leaders. However, in some situations, Christians are subject to Muslim personal status laws which differ significantly from Christian religious traditions. Christians are allowed to practise their religion publicly and build churches, although the latter is only possible following lengthy legal processes. The government has also taken steps to promote interfaith co-existence. However, there is state discrimination against Christians both in law and in its application, including occasionally in relation to blasphemy and related offences.

Christians also face societal discrimination in many aspects of life such as employment and housing. The listing of religion on Egyptian national identity cards leaves Christians open to discrimination by officials or non-state actors. They also sometimes face societal violence from Islamist groups and Egyptians more generally, but the number of reported attacks by radical Islamists and anti-Christian mobs has decreased in the last 10 years. Several sources reported that a small minority of Christian women, particularly those aged 14 to 25 years old, face abductions and forced conversions, while others face harassment.

Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they will not, in general, be able to obtain protection from the authorities. Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, in general the state is unlikely to be willing and able to provide protection.

Internal relocation is not viable where the state is the persecutor. Internal relocation is generally viable if the fear is of persecution from a societal actor, but this will depend on the facts of the case.

Each case will need to be considered on its facts, with the onus on the applicant to demonstrate that they face persecution or serious harm.

If the person's claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certified as clearly unfounded.

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Assessment

Updated: 19 December 2023

About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is information in the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of whether, **in general**:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution/serious harm by the state and/or non-state actors because the person is a Christian (see Note below)
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a grant of asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave is likely, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

Note: The assessment considers the general situation for Christians of all denominations **with the exception of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormon Church)**, which are very small minorities not recognised by the Egyptian government.

For further information, see [Risk](#) below.

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1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

1.1 Credibility

- 1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 1.1.3 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person’s claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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1.2 Exclusion

- 1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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2. Convention reason(s)

- 2.1.1 A person's actual or imputed religion.
- 2.1.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.
- 2.1.3 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

3. Risk

- 3.1.1 Christians in general are **unlikely** to be subject to treatment or discrimination by the state and societal actors that is sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to amount to persecution.
- 3.1.2 But the following profiles may be at risk of persecution:
 - Christians in some areas outside large cities where radical Islamists continue to have a foothold – notably Upper Egypt, rural areas and poor urban areas – although there is no recent evidence of large-scale attacks or incidents against Christians
 - Christian women aged 14 to 25 years old without a male protector
- 3.1.3 And the following profiles are likely to be at risk of persecution:
 - Christian converts continue to be likely to face societal and, in some cases, state treatment that amounts to persecution

- Christians involved in church construction or reconstruction/repair of churches which were previously attacked continue to be likely to face treatment that amounts to persecution
 - There is limited information available about the treatment of Christians who proselytise, regardless of whether this is serious or casual. In the absence of confirmation of positive treatment and in the wider context of prevailing state and societal attitudes, Christians who are accused of proselytising seriously not casually are likely to continue to be at risk of persecution
 - Christian men who are in a physical or emotional relationship with a Muslim woman, or rumoured to be in such a relationship
- 3.1.4 However, each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that they would be at risk of serious harm or persecution on account of their religion.
- 3.1.5 Egypt is a majority Muslim country, but Christians are an established and significant minority comprising an estimated 10% of the population (or around 10 million people) (see [Demography](#)).
- 3.1.6 The Constitution states that 'freedom of belief is absolute' and, although it stipulates that the principles of sharia are the main source of legislation, specifies that Christian canonical laws form the basis of legislation governing Christians' personal status, religious affairs and choice of spiritual leaders. Christians are allowed to practise their religion publicly and build places of worship (see [Constitution](#) and [Personal status and adoption law](#)).
- 3.1.7 The government has taken steps to promote interfaith co-existence, such as directing schools not to hold exams during the Coptic Christmas period. President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi inaugurated the largest church in the Middle East in the country's as yet unnamed New Administrative Capital, attends church annually at Coptic Christmas and speaks publicly about unity between Muslims and Christians (see [State attitude](#)).
- 3.1.8 However, there is state discrimination against Christians both in law and in its application. The approval process for church building and renovation is slow and complex (see [Church building law in practice](#)). Legislation governing approval stipulates requirements that do not apply to Sunni mosques (see [Church building law](#)). Christians occasionally face prosecution or conviction for blasphemy and related offences (see [Blasphemy laws](#) and [Prosecution under blasphemy laws](#)). Christians are subject to Muslim personal status laws in some situations, and these laws often differ significantly from Christian religious traditions. Christian men are unable to marry Muslim women (see [Personal status and adoption laws](#)).
- 3.1.9 Christian converts have reportedly been arrested and physically abused by the security services, and converts' activities may be monitored by the intelligence agencies, particularly those who proselytise (see [State treatment of Christian converts](#)). The listing of religion on Egyptian national identity cards leaves Christians open to discrimination by officials or non-state actors (see [Identity cards](#)). While Christians are represented in government, the judiciary and the civil service, they face some discrimination, with few

obtaining senior positions (see [Christians in public life](#)).

- 3.1.10 Christians sometimes face violence from societal actors – including armed groups as well as individuals – but the number of reported attacks by radical Islamists and anti-Christian mobs has decreased in the last 10 years and no large-scale terror attack against Christians has occurred since 2018. However, levels of violence vary considerably from place to place. Evidence suggests risks are greater in Upper Egypt and least in urban areas, including in Cairo and Alexandria. Christians are at risk of discrimination in some rural and/or poorer areas, particularly where there have been recent attacks on churches and Christian properties, as well as occasional ill-treatment including physical assault (see [Societal violence and discrimination](#)). Christians also continue to face discrimination in many aspects of life (see [Societal treatment](#)). They may face difficulties in obtaining employment, housing and healthcare (see [Employment](#), [Housing](#) and [Healthcare](#)).
- 3.1.11 Evidence is limited about Christian men who engage in relationships with a Muslim woman, although the Christian non-governmental organisation, Open Doors, reported that a Christian man's involvement, or rumoured involvement, with a Muslim woman may trigger mob violence but does not provide specific evidence and no other sources comment on the subject (see [Abductions, interfaith relationships and coerced conversion to Islam](#)). Christian women face harassment and sometimes abduction, which in some cases leads to forced conversion to Islam. While non-governmental organisation Coptic Solidarity reported abductions as numbering in the 10s annually in the decade to 2020 (out of a relevant cohort likely to number 100,000+ women), Open Doors' more recent data suggests prevalence has now decreased (see [Societal violence and discrimination](#)). Christian converts face societal discrimination that makes it difficult for them to live their faith, including family pressure or violence (see [Converts from Islam](#)). There is, however, limited information about the treatment of Christians who proselytise in the sources consulted (see [Societal treatment](#)).
- 3.1.12 Christians involved in church construction or reconstruction/repair of churches that were previously attacked continue to face societal violence. An attack in September 2023 on property belonging to a Christian rumoured to be building a church was reported by 2 sources, one of which – Coptic Solidarity – suggested such incidents occur frequently (see [Societal violence and discrimination](#)).
- 3.1.13 In the country guidance case of [MS \(Coptic Christians : Egypt\) CG \[2013\] UKUT 611 \(IAC\)](#), heard on 17 and 18 September 2013 and promulgated on 3 December 2013, the Upper Tribunal (UT) held:
- ‘Coptic Christians in Egypt... are not at a general risk of persecution or ill-treatment contrary to Article 3, ECHR.
- ‘However, on current evidence there are some areas where Coptic Christians will face a real risk of persecution or ill-treatment contrary to Article 3. In general these will be (a) areas outside the large cities; (b) where radical Islamists have a strong foothold; and (c) where there have been recent attacks on Coptic Christians or their churches, businesses or properties.

‘On the evidence before the Upper Tribunal, the following are particular risk categories in the sense that those falling within them will generally be able to show a real risk of persecution or treatment contrary to Article 3, at least in their home area:

- (i) converts to Coptic Christianity;
- (ii) persons who are involved in construction or reconstruction/repair of churches that have been the target for an attack or attacks;
- (iii) those accused of proselytising where the accusation is serious and not casual;
- (iv) those accused of being physically or emotionally involved with a Muslim woman where the accusation is made seriously and not casually.

‘Coptic Christian women in Egypt are not in general at real risk of persecution or ill-treatment, although they face difficulties additional to other women, in the form of sometimes being the target of disappearances, forced abduction and forced conversion.

‘However, depending on the particular circumstances of the case, Coptic Christian women aged between 14-25 years who lack a male protector may be at such risk.

‘If a claimant is able to establish that in their home area they fall within one or more of the risk categories identified in 3 (i)-(iv) above or that they come from an area where the local Coptic population faces a real risk of persecution, it will not necessarily follow that they qualify as refugees or as beneficiaries of subsidiary protection or Article 3 ECHR protection. That will depend on whether they can show they would not have a viable internal relocation alternative. In such cases there will be need for a fact-specific assessment but, in general terms, resettlement in an area where Islamists are not strong would appear to be a viable option.

‘None of the above necessarily precludes a Coptic Christian in Egypt from being able to establish a real risk of persecution or ill-treatment in the particular circumstances of their case, e.g. if such an individual has been the target of attacks because he or she is a Coptic Christian’ (paras 151(1-7)).

3.1.14 The UT in [MS](#) considered evidence largely based on events in the first half of 2013 and in the immediate aftermath of the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi by the military in July 2013, which was followed by a rise in sectarian violence. Morsi was replaced by President Sisi who, in the years since, has consolidated his and the military’s hold over government and the country more generally, and taken a hard line against armed groups, including those that have targeted Christian communities (see Country Policy and Information Note on [Egypt: Opposition to the State](#)).

3.1.15 The Country Guidance in [MS](#) relates to Coptic Christians but the UT did not define ‘Copt’ or ‘Coptic’, terms which according to the country of origin information are variously used to denote the following in Egypt:

- members of the Coptic Orthodox Church specifically, or
- members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Coptic Evangelical Church and Coptic Roman Catholic Church, or

- Christians of all denominations (see [Terminology](#) and [Demography](#)).
- 3.1.16 With the exception of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which are not recognised in Egypt (see [Christian denominations without legal recognition](#)), the sources consulted in this note do not suggest differences in treatment between the various Christian denominations by state or non-state actors (see [Bibliography](#)). Therefore for the purposes of this note the findings of [MS](#) are considered applicable to all Christian denominations recognised under Egyptian law.
- 3.1.17 The UT in [MS](#) did not consider the treatment faced by Christian activists who criticised the state. The government is intolerant of actual or perceived criticism and is likely to treat Christian activists in line with its approach to critics generally, who may be at risk of persecution or serious harm depending on the facts of their case.
- 3.1.18 For more information and an assessment of risk for critics of the state, see the Country policy and information note, [Egypt: Opposition to state](#).
- 3.1.19 For further general guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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4. Protection

- 4.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, they are unlikely to be able to obtain protection. Where the person fears societal actors, the state is unlikely to be willing and able to provide protection which is accessible to the person.
- 4.1.2 In [MS](#), while the UT found that there were some examples of the police and security forces being willing and able to prevent attacks, and instances of Copts effectively availing themselves of legal remedies (paragraph 122), it went on to observe '[t]he situation of Coptic Christians is such, in our opinion, that where an individual appellant can establish a real risk of serious harm, by virtue of some characteristic additional to merely being a Coptic Christian, it is quite unlikely he or she will have available protection, even when we limit that to mean protection against violations of non-derogable rights [because Egypt had been under a state of emergency]' (paragraph 121). The UT went on to hold '...there is inadequate state protection of Coptic Christians in Egypt...' (paragraph 151(1)).
- 4.1.3 The current context is different, with the most recent state of emergency having been lifted in 2021. There are also some indications of increased state assistance, with individuals who kill Christians sometimes being convicted and executed or receiving long prison terms. Authorities also occasionally help locate Coptic women who have been abducted (see [Protection from and prosecution of actions against Christians](#)). However, particularly in rural and/or poor areas such as Upper Egypt and the Nile Delta, police are unlikely to act on reports of attacks on Christians (see [Protection from and prosecution of actions against Christians](#)). When police do act, they sometimes arrest victims as well as, or instead of, those who instigated the attack, and victims are often pressured to agree to reconciliation sessions with their assailants (see [Reconciliation committees](#)).

- 4.1.4 As the availability of police protection is inconsistent, there are not very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from the findings in [MS](#).
- 4.1.5 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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5. Internal relocation

- 5.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from state actors, it is unlikely to be possible for them to relocate to escape that risk.
- 5.1.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state or hybrid actors, in general internal relocation is likely to be possible but will depend on the facts of the case.
- 5.1.3 Egypt is a large country, 4 times the size of the UK, with an estimated population of about 110 million. The population of the capital, Cairo, is estimated at around 22 million, while just under 5.6 million live in Alexandria. People are generally able to move around freely, although sources noted a woman may need the permission of her husband or other male guardian to relocate. Movement is restricted in sparsely populated North Sinai and to a lesser extent in other governorates along Egypt's borders. There may be bureaucratic barriers for individuals seeking to change their place of employment or education (see [Internal relocation](#)).
- 5.1.4 One source reported Christians may find it difficult to access housing in Cairo and Alexandria unless they have family or other connections there. Coptic Christians resettled by the government to escape sectarian violence in Upper Egypt tend to relocate to other villages. The ability to travel to Cairo and Alexandria from Upper Egypt depends on a family's circumstances or resources, and elderly people's reliance on family networks means most will not relocate to those cities. Christian converts have reportedly relocated within Egypt (see [Internal relocation](#) and [Converts from Islam](#)).
- 5.1.5 The UT held in [MS](#) that whether internal relocation is viable is 'a fact-specific assessment but, in general terms, resettlement in an area where Islamists are not strong would appear to be a viable option...' (para 151(7)). The available country information does not provide very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from this finding (see [Internal relocation](#)).
- 5.1.6 For more information on freedom of movement within Egypt, see the Country Information Note [Egypt: Background Note](#).
- 5.1.7 For further guidance on internal relocation and factors to be taken into account, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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6. Certification

- 6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and](#)

[Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\).](#)

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Country information

About the country information

This contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment.

The structure and content of this section follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

This document is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

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section updated: 1 November 2023

7. Background

7.1 Terminology

7.1.1 Encyclopaedia Britannica stated: 'Copt [is] a member of Egypt's indigenous Christian ethno-religious community. [However] [t]he terms Copt and Coptic are variously used to denote either the members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the largest Christian body in Egypt, or as generic terms for Egyptian Christians...'¹

7.1.2 Christianity Today, a non-profit organisation and 'global media ministry'², stated, 'Generally understood as "the Christians of Egypt," Copts comprise Orthodox, evangelicals, and Catholics...'³

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7.2 Christian community

7.2.1 The Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade country report on Egypt, dated May 2019 (2019 DFAT report), stated:

'Christianity was established in Egypt in the first century and is one of the oldest centres of Christianity in the world. Although there are twelve officially recognised Christian denominations in Egypt (four Orthodox, seven Catholic and one Protestant), the vast majority of Christians in Egypt are members of the Coptic Orthodox Church. All those belonging to recognised Christian denominations are identified as Christian on their national ID cards. While Christians reside throughout the country, they are particularly concentrated in Upper Egypt (the southern part of Egypt) and in major cities such as Cairo and Alexandria. Suburbs in Cairo and other cities and some villages are sometimes regarded or described as "Christian areas", but few are exclusively Christian (or Muslim). Egyptian Christians are politically and socio-economically diverse: they hold varied professions; range from the

¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Editors, '[Copt](#)', updated 25 August 2023

² Christianity Today, '[Our Ministry](#)', 2023

³ Christianity Today, '[Who are the Copts?](#)', 15 June 2012

very poor to the very rich; and have attained a range of education levels.

‘Christians generally dress similarly to Muslim Egyptians. In urban areas, however, Christian women are more likely than Muslim women to leave their hair uncovered. Christian women living in rural or conservative areas are more likely to cover their hair, but generally do not wear the Islamic hijab. Christians tend to have identifiable names. Some Christians tattoo small crosses on the inside of their wrists or between their thumb and forefinger as a mark of their identity, often following visits to monasteries or holy sites. Not all Christians have these tattoos and it is not a mandatory religious practice.’⁴

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7.3 Demography

7.3.1 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in its ‘2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter’ (2023 USCIRF annual report), dated May 2023, covering events in 2022, stated: ‘Egypt’s population is approximately 107.7 million... At an estimated 10 percent or more, Egypt’s indigenous Copts constitute the largest Christian minority in the Middle East and North Africa.’⁵

7.3.2 Encyclopaedia Britannica stated: ‘Copts constitute up to 10 percent of the population of Egypt.’⁶

7.3.3 The BBC stated, ‘The Coptic Orthodox Church is the main Christian Church in Egypt, where it has between 6 and 11 million members’ and that most Coptic Christians live in Egypt⁷.

7.3.4 Open Doors International, a global NGO network supporting ‘persecuted’ Christians⁸, in a report ‘Egypt: Full Country Dossier’ (2023 Open Doors dossier), dated January 2023, based on various sources including data and analysis from the Open Doors World Watch List (WWL 2023, reporting period 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022), stated: ‘The Coptic Orthodox Church remains the largest Christian denomination in Egypt... The Coptic Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Coptic Roman Catholic Church are the two other main denominations in Egypt.’⁹

7.3.5 The US State Department Report on International Religious Freedom for Egypt 2022 (USSD religious freedom report 2022), dated 15 May 2023, stated: ‘Most experts and media sources estimate approximately ... 10 percent [of the population] is Christian... Approximately 90 percent of Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church, according to Christian leaders.’¹⁰

7.3.6 The same report stated:

‘Other Christian communities together constitute less than 2 percent of the population. These include Armenian Apostolic, Catholic (Coptic Catholic,

⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Reports - Egypt](#)’ (section 3.31, 3.32), 17 June 2019

⁵ USCIRF, ‘[2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter](#)’ (page 55), May 2023

⁶ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Editors, ‘[Copt](#)’, updated 25 August 2023

⁷ BBC, ‘[Coptic Orthodox Church](#)’, 25 June 2009

⁸ Open Doors, ‘[About Us - Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide...](#)’, undated

⁹ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 25), January 2023

¹⁰ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 1), 15 May 2023

Armenian Catholic, Chaldean, Melkite, Maronite, Latin, and Syrian), Orthodox (Greek and Syrian), and Anglican/Episcopalian and other Protestants. Most Protestant denominations are members of the umbrella group the Protestant Churches of Egypt, also known as the General Evangelical Council. There are an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Jehovah's Witnesses and fewer than 100 members of the Church of Jesus Christ, the vast majority of whom are expatriates. Christians reside throughout the country.¹¹

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section updated: 1 November 2023

8. Legal framework

8.1 Constitution

8.1.1 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 observed:

'The constitution states that "freedom of belief is absolute" and "the freedom of practicing religious rituals and establishing worship places for the followers of divine religions [i.e., the 3 Abrahamic faiths: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism] is a right regulated by law." The constitution states citizens "are equal before the law" and criminalizes discrimination and "incitement to hatred" based upon religion.

'The constitution specifies Islam as the state religion and the principles of sharia as the main source of legislation but stipulates the canonical laws of Jews and Christians form the basis of legislation governing their personal status, religious affairs, and selection of spiritual leaders. The government officially recognizes Sunni Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, and allows only their adherents to publicly practice their religion and build houses of worship. "Disdaining and disrespecting" the three Abrahamic religions and supporting "extremist" ideologies are crimes.'¹²

8.1.2 The same report further stated, 'The constitution prohibits the exercise of political activity or the formation of political parties on the basis of religion.'¹³

8.1.3 For more information on specific laws relevant to Copts, see [Christian conversion and proselytising laws](#), [Hate speech](#), [Personal status and adoption laws](#), [State policy and initiatives](#), [Prosecution under blasphemy laws](#) and [Christians in public life](#).

8.1.4 For more information about the constitution in general, see the Country Information Note Egypt: Country Background Note.

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8.2 Blasphemy laws

8.2.1 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:

'The penal code, while not addressing blasphemy by name, states [in article 98(f)] that "disdaining and disrespecting" any of the "heavenly religions" (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) is punishable by six months' to five years'

¹¹ USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (section 1), 15 May 2023

¹² USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (Executive Summary), 15 May 2023

¹³ USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (section 2), 15 May 2023

imprisonment or fines of at least 500 Egyptian pounds (EGP) (\$20) [GBP 12.69¹⁴]. Using religion to promote “extremist ideology” with the aim of inciting strife or contempt of the “heavenly religions” or their sects or harming national unity carries penalties ranging from six months’ to five years’ imprisonment. The law is commonly applied in cases alleging contempt of Sunni Islam and Christianity. The cybercrime law penalizes “violating the family principles of Egyptian Society” with a minimum imprisonment of six months and a fine of 50,000-100,000 EGP (\$2,000-4,000) [GBP 1,270 to 2,540¹⁵]. According to civil society organizations, the term “family principles” is vague and is often invoked to punish perceived blasphemy.’¹⁶

8.2.2 The same report observed, ‘Human rights groups called the religious defamation laws vague, overly broad, and a threat to freedom of expression and called for their repeal.’¹⁷

8.2.3 The report further stated:

‘The Prime Minister has the authority to stop circulation of books that “denigrate religions,” referring to the three recognized Abrahamic faiths. Ministries may obtain court orders to ban or confiscate books and works of art. The cabinet may ban works it deems offensive to public morals, detrimental to religion, or likely to cause a breach of the peace. The Islamic Research Academy of al-Azhar [the main authority on theology and Islamic affairs] has the legal authority to censor and confiscate any publications dealing with the Quran and the authoritative Islamic traditions (sunnah) and to confiscate publications, tapes, speeches, and artistic materials deemed inconsistent with Islamic law.’¹⁸

8.2.4 Minority Rights Group International, a group of organisations campaigning on behalf of minorities and indigenous peoples¹⁹, in a report ‘The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities’ (2023 MRG culture report), dated 2 March 2023, based on various sources, noted that blasphemy article 98(f) ‘does not conform with constitutional standards for drafting penal legislation, because its vague formulation can be interpreted in multiple ways that can be contradictory to the law’s original objectives...’²⁰

8.2.5 See also [Prosecution under blasphemy laws](#).

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8.3 Christian conversion and proselytising laws

8.3.1 The 2019 DFAT report observed:

‘There is no statutory prohibition in Egypt on converting from one religion to another. In order to convert to Christianity, authorities require documents from the receiving church, identity documents and fingerprints. Checks are also made on criminal history as conversion often requires a change in name. Converts to Islam will generally have their conversions recognised

¹⁴ Xe, ‘[Currency converter](#)’, 1 EGP = 0.0253938 GBP, converted 14 August 2023

¹⁵ Xe, [currency converter](#), 1 EGP = 0.0253938 GBP, converted 14 August 2023

¹⁶ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

¹⁷ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (Executive Summary), 15 May 2023

¹⁸ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

¹⁹ MRG, [Home page](#) (Who we are), undated

²⁰ MRG, ‘[The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities](#)’, 2 March 2023

and their identity cards changed accordingly without difficulty or delay. However, courts and government officials have generally interpreted sharia as prohibiting conversion from Islam. Authorities have at times reportedly refused to recognise such conversions, including through failing to amend a convert's national identity card (and corresponding record) to reflect their chosen faith. This has significant ramifications for personal status issues, such as marriage and divorce, and the state's view of the religious identity of any children born to a convert. Egyptian children obtain a national identity card at age 16, with their religious identity matching that of their parents (their Muslim parent, in the case of a mixed marriage between a Muslim man and Christian woman).

'A 2011 court ruling allowed Christians who converted to Islam and then back to Christianity (generally in order to more easily access divorce) to amend their identity cards to reflect their return to their original faith. DFAT understands, however, that only a small number of such individuals have been permitted to do so, and that several thousand others are still waiting to have their cards changed back.'²¹

8.3.2 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:

'Neither the constitution nor the civil or penal codes prohibit apostasy from Islam, nor do they outlaw efforts to proselytize. The law states individuals may change their religion. The government recognizes conversion to Islam, but generally does not recognize conversions from Islam to any other religion, except in the case of individuals who were not born Muslim but later converted to Islam, according to a Ministry of Interior decree pursuant to a court order. Reverting to Christianity requires presentation of a document from the receiving church, an identity card, and fingerprints. After a determination is made that the intent of the change – which often also entails a name change – is not to evade prosecution for a crime committed under the Muslim name, a new identity document is issued with the Christian name and religious designation. In cases in which Muslims not born Muslim convert from Islam, their minor children, and in some cases adult children who were minors when their parents converted, remain classified as Muslims. When these children reach the age of 18, they have the option of converting to Christianity and having that reflected on their identity cards.'²²

8.3.3 'Conversion from Islam to Christianity ("apostasy") is not officially forbidden by law. However, a key ruling by the Cairo Administrative Court in 2008 stated that the freedom to practice one's religion is subject to certain limitations, and affirmed that conversion from Islam to another faith is a violation of the principles of Islam and therefore not allowed.

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8.4 Anti-discrimination laws

8.4.1 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:

'The penal code criminalizes discrimination based on religion and defines it as including "any action, or lack of action, that leads to discrimination

²¹ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)' (section 3.7, 3.8), 17 June 2019

²² USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (section 2), 15 May 2023

between people or against a sect due to... religion or belief.” The law applies to religions “whose rituals are publicly held,” which technically applies only to the three Abrahamic religions. The law stipulates imprisonment for a term determined by the judge, a fine of no less than 30,000 EGP (\$1,200) [GBP 761.58²³] and no more than 50,000 EGP (\$2,000) [GBP 1,270²⁴], or both as penalties for discrimination. If the perpetrator is a government employee, the law states that the imprisonment should be no less than three months and the fine no less than 50,000 EGP (\$2,000) [GBP 1,270²⁵] and no more than 100,000 EGP (\$4,000) [GBP 2,540²⁶].²⁷

8.4.2 See also [State policies and initiatives](#).

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8.5 Hate speech

8.5.1 The 2023 MRG culture report stated:

‘Egypt is committed to prohibiting hate speech under the Constitution. This follows on from the country’s ratification of two binding international legal texts concerning the prohibition of hate speech. These are the ICCPR [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Thus, Egypt is obliged to implement a ban on hate speech under Article 93 of the Egyptian Constitution. The article stipulates that the state’s adherence to international human rights conventions should be given force of law. Moreover, Article 53 of the Constitution criminalizes discrimination and incitement to hatred. The Constitution recognizes diversity within society, since it bans discrimination based on religion, belief, sex, origin, race, colour, language, social level or disability.

‘The Penal Code does not devote a chapter or section to acts of hatred, nevertheless, it restricts some hate speech forms[,] Article 176 clearly stipulating the prohibition of incitement to discrimination based on their religion, belief, sex, origin, race, colour or language...

‘Hate speech that constitutes incitement to discrimination or violence falls under the provisions of Articles 95 and 96...’²⁸

8.5.2 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:

‘On June 18 [2022], International Day for Combatting Hate Speech, Grand Imam al-Tayyeb called for a review of the adequacy and effectiveness of legislation to combat intolerance and hatred. The Grand Imam conveyed his message via Facebook and Twitter posts in Arabic, English, and Hindi. He stated the commemoration came at a time of rising intolerance and hatred against Muslims as well as mockery of their symbols and religious principles.’²⁹

²³ Xe, [currency converter](#), 1 EGP = 0.0253938 GBP, converted 14 August 2023

²⁴ Xe, [currency converter](#), 1 EGP = 0.0253938 GBP, converted 14 August 2023

²⁵ Xe, [currency converter](#), 1 EGP = 0.0253938 GBP, converted 14 August 2023

²⁶ Xe, [currency converter](#), 1 EGP = 0.0253938 GBP, converted 14 August 2023

²⁷ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

²⁸ MRG, ‘[The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities](#)’ (page 22), 2 March 2023

²⁹ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

- 8.5.3 See also [Constitution](#), [Anti-discrimination laws](#) and [Protection from and prosecution of actions against Christians](#).

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8.6 Personal status and adoption laws

- 8.6.1 USCIRF, in its report 'Country Update: Egypt' (2023 USCIRF update), dated 4 August 2023, based on USCIRF observations during a visit to Egypt in May 2023 and written sources, stated:

'Following decades of advocacy and negotiations, an Egyptian judicial committee completed a draft personal status law for Christians in 2022. The Coptic Orthodox Church, along with representatives from other Coptic churches, including Catholic, Evangelical, and Anglican, has contributed to ongoing drafting efforts for laws related to Christian marriage, divorce, child custody – though not adoption – and inheritance. In mid-2023 – reportedly in part due to the government's parallel work on an Islamic personal status law revision – Egypt's Cabinet had not yet reviewed and approved the law for voting by parliament and potential passage into law. In the meantime, Christians in Egypt remain potentially – and sometimes inconsistently – subject to Muslim personal status laws, which often differ significantly from those of Christian religious traditions. Christian leaders representing the five major denominations in Egypt have stated their support for the draft Christian personal status law. Egyptian government officials with whom USCIRF met noted little tangible progress in the actual passage of the law, though they expressed enthusiasm about its potential passage as evidence of greater religious tolerance in Egypt. Some activists with whom USCIRF met also raised concerns that the personal status law would concentrate religious power in Christian religious establishments that are within the influence of the Egyptian state, restricting further the individual freedom of religion or belief of members of these communities.'³⁰

- 8.6.2 For information on proposals to change the personal status laws, see [State policies and initiatives](#).

- 8.6.3 With regard to inheritance, the USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated, 'In 2017, an appellate court ruled that applying sharia to non-Muslims in inheritance matters violated the section of the constitution stating that personal status matters for Christian and Jewish communities are governed by their respective religious doctrines.' However, the report further observed, 'The law generally follows sharia in matters of inheritance,' and noted, 'The Constitutional Court has not ruled on this issue.'³¹

- 8.6.4 The privately-owned Egypt Independent, the sister English-language publication of Egypt's independent Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper³², in an article 'Egypt court gives Coptic woman inheritance equivalent to man', dated 11 April 2023, reported:

'The Cairo Court of Appeals for Family Affairs issued a judicial ruling applying the principles of Christianity in dividing the inheritance of a Christian

³⁰ USCIRF, '[Egypt Country Update](#),' 4 August 2023

³¹ USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (section 2), 15 May 2023

³² Egypt Independent, '[About Us](#)', 2023

family, local media reports said...

'The known law in Egypt and Islamic Sharia gives the son double the daughter's share in inheritance and in this case it was a matter of concern for her based on her circumstances.

'The complainant explained that the heirs of her deceased father are all Coptic Orthodox, and that the provisions of Christianity should be applicable in this case. Her claim was that she deserves a share equivalent to her brothers. The appeals court overturned the original judgment and allowed her an equal share.'³³

8.6.5 With regard to inheritance in interfaith relationships, the USSD HR report 2022 stated, '... Christian widows of Muslim men have no inheritance rights.'³⁴

8.6.6 For further information regarding inheritance, marriage, divorce and adoption, see the [2023 USCIRF update](#), the [2023 Freedom House report](#), the [2022 USSD religious freedom report](#) and the [2022 USSD human rights report](#). See also [Abductions, interfaith relationships and coerced conversion to Islam](#).

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8.7 Identity cards

8.7.1 The 2023 USCIRF update reported:

'Egypt's national identity cards are crucial for civic participation in the country, and numerous governmental and non-governmental institutions request them for formal transactions (e.g., booking hotel rooms). Egypt's government allows ID holders to list one of three recognized religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) or – partly in response to past Baha'i advocacy efforts – a "dash" on the religion line of the card. While the dash allows members of non-recognized faiths to avoid falsely claiming membership in a different religion, both this option and the listing of religion on ID cards more broadly create restrictions on freedom of religion or belief for Egyptians. For example, Baha'is who use a dash on their ID cards have faced questioning by officials to whom they show the cards. Some Baha'is report that such conditions have improved in recent years. However, the existence of the religion listing on ID cards continues to leave not only Bahai's [sic] but all religious minorities vulnerable to exposure and potential discrimination when presenting their card.'³⁵

8.7.2 In a joint report 'A Crisis by Design: The Systemic Nature of Human Rights Violations in Egypt: Mid-term UPR Report – January 2023' (EIPR and others Mid-term UPR Report), dated January 2023 and based on various sources, Cairo-based non-government organisation Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) and 9 other human rights organisations working in Egypt or overseas noted that in November 2019, after receiving human rights recommendations from United Nations member states as part of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, 'Egypt

³³ Egypt Independent, '[Egypt court gives Coptic woman inheritance...](#)', 11 April 2023

³⁴ USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights...](#)' (section 6), 20 March 2023

³⁵ USCIRF, '[Egypt Country Update](#)', 4 August 2023

rejected two recommendations regarding the removal of the religion box from identity cards.^{'36}

- 8.7.3 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated: 'The Ministry of Interior issues national identity cards for citizens that include official religious designations... Although the government designates Jehovah's Witnesses as "Christian" on identity cards, a presidential decree bans their religious activities... The Minister of Interior has the authority to issue executive regulations determining what data national identity cards must list.'³⁷
- 8.7.4 The USSD report further stated, 'On June 25 [2022], the Administrative Court of the State Council ruled it had no jurisdiction in a lawsuit Coptic human rights attorneys filed in 2021 seeking removal of the "religion" field from national identity cards.'³⁸

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8.8 Christian denominations without legal recognition

- 8.8.1 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:
'Islamic, Christian, and Jewish groups may request official recognition from the government, which gives previously unrecognized religious groups the right to be governed by their own canonical laws, practice religious rituals, establish houses of worship, and import religious literature. To obtain official recognition, a religious group must submit a request to the Ministry of the Interior's Administrative Affairs Department. The department then determines whether the group poses a threat to national unity or social peace. As part of this determination, the department consults leading religious institutions, including the Coptic Orthodox Church and al-Azhar. The President then reviews and adjudicates the registration application.'³⁹
- 8.8.2 Referring to events in 2022, the report further stated: 'The government continued to allow Baha'is, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Shia Muslims to worship privately in small numbers, but it continued to deny their requests to hold public religious gatherings or build houses of worship.'⁴⁰
- 8.8.3 The report also noted: 'According to a contributor at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy [TIMEP], an international NGO focused on human rights, the government continued to ban the importation and sale of Baha'i and Jehovah's Witnesses literature and authorized customs officials to confiscate religious materials from these groups' adherents.'⁴¹
- 8.8.4 See [Personal status and adoption laws](#) and [State treatment and non-blasphemy prosecutions](#).

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8.9 Church building law

³⁶ EIPR and others, 'Egypt: Crisis by design', January 2023

³⁷ USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (section 2), 15 May 2023

³⁸ USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (section 2), 15 May 2023

³⁹ USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (section 2), 15 May 2023

⁴⁰ USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (section 2), 15 May 2023

⁴¹ USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (section 2), 15 May 2023

- 8.9.1 The US Congressional Research Service, in its report ‘Egypt: Background and US Relations’ (the 2023 USCRS report), updated 2 May 2023, based on various sources, stated, ‘In 2016, parliament approved a church construction law (Law 80 of 2016) that expedited the government approval process for the construction and restoration of Coptic churches, among other structures.’⁴²
- 8.9.2 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 noted that this law:
 ‘... delegates the power to issue legal permits and to authorize church construction or renovation to governors of the country’s 27 governorates. The governor must respond within four months of receipt of an application for legalization; any refusal must include a written justification. The law does not provide for review or appeal of a refusal, nor does it specify recourse if a governor fails to respond within the required timeframe. The law also includes provisions to legalize existing unlicensed churches. It stipulates that while a request to license an existing building for use as a church is pending, the use of the building to conduct church services and rites may not be prevented. Under the law, the size of new churches continues to depend on a government determination of the “number and need” of Christians in the area.’⁴³
- 8.9.3 Similarly, the 2019 DFAT report noted: ‘The law requires the size of a church to be “commensurate with” the number of Christians in the area. Because there are no official statistics in relation to the size of religious communities, determining the size of local Christian communities is difficult and most likely arbitrary.’⁴⁴
- 8.9.4 With regard to differences between regulatory treatment for church and mosque construction, the USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:
 ‘Construction of new churches must meet specific land registration procedures and building codes and is subject by law to greater government regulation than that applied to the construction of new mosques.
 ‘Under a separate law governing the construction of mosques, the Ministry of Awqaf [Islamic Endowments] reviews and approves building permits. A 2001 cabinet decree includes a list of 10 provisions requiring that new mosques built after that date must, among other conditions, be a minimum of 500 meters (1,640 feet) from the nearest other mosque, have a ground surface of at least 175 square meters (1,884 square feet), and be built only in areas where “the existing mosques do not accommodate the number of residents in the area.” The law does not require Ministry of Awqaf approval for mosque renovations.’⁴⁵
- 8.9.5 TIMEP, in a report ‘Egypt’s Religious Minorities: The Legal Framework’, dated 6 January 2022, noted: ‘... the law’s [Law No. 80/2016 on the Construction and Repair of Churches] silence on a number of essential issues has created space for arbitrary and discretionary implementation. For example, the law does not provide recourse for religious communities who

⁴² USCRS, ‘[Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations](#)’, updated 2 May 2023

⁴³ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

⁴⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country information report Egypt](#)’ (section 3.18), 17 June 2019

⁴⁵ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

do not receive responses within the four month period. It does not indicate whether there is an opportunity to appeal a rejection decision should a denial be issued. The law also does not stipulate a deadline for the review of previously-unlicensed churches, leaving a number of communities in limbo.⁴⁶

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section updated: 1 November 2023

9. State treatment

9.1 State attitude

9.1.1 The 2023 USCIRF update reported, 'The administration of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has named religious tolerance as a goal for society...'⁴⁷

9.1.2 With regard to the establishing of Sisi's relationship with the Coptic Orthodox Church, TIMEP, in an article 'Coptic Voices in the Face of State Narrative', dated 14 January 2022, commented:

'An important part of El-Sisi's heroic tale around saving the country has relied on saving the Coptic community from the Islamists. He invited Pope Tawadros II to attend his July 3 [2013] speech [marking the toppling of Islamist President Morsi⁴⁸], presented him as a part [of] the post-Brotherhood Egypt to further promote his tale, and gain support at a time he desperately needed legitimacy for the takeover. A good relationship between El-Sisi and the Pope was established, fostered by exchanges of support.'⁴⁹

9.1.3 With regard to the current relationship, the 2023 USCIRF update stated: 'The Egyptian government maintains a relationship with the Coptic Orthodox Church, the largest Christian denomination in Egypt, and with other Christian institutions and leaders.'⁵⁰

9.1.4 The 2021 USCIRF country update noted that Sisi's 'now annual tradition of attending the Coptic Orthodox Christmas Mass, publicly recognizing the Christian community's celebration of Easter, and speaking openly since 2015 about the need for greater inclusion of non-Muslims in Egyptian society...' were 'important symbolic steps toward improving religious freedom conditions for the country's sizeable Coptic Christian minority'⁵¹.

9.1.5 Egypt Independent, in an article 'Egypt's Dar al-Iftaa steps in row over celebrating Christmas', dated 21 December 2021, stated:

'Egypt's Dar al-Iftaa, the government's principal Islamic legal institution for issuing fatwas (non-binding religious edicts), has responded to controversy surrounding celebrating Christmas in Egypt, a majority Muslim country, coinciding with Coptic celebrations for Christmas and New Year's Eve.

'Dar al-Iftaa clarified that the ruling on celebrating Christmas and the ruling on celebrating the New Year is "permissible", as it is the day of the birth of

⁴⁶ TIMEP, '[Egypt's Religious Minorities: The Legal Framework...](#)', 6 January 2022

⁴⁷ USCIRF, '[Egypt Country Update](#)', 4 August 2023

⁴⁸ The Guardian, '[Egyptian military removes President Mohamed Morsi](#)', 4 July 2013

⁴⁹ TIMEP, '[Coptic Voices in the Face of State Narrative...](#)', 14 January 2022

⁵⁰ USCIRF, '[Egypt Country Update](#)', 4 August 2023

⁵¹ USCIRF, '[2021 Country Update: Egypt...](#)', November 2021

Prophet Jesus Christ, son of Mary...

'Dar Al Iftaa added in an official fatwa on its website issued by the Grand Mufti Shawqi Allam that celebrating Christmas recognizes the miraculous birth of Prophet Jesus Christ, son of Mary, peace be upon him, who was immortalized by the Quran.

'The institute stated in another Fatwa celebrating Christmas is permissible as Muslims believe in prophets as well.'⁵²

- 9.1.6 Privately-owned news outlet Egypt Today, in an article 'Sisi at Cathedral of Nativity of Christ: Our love for each other must continue without discrimination', dated 6 January 2023, reported:

'Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al Sisi congratulated Egyptians on Christmas during visiting the Cathedral of Nativity of Christ in the New Administrative Capital...

'Sisi praised Pope Tawadros [sic] wisdom saying: "all respect, and appreciation for Pope Tawadros, you all don't know how much love and appreciation [I] have for him.

'He added that: "our love for each other must continue without discrimination, this must be ingrained in our souls and in all generations. We are one."⁵³

- 9.1.7 The 2023 Open Doors dossier stated, 'President al-Sisi regularly speaks positively about Egypt's Christian community and continues efforts to create one Egyptian identity, which includes both Muslims and Christians...'⁵⁴

- 9.1.8 Similarly, the 2023 USCERS report stated: 'Since taking office, President Sisi has publicly called for greater Muslim-Christian coexistence and national unity. In January 2019, he inaugurated Egypt's Coptic Cathedral of Nativity in the new administrative capital east of Cairo saying, "This is an important moment in our history... We are one and we will remain one."⁵⁵

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9.2 State policies and initiatives

- 9.2.1 USCIRF, in its report 'Tolerance, Religious Freedom, and Authoritarianism: Implications for US Policy' (USCIRF tolerance and religious freedom report 2022), dated December 2022, listed Egypt among countries it termed '[a]uthoritarian states that are substantial investors in RTP [religious tolerance promotion]', and drew a distinction between RTP as 'primarily... initiatives that focus on reforming relations among citizens from different religious communities within a state' and freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), which it noted 'refers to a state itself undertaking systemic changes, reforming laws, and implementing new policies to comply with international human rights laws.'⁵⁶

- 9.2.2 The report further noted:

⁵² Egypt Independent, '[Egypt's Dar al-Iftaa steps in row...](#)', 21 December 2021

⁵³ Egypt Today, '[Sisi at Cathedral of Nativity of Christ...](#)', 6 January 2023

⁵⁴ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 6), January 2023

⁵⁵ USCERS, '[Egypt: Background and US relations](#)', updated 2 May 2023

⁵⁶ USCIRF, '[Tolerance, Religious Freedom, and Authoritarianism](#)' (page 2), December 2022

‘RTP and FoRB are both meaningful tools of statecraft, but there are important differences between them. RTP shifts the burden of responsibility for social peace onto citizens, a dynamic that can occur within both authoritarian and democratic states, while FoRB maintains the burden of responsibility on the state to undertake and implement a range of reforms to meet standards to which they have agreed in international treaties and accords.

‘Many authoritarian states’ RTP initiatives considered in this report have an internal focus, such as the creation of state-approved institutions ostensibly aimed at fostering mutual toleration and understanding among their citizens of different faiths. However, some authoritarian states direct their RTP efforts at an international audience. These authoritarian states host high-profile international conferences attended by prominent religious leaders and diplomats and organized by prominent state-approved institutions... Some of the authoritarian states in this report also build and renovate grand houses of worship for use by religious minorities with a history of suffering. At the same time, the [USCIRF], human rights organizations and the U.S. Department of State (DoS) have sharply criticized religious freedom conditions as well as the wider human rights environment in these states. Moreover, USCIRF has also recommended in previous years that many of these states be designated Countries of Particular of Concern (CPC) or placed on a Special Watch List (SWL) and sanctioned in accordance with the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). Consequently, there is a clear disjuncture between the high-profile RTP initiatives implemented by the authoritarian states in this report and the fulfillment of their international obligations to ensure freedom of religion or belief.’⁵⁷

9.2.3 The report noted that one reason for the emergence of international RTP in the countries concerned was ‘these authoritarian states... learning to use a new language of religious “tolerance talk,” which is part of a wider dynamic that has previously been termed “authoritarian upgrading...”⁵⁸

9.2.4 The report noted, ‘Authoritarian governments engage in RTP when it furthers their primary goal of remaining in power, in many instances with the intent of maintaining or bettering relations with the United States,’ adding that declarations such as the Abu Dhabi Declaration, signed by the Grand Imam of al-Azhar and Pope Francis in 2019, ‘...illustrate these dynamics at work.’⁵⁹

9.2.5 Referring to the National Human Rights Strategy, an initiative introduced in September 2021, the report observed:

‘... the document suggests that the RTP elements are top-down, state-led initiatives in the realm of curricula oversight, censorship of certain Islamic materials, and greater surveillance of mosques and control of sermon topics... The RTP elements of the national strategy can be understood as an authoritarian state further expanding its control of religious life. This approach is in contrast to promoting FoRB, which entails the state itself making reforms that would lead to a reduction in state control over religious

⁵⁷ USCIRF, [‘Tolerance, Religious Freedom, and Authoritarianism’](#) (page 2), December 2022

⁵⁸ USCIRF, [‘Tolerance, Religious Freedom, and Authoritarianism’](#) (page 8), December 2022

⁵⁹ USCIRF, [‘Tolerance, Religious Freedom, and Authoritarianism’](#) (page 5), December 2022

life.’⁶⁰

9.2.6 The report further stated:

‘Amid... RTP efforts by the Egyptian state, USCIRF maintains its recommendation that Egypt be included on the SWL for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of international religious freedom... Moreover, in line with defining RTP as initiatives that do not require authoritarian states to make legal, systemic changes, USCIRF reporting also highlights the use of “customary reconciliation” councils in the aftermath of acts of violence against Coptic Christians. These councils represent instances of interpersonal tolerance and reconciliation being foregrounded at the expense of upholding the rule of law.’⁶¹

9.2.7 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:

‘The quasigovernmental National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), whose members are by law appointed by parliament, is charged with strengthening protections, raising awareness, and ensuring the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom. It also is charged with monitoring enforcement and application of international agreements pertaining to human rights. The council’s mandate includes investigating reports of alleged violations of religious freedom.’⁶²

9.2.8 With regard to the establishment of a commission to address discrimination, the USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated, ‘The constitution mandates that the state eliminate all forms of discrimination through an independent commission, to be established by parliament; parliament has not established such a commission.’⁶³

9.2.9 However, the Egypt State Information Service (SIS), ‘the nation’s main informational, awareness and public relations agency’⁶⁴, in an article ‘National Dialogue proposes major legislative, political, economic & social reforms in Egypt’, dated 18 August 2023, reported that the establishment of such a commission by way of statute had been advised by the National Dialogue, according to that initiative’s chairperson, Daa Rashwan⁶⁵.

9.2.10 Amnesty International, in its report “‘Disconnected from reality’: Egypt’s National Human Rights Strategy covers up human rights crisis’, dated 21 September 2022 (2022 AI NHRS report), commented:

‘The NHRS... hails the authorities’ respect of the right to freedom of religion and belief, but fails to recognize that religious minorities, including Coptic Christians, Shi’a Muslims and Bahá’í continue to face discrimination in law and/or practice. The NHRS presents Law No. 80/2016 on Building and Repairing Churches as an advancement of the rights of Christians, while in practice it is used to prevent Christians from worshipping by restricting their right to build or repair churches...’⁶⁶

⁶⁰ USCIRF, ‘[Tolerance, Religious Freedom, and Authoritarianism](#)’ (page 15), December 2022

⁶¹ USCIRF, ‘[Tolerance, Religious Freedom, and Authoritarianism](#)’ (page 16), December 2022

⁶² USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

⁶³ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

⁶⁴ SIS, ‘[About SIS](#)’, undated

⁶⁵ SIS, ‘[National Dialogue proposes major legislative, political, economic & social...](#)’, 18 August 2023

⁶⁶ AI, ‘[“Disconnected from reality”: Egypt’s National Human Rights Strategy...](#)’, 21 September 2022

9.2.11 With regard to the National Dialogue initiative, Reuters news agency, in an article ‘Egypt launches national dialogue amid ongoing security crackdown’, dated 3 May 2023, reported:

‘Egypt launched a national political dialogue on Wednesday [3 May 2023] that authorities said was meant to generate debate around the country's future, though the chair of the event said several areas of discussion would be off limits.

‘The dialogue, announced by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in April 2022, aims to produce political, economic and social reform recommendations that could be presented for Sisi's consideration.

‘It is one of several steps aimed at countering criticism of Egypt's human rights record. Other measures include a five-year human rights strategy and a presidential amnesty committee that is considering thousands of requests to free some of those jailed under Sisi's rule...

‘The dialogue's chairperson, Diaa Rashwan, said all sessions would be open to the media but discussions around the constitution, foreign policy and "strategic national security" would be off limits.

‘Critics say recent steps on human rights are cosmetic, pointing to continuing detentions and arrests of dissidents, and say they doubt the dialogue signals real change.’⁶⁷

9.2.12 See Country Policy and Information Note [Egypt: Opposition to the State](#).

9.2.13 In reference to National Dialogue recommendations about personal status laws, the SIS article reported: ‘The key suggestion in terms of social policy is to create a new personal affairs law to address a variety of issues relating to child custody, marriage, and divorce, including money guardianship.’⁶⁸

9.2.14 See [Personal status and adoption laws](#).

9.2.15 Khalil al-Anani, senior fellow at Arab Center Washington DC, a non-profit, independent research organisation⁶⁹, in an article ‘Egypt's National Dialogue: A Lost Opportunity for National Salvage’, dated 7 July 2023, observed that National Dialogue participants lacked voting rights on the issues raised and that no time frame for the dialogue had been stipulated, further noting: ‘Strikingly, the participants in the National Dialogue find themselves constrained by limitations that curtail their ability to openly discuss and address the full range of concerns impacting Egyptians today. This is a reality that undermines the very idea of dialogue itself.’⁷⁰

9.2.16 With regard to the state policy of supporting imams and mosques, the USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated, ‘The government, through the Ministry of Awqaf, appoints, pays the salaries of, and monitors imams who lead prayers in licensed mosques.’⁷¹

9.2.17 Similarly, ReligionUnplugged.com, the online news magazine of international

⁶⁷ Reuters, ‘[Egypt launches national dialogue amid ongoing security crackdown](#)’, 3 May 2023

⁶⁸ SIS, ‘[National Dialogue proposes major legislative, political, economic & social...](#)’, 18 August 2023

⁶⁹ Arab Center Washington DC, ‘[About - Research Organization](#)’, undated

⁷⁰ Arab Center Washington DC, ‘[Egypt's National Dialogue: A Lost Opportunity...](#)’, 7 July 2023

⁷¹ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

non-profit organisation The Media Project⁷², in an article 'Are Egypt's Christians Persecuted? Why Some Copts Say No', dated 15 January 2021, noted that one form of 'systematic discrimination' suffered by Copts is that '...taxes that they pay go to mosques, Muslim schools and universities and imams but not for Christian organizations'⁷³.

- 9.2.18 In reference to the Holy Family Trail – which links 'sites that local Christian tradition associates with the Holy Family's first-century exile in Egypt'⁷⁴ – and other projects, USCIRF, in its 'Country Update: Egypt – Religious Freedom in Egypt in 2021' (2021 USCIRF country update), dated November 2021, stated: 'One area in which Egypt has demonstrated clear improvement has been the recognition and protection of heritage sites belonging to religious minorities, including the Christian, Jewish, and most recently Shi'a Muslim communities.'⁷⁵
- 9.2.19 The same update noted that '...since 2019 the government has devoted substantial financial resources and marketing efforts' to the Holy Family project '... which would attract religious tourism to sites...[which] notably include remote areas of Upper Egypt that the tourism sector has often marginalized, including the Muharraq Monastery in al-Qusiya and the Monastery of the Virgin Mary in Durunka, both of which are in Asyut governorate. Completed in August 2021, renovations at the Durunka monastery are particularly noteworthy as Coptic Orthodox tradition names the site as the southernmost point of the Holy Family's travels in Egypt, and its Feast of the Virgin Mary draws hundreds of thousands of Egyptian Christians each August.'⁷⁶
- 9.2.20 With regard to the Holy Family project, the USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:
- 'In May [2022], then Minister of Local Development Mahmoud Shaarawy announced that the 25 stops on the 2,100-mile Holy Family Trail, marking the route Christians believe was taken by Mary, Joseph, and Jesus from Israel to Egypt, were almost ready to receive visitors. In September [2022], following months of renovation, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities reopened a pilgrimage site on the trail in Cairo's Matariya District believed to contain a sycamore tree descended from the one under which Mary reputedly bathed the infant Jesus during the trio's journey. On January 11 [2022], the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities announced a special six-month museum exhibition in Sharm al-Sheikh on the history of the Holy Family in Egypt, consisting of manuscripts, icons, and other exhibits.'⁷⁷
- 9.2.21 With regard to Christian practices within the military, the USSD religious freedom report 2022 observed: 'Reverend Samuel Abdullah stated on Facebook that on May 20 [2022], for the first time since its establishment, the Air Force Academy in Bilbeis, Sharqia Governorate, held a Christian religious service. The service, which took place in a newly constructed

⁷² The Media Project, 'Mission & History', undated

⁷³ Religion Unplugged, 'Are Egypt's Christians persecuted?...' 15 January 2021

⁷⁴ USCIRF, '2021 Country Update: Egypt...', November 2021

⁷⁵ USCIRF, '2021 Country Update: Egypt...', November 2021

⁷⁶ USCIRF, '2021 Country Update: Egypt...', November 2021

⁷⁷ USSD, '2022 report on International Religious Freedom...' (Executive Summary), 15 May 2023

church opened earlier that month, included students and leaders from the academy.¹⁷⁸

9.2.22 For more information on Christians in the military, see [Christians in public life](#).

9.2.23 With regard to Copts' treatment by the governor of North Sinai, the USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:

'Al-Watani reported that in May, governor of North Sinai Mohamed Abdel-Fadil Shousha ordered that 200 Copts displaced by threat of terrorist violence from the city of Arish in 2017 should be officially assigned to government jobs in their current locations. The decision meant a substantial pay cut for the relocated Copts, since wages and benefits in Arish are higher than in other parts of the country. Following criticism of the decision from the affected employees, the governorate announced in June that the displaced Copts could continue to earn the same salaries they received while working in Arish, provided they presented periodic documentation of their current work status outside of Arish. The Arish Copts expressed relief at the governor's decision and appreciation for the government's efforts in its war against terrorism in North Sinai Governorate.'¹⁷⁹

9.2.24 In reference to an initiative for tackling sectarian incidents, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRBC), in an information request response 'Egypt: Situation of Coptic Christians and treatment by authorities and society; ability to access housing, employment, education, health care, and support services, particularly in Cairo and Alexandria; state protection (2020–April 2022)' (2022 IRBC response), dated 6 May 2022, based on various sources, stated:

'... [T]he Supreme Committee for Confronting Sectarian Incidents was created by presidential decree in 2018. Egypt's National Human Rights Strategy states that the committee is responsible for developing and implementing policies that "ensure further awareness of the threa[t]" posed by sectarian conflict fostering religious coexistence addressing specific sectarian incidents case by case undertaking "development activities" in regions with sectarian "tensions".

'Sources report that the committee is formed by various actors from state security institutions, including the Administrative Control Authority and the National Security Agency, and is headed by the president's advisor for security and counter-terrorism affairs. [TIMEP Deputy Director Timothy E.] Kaldas indicates that a number of "relevant" stakeholders are missing, noting a lack of representation from the minority groups affected and a total absence of judicial, legislative and rights advocacy actors.'¹⁸⁰

9.2.25 For interfaith dialogue initiatives, see [Interfaith dialogue](#).

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9.3 Interfaith dialogue

⁷⁸ USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (section 2), 15 May 2023

⁷⁹ USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (section 2), 15 May 2023

⁸⁰ IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

9.3.1 The USCIRF tolerance and religious freedom report 2022 stated:

‘... [The] Egyptian government makes substantial use of Egypt’s position at a historical crossroads of Islamic learning and scholarship and the location of the venerated institution of al-Azhar to position itself as a center of [religious tolerance promotion] RTP and dialogue, particularly with regard to the Coptic Christian community, the largest ethno-religious Christian minority in the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] region. Al-Azhar hosts high-profile symposiums in collaboration with institutions such as the Vatican and engages in other realms of interfaith dialogue internationally.

‘Within Egypt, the Egyptian Family House — launched in 2011 in the wake of a deadly bombing of a Coptic Orthodox church in Alexandria — is among the most prominent state-approved interfaith and RTP initiatives aimed at improving relations between Muslims and Christians within the country. This initiative is included in this research since, in contrast to other Muslim-Christian dialogue endeavors in other regions, this is an example of an authoritarian state-approved initiative.’⁸¹

9.3.2 The USCIRF tolerance and religious freedom report 2022 stated, ‘[Grand Imam] Sheikh al-Tayyib [of Al-Azhar] traveled to the UAE to meet with Pope Francis at the Global Conference of Human Fraternity and sign the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, also known as the Abu Dhabi Declaration [on 4 February 2019⁸²].’⁸³

9.3.3 The USCIRF report further noted:

‘Egypt’s al-Azhar, the oldest center of Islamic learning in the region (nationalized by the state in 1952, turning its upper echelons into state-approved employees) hosts centers such the al-Azhar Centre for Interreligious Dialogue and the al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism that also undertake RTP-related programming. The Observatory issues documents with titles such as Religious Freedom: An Authentic Islamic Principle, and the al-Azhar International Academy aims to train imams in to promote [religious tolerance] RT internationally and establish training branches abroad to export “moderate Islam.”’⁸⁴

9.3.4 Egypt Today, in an article ‘International conference on interfaith dialogue kicks off in Cairo’, dated 13 March 2021, reported that the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs had begun a two-day conference on interfaith dialogue with the participation of more than 35 countries⁸⁵. It reported that the conference, ‘which comes under the auspices of President Abdel Fattah El Sisi, would discuss more than 30 research papers and aims to consolidate the dialogue between cultures and religions...’⁸⁶

9.3.5 With regard to Al-Azhar’s dialogue with the Episcopal/Anglican Church, the website of the Episcopal/Anglican diocese in Egypt, in an article ‘Archbishop to Sheikh: Al-Azhar: We Aspire To More Joint Interfaith Dialogue Projects’,

⁸¹ USCIRF, ‘[Tolerance, Religious Freedom, and Authoritarianism](#)’, December 2022

⁸² USSD, ‘[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 10 June 2020

⁸³ USCIRF, ‘[Tolerance, Religious Freedom, and Authoritarianism](#)’ (page 15), December 2022

⁸⁴ USCIRF, ‘[Tolerance, Religious Freedom, and Authoritarianism](#)’ (page 15), December 2022

⁸⁵ Egypt Today, ‘[International conference on interfaith dialogue kicks off in Cairo...](#)’, 13 March 2021

⁸⁶ Egypt Today, ‘[International conference on interfaith dialogue kicks off in Cairo...](#)’, 13 March 2021

dated 15 July 2021, reported:

‘Dr. Samy Fawzy, Archbishop of the Episcopal/Anglican Province of Alexandria, headed the church delegation to visit the Grand Imam, Dr. Ahmed Al-Tayeb Sheikh of Al-Azhar, at the headquarters of Al Azhar, where the delegation congratulated the Sheikh on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha.

‘Bishop Samy thanked Sheikh of Al-Azhar for congratulating him on his new position, stressing the need for cooperation between the two institutions in establishing the Bishop Mouneer Hanna Center for Islamic-Christian Studies, which the Episcopal/Anglican Church intends to open.

‘The Archbishop continued: We are proud of the relationship of the Episcopal/Anglican Church with Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, and we hope that the relationship will continue in more projects, meetings, and dialogues.’⁸⁷

9.3.6 See [State attitude](#) and [State policies and initiatives](#).

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9.4 State treatment and treatment of Christian activists

9.4.1 The 2023 USCIRF update stated:

‘The Egyptian criminal justice system continues to pose some of the most potent challenges to religious freedom in Egypt. The government released hundreds of prisoners ahead of the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP27) climate summit, which it hosted in November 2022. However, officials continue to detain potentially tens of thousands of political prisoners, including scores of individuals detained on the basis of religion or belief. Those accused of crimes often face egregious violations of due process, such as lack of access to a lawyer, denial of habeas corpus, detention without charges, unjust detention in solitary confinement, serial postponement of judicial hearings, and unjust travel bans following their release. Some, though not all, of these denials have targeted religious minorities.’⁸⁸

9.4.2 The 2023 USCIRF update further stated:

‘... [S]ystematic restrictions on freedom of religion or belief remain in place in Egypt, including actively enforced blasphemy laws, non-recognition of certain religious communities, and severe restrictions on religious expression. State security and the courts continue to arbitrarily detain and prosecute religious freedom advocates and members of religious minorities. Further, some government initiatives that appear to address specific religious minorities’ concerns have not significantly advanced religious freedom for Egyptians of all religious backgrounds.’⁸⁹ The USCIRF did not state whether its comments related to Copts or specific Christian subsets.

9.4.3 The 2022 IRBC response noted:

‘The New Arab states that, in the wake of a "wider [government] crackdown on civil society" since September 2019, the state has no "leniency" for Coptic activism (The New Arab 4 Feb. 2020)... Freedom House similarly states that

⁸⁷ Diocese of Egypt, ‘[Archbishop to Sheikh: Al-Azhar: We aspire to more...](#)’, 15 July 2021

⁸⁸ USCIRF, ‘[Egypt Country Update](#)’, 4 August 2023

⁸⁹ USCIRF, ‘[Egypt Country Update](#)’, 4 August 2023

activists who express views that run counter to the "preferred state narratives" are subject to reprisals from the authorities and "common[ly]" arrested (Freedom House 28 Feb. 2022, Sec. D4).⁹⁰

- 9.4.4 Amnesty International stated in the Egypt section of its '2022 Middle East and North Africa report' (AI human rights report 2022), dated 27 March 2023, 'Authorities continued to discriminate against Christians in law and practice, and prosecuted Christians demanding their right to worship.'⁹¹ The AI report did not, however, state how many prosecutions took place or describe the nature of the discrimination.
- 9.4.5 Open Doors International stated that during its WWL 2021 reporting period (1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020), 26 Christians had been detained for faith-related reasons and that '[t]hey were in most cases the victims of a mob attack and arrested to satisfy their attackers' demands and to de-escalate the situation'. However, during the same period, no Christians had been 'sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons'⁹².
- 9.4.6 Open Doors International reported that during the WWL 2022 reporting period, 11 Christians were detained, and one Christian was sentenced to jail or similar, for faith-related reasons. Those arrested included victims of mob attacks detained for de-escalation purposes⁹³. During the WWL 2023 reporting period, 40 Christians were detained, and one Christian sentenced to jail or similar, for faith-related reasons. Among those arrested were Christians 'detained after peacefully demonstrating for permission to rebuild their burnt down church.'⁹⁴
- 9.4.7 For information on detention of converts to Christianity, see [Christian converts](#). For information on detention and imprisonment of Christians accused of blasphemy, see [Prosecution under blasphemy laws](#).
- 9.4.8 Citing the cases of Coptic activist Ramy Kamel and Coptic human rights researcher Patrick Zaki, the 2023 USCIRF annual report stated, 'The Egyptian criminal justice system remained the locus of systematic and ongoing religious freedom violations.'⁹⁵
- 9.4.9 The 2023 USCIRF update reported that Zaki 'was arrested in 2020 after publishing an article with personal reflections on religious discrimination against Copts in Egypt. Authorities released him after 22 months of detention but, for the next 1.5 years, placed him under an official travel ban and forced him to endure serial postponement of a judicial ruling in his case... On July 18, 2023, an emergency state security court sentenced Zaki to three years in prison... The sentencing prompted an outpouring of international concern for Zaki's status... The following day, President El-Sisi pardoned Zaki and another high-profile prisoner of conscience.'⁹⁶

⁹⁰ IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

⁹¹ AI, '[Human rights in Egypt](#)', 27 March 2023

⁹² Open Doors, '[...Egypt: Country Dossier](#)' (Violence section), 13 January 2021

⁹³ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (pages 36-37), January 2022

⁹⁴ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 38), January 2023

⁹⁵ USCIRF, '[2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter](#)' (page 55), May 2023

⁹⁶ USCIRF, '[Egypt Country Update](#)', 4 August 2023

- 9.4.10 The 2023 USCIRF update further reported: ‘Ramy Kamel is a Coptic activist and founder of the Maspero Youth Foundation who was arrested in 2019. Prior to his January 2022 release, a prosecutor asked Kamel to sign a document with the effect of banning him from travel for one year. However, other authorities later told him the ban extends beyond the one year specified.’⁹⁷
- 9.4.11 With regard to travel bans, including those imposed on Kamel and Zaki, the 2023 USCIRF update noted:
 ‘Egypt’s judiciary also continues to impose travel bans in ways that are arbitrary and not subject to oversight. Travel bans restrict not only freedom of movement but also the freedom to express religious beliefs, as those under such bans cannot evade the surveillance of the state or speak freely at international conferences.’⁹⁸
- 9.4.12 The 2023 USCIRF annual report stated, ‘In June [2022], Al-Mataria prosecutors wielded the same charge [as Zaki: ‘spreading false news’] to detain Coptic attorney Hani Farouk Gibran—later releasing him—for posting messages on social media such as, “No to attacks on churches in Egypt, burning homes and kidnapping girls.”’⁹⁹
- 9.4.13 The same report stated: ‘In January [2022], security officials arrested nine Copts for online videos showcasing their peaceful protest of the government’s failure to permit the rebuilding of the fire-ravaged St. Joseph and Abu Seifein Church in Samalout. Charges included “participating in a demonstration threatening public safety and committing a terrorist act.” They were released in April, the same month the government relaunched its Presidential Pardon Committee, possibly in advance of the 27th Conference of the Parties, or COP27 climate summit, which Egypt hosted in November.’¹⁰⁰
- 9.4.14 With regard to Coptic activism, the 2023 Open Doors dossier noted: ‘...[A]-Sisi’s ongoing crackdown on any dissent or criticism, including human rights activism by human rights defenders like Coptic activists Ramy Kamel...and Patrick George Zaki... will continue to make it difficult for churches and Christians to speak up for themselves and address injustices.’¹⁰¹
- 9.4.15 In relation to forced evictions, the 2022 IRBC response stated:
 ‘The same source [a 2019 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing on a visit to Egypt from September to October 2018] reported that “in some instances” forced evictions were “ordered” by “community reconciliation mechanisms”..., including in the presence of government officials who “reportedly failed to intervene when rulings legitimized the arbitrary expulsion of Coptic families from their homes” and “sometimes expressed public support for such decisions” (UN 3 Oct. 2019, para. 83). In responding to the UN Special Rapporteur’s statements in paragraphs 82 and 83 of the final report, the Egyptian government states that Coptic Christians

⁹⁷ USCIRF, ‘[Egypt Country Update](#)’, 4 August 2023

⁹⁸ USCIRF, ‘[Egypt Country Update](#)’, 4 August 2023

⁹⁹ USCIRF, ‘[2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter](#)’ (page 55), May 2023

¹⁰⁰ USCIRF, ‘[2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter](#)’ (page 55), May 2023

¹⁰¹ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 21), January 2023

“have the same civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as all other citizens” and that “[d]iscrimination is prohibited and all citizens are equal before the law,” adding that the Special Rapporteur’s “insinuation” that the State is involved in the forced eviction of Coptic Christians “in particular” is “false and baseless” (Egypt 1 Mar. 2019, para. 106).

9.4.16 For more information on evictions, see [Housing](#).

9.4.17 With regard to Christian prisoners, the USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:

‘In August [2022], the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy published an article by an academic on ministering to Christians in the country’s prisons. The academic said prison authorities controlled what written or visual materials religious workers shared with inmates. Guards reportedly did not always recognize the diversity of Christian denominations, asking a Coptic layperson “are you not all the same?” The academic also suggested that nonbelieving Coptic prisoners felt compelled to attend meetings with religious counselors, lest their absence imply atheism, making them “more vulnerable to violence by jailers and prisoners.”’¹⁰²

9.4.18 The same report stated, ‘Local media reported that on January 7 [2022], Wadi al-Natrun Correctional and Rehabilitation Center allowed several members of clergy to enter the facility to perform prayers for Christian prisoners for Coptic Christmas.’¹⁰³

9.4.19 For information about general detention conditions, see the Country Information Note [Egypt: Country Background Note](#) and Country Policy and Information Note [Egypt: Opposition to the State](#).

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9.5 Christian converts

9.5.1 Christian rights group, Middle East Concern, in an article ‘Egypt: Convert beaten’, dated 23 March 2021, reported:

‘On 17 March, “Brother P” was lured from his house by his neighbours and beaten due to his conversion to Christianity. His house and belongings were also damaged. Brother P has a physical disability that prevented him from escaping. Other Christians who tried to help him were also attacked.

‘He complained to police, informing them of the reason for the attack. The police then detained him, but lawyers managed to locate him and secure his release.’¹⁰⁴

9.5.2 The 2023 Open Doors dossier reported, ‘The security services also actively detain and intimidate converts [from Islam to Christianity] in order to make them stay silent about their conversion, while the state makes it impossible for them to obtain any official recognition of their conversion.’¹⁰⁵

9.5.3 The dossier also reported cases of ‘Christian converts from a Muslim background [being] arrested and physically abused by the Egyptian security

¹⁰² USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

¹⁰³ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

¹⁰⁴ MEC, ‘[Egypt: Convert beaten](#)’, 23 March 2021

¹⁰⁵ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 6), January 2023

services.’¹⁰⁶ It stated that ‘At least ten converts to Christianity were arrested and detained by the security services during the WWL 2023 reporting period’, but it did not specify how many had been abused¹⁰⁷.

- 9.5.4 The dossier further stated: ‘Converts from Islam to Christianity lack recognition and can only gather discreetly without attracting attention. Their activities are monitored by the intelligence agencies, which especially target those who proselytize or speak publicly about their faith.’¹⁰⁸
- 9.5.5 The dossier also reported, ‘...Security and intelligence agencies spy on converts and try to force them to supply information on the activities of convert groups.’¹⁰⁹
- 9.5.6 It further noted: ‘Several converts from a Muslim background who openly declared their Christian faith on social media have been arrested.’¹¹⁰
- 9.5.7 For information about societal treatment of Christian converts, see [Converts from Islam](#).

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9.6 Prosecution under blasphemy laws

9.6.1 The 2019 DFAT report noted:

‘... Article 98(f) has been used against an increasingly wide range of groups across the country, including atheists [and] Christians (including converts from Islam)... The increased use of social media has reportedly been a contributing factor in the rise of such cases: more people have had visibility of potentially controversial material, and so the number of complaints has risen accordingly...

‘DFAT understands that those accused of blasphemy rarely have an adequate defence counsel... In some cases, families have reportedly had to leave their homes due to threats received because of defamation of religion cases.’¹¹¹

9.6.2 The EIPR and others Mid-term UPR Report noted: ‘Defamation of religion’ continues to be a charge widely used to prosecute citizens who have not committed any criminal act. The charge is used...in prosecuting Christians...’¹¹²

9.6.3 Similarly, the AI Egypt report 2022 stated, ‘Members of religious minorities, atheists and others not espousing state-sanctioned religious beliefs were prosecuted and imprisoned on “defamation of religion” and other bogus charges.’¹¹³

9.6.4 The 2023 USCIRF annual report noted that the blasphemy and other laws were invoked ‘to arrest, detain, convict, and sentence Egyptians from a

¹⁰⁶ Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 26), January 2023

¹⁰⁷ Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 39), January 2023

¹⁰⁸ Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 37), January 2023

¹⁰⁹ Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 34), January 2023

¹¹⁰ Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 32), January 2023

¹¹¹ DFAT, [‘Country information report Egypt’](#) (sections 3.14, 3.16), 17 June 2019

¹¹² EIPR and others, [‘A Crisis by Design...’](#), January 2023

¹¹³ AI, [‘Human rights in Egypt’](#), 27 March 2023

diverse range of religious backgrounds.¹¹⁴

- 9.6.5 The 2023 USCIRF update stated: ‘The government has not indicated the existence of significant political will to repeal or revise [provision 98(f) of the Penal Code] or to end the active pursuit of potential blasphemy cases. Meanwhile, state security, prosecutors, and courts have continued investigation, arrest, detention, prosecution and, in some cases, conviction and sentencing on the basis of alleged breaches of the blasphemy law.’¹¹⁵
- 9.6.6 Commenting on article 98(f), the 2023 MRG culture report stated: ‘The contradictions and gaps in this loosely worded article are manifested in the selective application of the article on certain religions and sects. The danger is that this type of legislation could gravely reduce the ability of religious minorities to express themselves freely in public.’¹¹⁶
- 9.6.7 With regard to the cybercrimes law, the 2023 USCIRF update reported: ‘Egypt has also continued to detain and charge individuals under the Egyptian cybercrimes law (175/2018)... The law contains several broad provisions that the government can use to censor the expression of religious beliefs, targeting both non-Muslim and Muslim religious minorities... The government has threatened legal experts attempting to study the law to understand its limitations.’¹¹⁷
- 9.6.8 Sources consulted in this note provide little information about the number of arrests, prosecutions and convictions of Christians (including Christians converts) under the blasphemy laws (see [Bibliography](#)). Open Doors stated that in the WWL 2021 reporting period, ‘At least one Christian has been imprisoned after being accused of blasphemy.’¹¹⁸ In the WWL 2022 reporting period, it noted that among 11 Christians detained for faith-related reasons were Christians accused of blasphemy, but it did not specify the number¹¹⁹. In the WWL 2023 reporting period, it reported, ‘At least one Christian has been sentenced and imprisoned after being accused of blasphemy.’¹²⁰
- 9.6.9 There is also reference to the following specific cases:
- The 2023 USCIRF update stated: ‘In 2023, courts invoked both counterterrorism and blasphemy laws to renew the detention of Nour Fayez Ibrahim Gerges, who had created a Facebook group to assist people wishing to convert to Christianity, and Abdulbaqi Saeed Abdo, a Yemeni asylum-seeker whose apparent basis for detention – publicizing his conversion to Christianity – also puts him at risk if deported to the country from which he originally sought refuge.’¹²¹
 - The 2023 USCIRF annual report noted, ‘In September [2022], an appeals court in Cairo upheld a five-year prison sentence against Marco Girgis, a Copt, on charges including breach of 98(f) and

¹¹⁴ USCIRF, ‘[2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter](#)’ (page 54), May 2023

¹¹⁵ USCIRF, ‘[Egypt Country Update](#)’, 4 August 2023

¹¹⁶ MRG, ‘[The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities](#)’, 2 March 2023

¹¹⁷ USCIRF, ‘[Egypt Country Update](#)’, 4 August 2023

¹¹⁸ Open Doors, ‘...[Egypt: Country Dossier](#)’ (Violence section), 13 January 2021

¹¹⁹ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 36), January 2022

¹²⁰ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 39), January 2023

¹²¹ USCIRF, ‘[Egypt Country Update](#)’, 4 August 2023

“exploiting religion in promoting extremist ideas, contempt of Islam, and transgression of the values of the Egyptian family” for allegedly sharing sexually explicit digital material.’¹²²

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9.7 Church building law in practice

9.7.1 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 noted:

‘In November [2022], the State Information Service announced that a cabinet committee tasked with registering unlicensed churches approved the adjusted status of 125 churches and affiliated buildings which were already built, bringing the total number of churches and service buildings granted legal status since 2017 to 2,526 out of 3,730 requests sent to the committee, with the remaining 1,204 pending at year’s end. There were no reports that the committee had rejected any requests to adjust the status of unlicensed churches. The committee stated representatives of Christian denominations would be invited to attend its next meeting to discuss ways for recently legalized churches to conform to building codes and fire safety standards. In March [2022], President Sisi publicly called for building churches in every new municipality. While some non-Coptic Orthodox groups said the approval process took longer than normal, Coptic leaders said they were satisfied with the pace of committee approvals and that they expected to see decreasing numbers of approvals for previously unlicensed churches in the future as the government addressed the pre-2017 backlog.

‘In August [2022], an unnamed Coptic parliamentarian told the news outlet New Arab the government and the Coptic Orthodox Church went through a “muffled crisis” over church properties located within areas and projects that the government had prioritized for economic development. The parliamentarian said the government offered the Coptic Orthodox Church new land in exchange for its current holdings. Other sources said the government and the church cooperated and the government did not force the church to exchange properties.

‘Al-Bawabh News reported that in August [2022], President Sisi issued a decree allocating an area of approximately 12 acres of state-owned land in the Qus District, Qena Governorate, to establish a church for Coptic Catholics.’¹²³

9.7.2 The 2023 Open Doors dossier stated: ‘...[I]n clear contrast to how mosques are dealt with, the building of new churches is restricted. Despite promises from the president that a church will be built in every new neighborhood and despite the fact that an increasing number of churches are being legalized through official registration, Christians of all backgrounds face difficulties when trying to find (new) places for holding worship. Communal hostility and mob violence, in particular, continue to cause difficulties.’¹²⁴

9.7.3 The 2023 USCIRF annual report similarly stated: ‘Rights organizations have... noted that the 2016 legislation is inherently discriminatory in

¹²² USCIRF, ‘[2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter](#)’ (page 55), May 2023

¹²³ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

¹²⁴ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 6), January 2023

continuing to subject churches to requirements and approval processes that do not apply to Sunni mosques... [E]ven after successfully registering, some churches continued to face threats...'¹²⁵

- 9.7.4 Amnesty International, in a report 'Egypt's "decade of shame": Unrelenting assault on human rights since Rabaa massacre' (AI August 2023 report), dated 14 August 2023, stated, 'Although the authorities hailed Law No. 80/2016 on the Construction and Repair of Churches, they have in fact used it to restrict or prevent Christians from building and repairing churches by requiring approval from security agencies and other state bodies, which involves lengthy and complicated procedures.'¹²⁶
- 9.7.5 Watani, in an article dated 15 May 2023, reported: 'The Cabinet-affiliated committee charged with looking into the status of unlicensed churches to grant them legality has approved today... legalisation of a new batch of churches and affiliated service buildings.
'The new batch comprises 216 churches and affiliated community service buildings...'¹²⁷
- 9.7.6 Ahram Online, the English-language news website of public media entity Al-Ahram Establishment¹²⁸, in an article dated 19 June 2023, reported, 'Egypt approved the legalization of an additional 374 Christian churches and service buildings that had been operating without a permit,' adding: 'The total number of churches and their service buildings that have been legalized by the government now exceeds 3,000.'¹²⁹
- 9.7.7 The Watani article noted:
'Given that a sizeable number of unlicensed churches were built in rural areas or underprivileged, unplanned urban areas characterised by very narrow streets, and crowded wall-to-wall small buildings, complying with standard safety conditions has not been attainable in many cases. Church officials complained about this to the Cabinet committee which then decided to involve the Ministry of Housing in resolving the issue by figuring out adequate safety requirements according to relevant building codes. Until this is resolved, churches have been required to fulfil the minimum precautionary measures, such as providing fire extinguisher facilities.'¹³⁰
- 9.7.8 With regard to participation in church construction work, the 2021 USCIRF country update stated, 'In February of this year [2021], Egypt's chief official on Islamic jurisprudence, Grand Mufti Shawki Allam, issued a fatwa permitting Muslims to take part in the construction of churches—a ruling that immediately attracted praise from interfaith proponents and loud criticism from less tolerant members of Parliament and conservative Salafi groups.'¹³¹
- 9.7.9 With regard to revocation of permission to build or repair churches following violence, Coptic Solidarity, a non-government organisation which is

¹²⁵ USCIRF, '[2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter](#)' (page 54), May 2023

¹²⁶ AI, '[Egypt's "decade of shame": unrelenting assault...](#)' (page 7), 14 August 2023

¹²⁷ Watani, '[26th batch of churches legalised...](#)', 15 May 2023

¹²⁸ Media Ownership Monitor Egypt, '[Al Ahram Establishment...](#)', 2018

¹²⁹ Ahram Online, '[Egypt legalizes 374 more unlicensed churches...](#)', 19 June 2023

¹³⁰ Watani, '[26th batch of churches legalised...](#)', 15 May 2023

¹³¹ USCIRF, '[2021 Country Update: Egypt...](#)', November 2021

‘dedicated to advocating equal citizenship for the Coptic Christians of Egypt and minorities in the Middle East’, in an article dated 13 September 2023 (Coptic Solidarity construction article 2023), stated that when rumours of church construction or repair spark riots and attacks by ‘local Muslim mobs’, ‘Authorities frequently respond by appeasing the rioters and permanently sealing up the “offending” churches on the charge that they are “security risks.”’¹³²

9.7.10 The article further reported that after Muslims reacted violently on 24 December 2022 to permission being granted for repairs to a church roof, ‘On the following day, the Muslim governor responded to the violence by rescinding the church’s permit to fix its crumbling roof, telling them to “pray in the rain.”’ The article did not state where this took place¹³³.

9.7.11 For more information on violence in relation to church construction, see [Societal violence](#). For information on the police response to such violence, see [Protection from and prosecution of actions against Christians](#).

<https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Egyptian-Muslims-can-help-build-churches-52472.html>[Back to Contents](#)

9.8 Christians in public life

9.8.1 The 2021 USCIRF country update stated:

‘...[D]espite marked improvement in official discourse on religious diversity and tolerance among Egyptian leadership, discrimination and marginalization within Egyptian government and society on the basis of religion remain endemic, but notoriously elusive to track and document. That reporting challenge remains ongoing and pronounced, particularly given the severe restrictions on civil society and the government’s longstanding sensitivity toward the public release of data or analysis that it perceives as reflecting negatively on the country—even if that information would aid significantly in the government’s stated intentions to improve religious freedom conditions. Therefore, the exclusion or severe underrepresentation of non-Muslims in key areas of public service—particularly among security, diplomacy, and military leadership—remains widely known and poorly documented.’¹³⁴

9.8.2 The 2023 Freedom House (FH) report stated:

‘The constitution and Egyptian laws grant political rights to all citizens regardless of religion, gender, race, ethnicity, or any other such distinction. However, Christians... face discrimination and are denied access to rights, which in turn affects their ability to participate in political life. Sisi and the security apparatus’s increasing control of elections and other aspects of society only permit these groups to represent their interests within the narrow scope of officially sanctioned politics or risk harsh penalties for transgressing stated and unstated red lines. The diminishing power of the legislature further undercuts avenues for meaningful representation.’¹³⁵

¹³² Coptic Solidarity, ‘[Where is the Equality?...](#)’, 13 September 2023

¹³³ Coptic Solidarity, ‘[Where is the Equality?...](#)’, 13 September 2023

¹³⁴ USCIRF, ‘[2021 Country Update: Egypt...](#)’, November 2021

¹³⁵ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023...](#)’, 10 March 2023

- 9.8.3 The 2023 Open Doors dossier reported: ‘Christians are not employed within the intelligence agencies, and cannot be promoted to senior positions within the army or police force. Christians are also underrepresented in senior government positions.’¹³⁶ The dossier further noted, ‘...Civil servants are sometimes unwilling to accept Christians as peers with the same rights and guarantees of safety...’¹³⁷
- 9.8.4 The dossier also noted: ‘Men face conscription into the army from the age of 18, where they serve 18-36 months. Within this context, Christians face discrimination. They are reportedly denied promotion and positions within certain areas of the armed forces and security services.’¹³⁸
- 9.8.5 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated, ‘The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Coptic Solidarity said there was a “2 percent glass ceiling” on Copts in entry-level positions in the judiciary, military, police, and diplomatic corps as well as limits on their participation in the upper ranks of other government positions.’¹³⁹
- 9.8.6 The report further stated, ‘On February 8 [2022], President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi issued a decree appointing Judge Boulos Fahmy Iskandar Boulos, a Copt, to head the Supreme Constitutional Court, the first Christian so appointed.’¹⁴⁰
- 9.8.7 The same report also stated: ‘There were two Christians (in Ismailia and Damietta Governorates) among the appointed governors of the 27 governorates... In August [2022], 73 female judges, including two Christians, were appointed to the courts of first instance...’¹⁴¹

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9.9 Reconciliation committees

- 9.9.1 The 2022 USSD religious freedom report stated: ‘Customary reconciliation is a form of dispute resolution that predates the country’s modern judicial and legal systems and is recognized in the law in instances that do not pertain to crimes considered more serious (e.g., those involving homicide, significant injury, or theft). Customary reconciliation sessions rely on the accumulation of a set of customary rules to address conflicts between individuals, families, households, or workers and employees in certain professions. Parties to disputes agree upon a resolution that typically contains stipulations to pay an agreed-upon amount of money for breaching the terms of the agreement.’¹⁴²
- 9.9.2 USCIRF, in a report ‘Country Update: Egypt’, dated 9 November 2021, based on various sources (2021 USCIRF update), stated:
- ‘There has been no visible effort to systematically or practically end the practice of invoking so-called “customary reconciliation councils” to respond to anti-Christian mob attacks in rural areas, which universally absolve perpetrators of violence of legal accountability and lay at least partial blame

¹³⁶ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 33), January 2023

¹³⁷ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 34), January 2023

¹³⁸ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 13), January 2023

¹³⁹ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (Executive Summary), 15 May 2023

¹⁴⁰ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (Executive Summary), 15 May 2023

¹⁴¹ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights...](#)’ (section 3), 20 March 2023

¹⁴² USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

and often punishment on the victims.’¹⁴³

- 9.9.3 The 2022 USSD religious freedom report noted: ‘Human rights groups and some Christian community representatives continued to characterize government-sponsored customary reconciliation sessions as encroaching on the principles of nondiscrimination and citizenship and denying Christians the opportunity to pursue justice through the courts.’¹⁴⁴
- 9.9.4 The 2023 USCIRF annual report, citing ‘a male pharmacist’s physical assault of Naveen Sobhi for appearing in non-Islamic dress during the Muslim holy days of Ramadan’, commented that the case ‘is notable for the police’s pressuring of the victim to agree to adjudication by a local, nonjudicial “reconciliation” session, which doubly victimizes Copts and other minorities by forcing them to reconcile with their attacker, commonly resulting in lenient punishments for assailants.’¹⁴⁵
- 9.9.5 For reconciliation committees in the context of religious tolerance, see [State attitude](#). For further examples of the use of reconciliation committees, see [Protection from and prosecution of actions against Christians](#).

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9.10 State media and social media

- 9.10.1 For background information about the media generally and the state’s treatment of perceived critics in the media see the Country Information Note [Egypt: Country Background Note](#) and the CPIN [Opposition to state](#).
- 9.10.2 The 2023 Open Doors dossier stated:
‘Despite the anti-cyber laws restricting the press and all other media channels, thus limiting freedom of speech, Christians in Egypt report that modern communications technology is nevertheless widely used in Egypt. Social media (especially Facebook) is used to mobilize public opinion. However, all social media is monitored by the government and criticism of the government or Islam is not tolerated. Most churches are currently using little modern technology in youth-work or for evangelistic purposes.’¹⁴⁶
- 9.10.3 The dossier further reported: ‘Churches can print and import Christian material including Bibles, as long as the material is not deemed offensive to Islam. Christian books and other items can be sold in public places in some parts of Egypt, but is in general only sold to Christians to avoid accusations of proselytizing.’¹⁴⁷
- 9.10.4 The 2023 MRG culture report stated: ‘There are no official statistics on Coptic representation in official or private cultural life, but the documented testimonies of Coptic activists, as well as accounts in the press, media and cultural archives show that...[n]ot one of the nine state television channels is dedicated to Copts and their cultural identity, and coverage of Coptic affairs is confined to broadcasts of Christmas and Easter mass...’¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ USCIRF, ‘[Egypt Country Update](#)’, 9 November 2021

¹⁴⁴ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (Executive Summary), 15 May 2023

¹⁴⁵ USCIRF, ‘[2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter](#)’ (page 54), May 2023

¹⁴⁶ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 19), January 2023

¹⁴⁷ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 36, 37), January 2023

¹⁴⁸ MRG, ‘[The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities](#)’, 2 March 2023

9.10.5 The report further stated: ‘The state has 25 official radio stations, none of which has a radio station or program for Copts in Egypt. There is no program on these official stations dedicated to Coptic issues.’¹⁴⁹

9.10.6 Media Diversity Institute (MDI), a not-for-profit organisation headquartered in Brussels¹⁵⁰, in an article ‘The absence of independent media in Egypt is behind the lack of representation of Coptic Christian issues’, dated 19 August 2022, quoted London-based Egyptian journalist and novelist Shady Lewis Botros as saying, ‘Media close to the regime ignore any news about violence against the Copts because they consider this a sensitive issue that should not be approached and may contribute to sectarian strife.’¹⁵¹

9.10.7 The same article stated:

‘Sherif Azer, an Egyptian human rights activist in Cairo, believes that the Egyptian media has no problem reporting on Copts and the Coptic church news as long as it is approved by the church leadership and the state security.

“They are not intentionally ignoring; they are not allowed by security and the church to write about the real issues of the Copts or any violations and sufferings. On the contrary, they report only what the church and the security approved, showing that the situation is positive or represents the church and the state’s point of view,” Azer told MDI.

‘The Egyptian media, since 2013, has been covering news related to the Copts as routine coverage about Sisi activities: his attendance at Christmas celebrations inside the church; the regime’s support to Copts; allowing them to build churches; the mutual support of Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria and the Copts of Egypt and the diaspora for the administration of President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

“There is an internal agreement between the church and the regime to ignore any news about the church’s internal issues or violence against the Copts in Egypt. The church considers these coverages to go beyond the red lines,” Shady said.’¹⁵²

9.10.8 The article further noted:

‘Azer told MDI that if the media publishes something about violations, it would be in a way that would show how the state is supporting Copts, for example, on the violent event of killing a priest in the street and how the security arrested the killer.

‘Part of the Coptic community in Egypt believes that the current regime is much better than previous Egyptian regimes in dealing with Copts. Therefore, they think the media coverage of any events related to Copts in Egypt may harm their good relationship with the current government.’¹⁵³

9.10.9 The 2023 Open Doors dossier stated, ‘There are Christian TV channels and Christian (social) media is widely accessible, but churches have to be careful

¹⁴⁹ MRG, [‘The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities’](#), 2 March 2023

¹⁵⁰ MDI, [‘Contact Us’](#), undated

¹⁵¹ MDI, [‘The Absence of Independent Media in Egypt...’](#), 19 August 2022

¹⁵² MDI, [‘The Absence of Independent Media in Egypt...’](#), 19 August 2022

¹⁵³ MDI, [‘The Absence of Independent Media in Egypt...’](#), 19 August 2022

not to openly proselytize or criticize Islam.’¹⁵⁴

9.10.10 The 2023 MRG culture report stated:

‘Four private satellite channels represent the official Coptic Orthodox Church (the main church in Egypt), broadcasting on various satellite channels whose signal overlaps via Nilesat. One is Aghapy TV, which started broadcasting in 2005 on the American satellite Telstar, then on a Chinese satellite station. Aghapy focuses on Coptic heritage and art and aims to ‘spread Christian awareness and spread the Coptic heritage of the church, including history, language, and arts. MarMarkos TV has been broadcast from the papal headquarters in Cairo since 2011, in addition to which are CTV and Koogi children TV.

‘There are Christian channels not affiliated with the church but broadcast on Nilesat, including Alkarma TV, Miracle, Noursat Shabab, Good Shepherd TV, Taraneem, Healing Channel, The Kingdom Sat, The Way TV and Csat.

‘Several private channels broadcast via the European satellite Hot Bird. They are financed and supervised by Coptic businessmen... There is also Logos TV, aimed at Egyptian Christians, migrants and expatriates abroad, under the direct supervision of the church.’¹⁵⁵

9.10.11 The same report stated:

‘Some newspaper pages are allocated to church news, but there are several private newspapers that represent Copts and their cultural identity, namely Watani, Al-Tariq wa Al-Haqq. According to the Supreme Press Council, there are 16 newspapers published by Christian churches and sects, including El-Kirazah. The Youth Bishopric of the church puts out 3 magazines: El Kalema, Resalet El Shabab, and Aghsan. Some businessmen also put out newspapers dealing with the situation of Christians in Egypt, such as ‘Aalem El Meshaher, Nida’ El Watan, and Agras El Watan. Egyptian churches do not have official news agencies; there was a Christian news agency called Middle East Christian News Agency, but it stopped working.’¹⁵⁶

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section updated: 1 November 2023

10. Societal treatment

10.1 Societal violence and discrimination

10.1.1 The Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church stated in an interview with the Vatican’s news service, in an article dated 8 January 2021:

“When I meet the leaders of the world, they always ask me questions about the persecution that is affecting us in Egypt, and I answer that there is no persecution, clearly rejecting this expression to qualify our condition in our country”. This is how Coptic Orthodox Patriarch Tawadros II described his reaction to foreign representatives - including political leaders and Heads of State - who, when they meet him, evoke in their conversation formulas and schemes with which the Coptic Christians of Egypt in the “mainstream”

¹⁵⁴ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 36, 37), January 2023

¹⁵⁵ MRG, ‘[The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities](#)’, 2 March 2023

¹⁵⁶ MRG, ‘[The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities](#)’, 2 March 2023

media representation, and in general the Christian communities in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East, are systematically labeled as “persecuted minorities”.

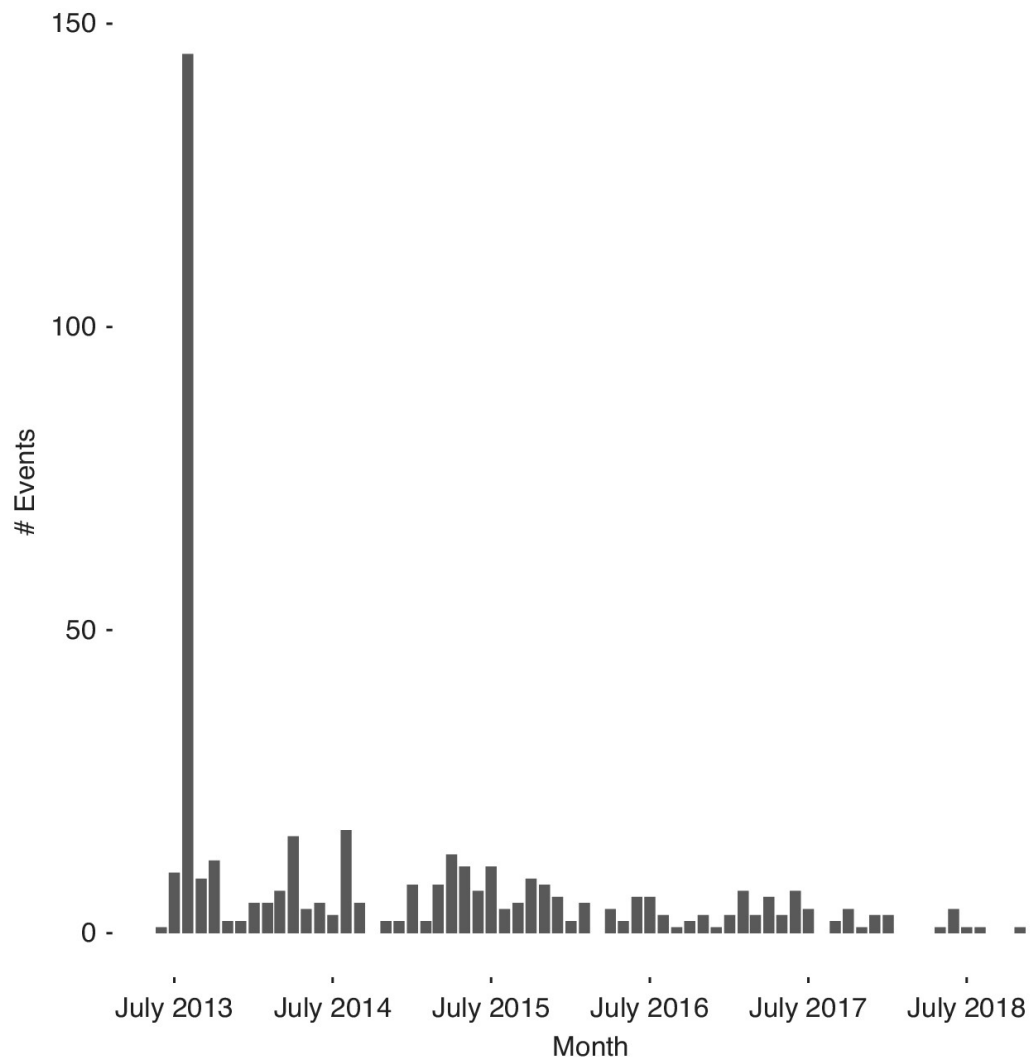
‘This representation - explained Pope Tawadros in an interview broadcast by the satellite television channel Nile TV on the occasion of the Coptic Christmas - provides “a distorted image of the situation in Egypt”, where Copts are called to face difficulties and problems also linked to sectarian violence and discrimination, which however do not constitute a condition of systematic religious persecution.

“If there is a problem between the different communities in a village”, the Patriarch explained, referring to recent cases of sectarian conflicts that have exploded in certain regions of Upper Egypt, “it is necessary to take into account that in Egypt there are 5 thousand villages. It happens that in some of them people act recklessly, but for this they are arrested and judged. I categorically reject the definition of ‘persecution’ that some leaders put before me when they talk about Copts.”¹⁵⁷

- 10.1.2 University of Edinburgh lecturer Christopher Barrie and others, in a 2022 paper in the journal *Perspectives on Politics*, showed the number of ‘anti-Christian attacks’ per month in Egypt from July 2013 to December 2018 in a graph, which is reproduced below. The authors noted that such attacks spiked in August 2013 because the ousting of Morsi the previous month ‘set in motion a series of political events that culminated in a surge of ethnic violence against Egypt’s Christians...’¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁷ Agenzia Fides, [‘Refusal of the word persecution to qualify the situation in Egypt...’](#), 8 January 2021

¹⁵⁸ Barrie, C, and others, PoP, [‘Burnings, Beatings, and Bombings...’](#), 13 October 2022



- 10.1.3 Human Rights Watch, in an article dated 21 August 2013, stated, 'Immediately following the violent dispersal of the Muslim Brotherhood sit-ins in Cairo on August 14, crowds of men attacked at least 42 churches, burning or damaging 37, as well as dozens of other Christian religious institutions in the governorates of Minya, Asyut, Fayum, Giza, Suez, Sohag, Bani Suef, and North Sinai.' Among the buildings attacked, the article listed both Coptic Orthodox places of worship and Baptist, Adventist and other non-Coptic Orthodox churches.¹⁵⁹
- 10.1.4 Open Doors International, in its Egypt dossier for 2020, dated 15 January 2020 and covering the period 1 Nov 2018 to 31 Oct 2019, showed the number of Christians killed, attacked or arrested and the number of churches and Christian-owned houses and shops attacked during its 2018, 2019 and 2020 reporting periods in a table, which is reproduced below. It noted that figures reported are minimum numbers¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁹ HRW, ['Egypt: Mass Attacks on Churches'](#), 21 August 2013

¹⁶⁰ Open Doors, ['World Watch List 2020 - Egypt: Country Dossier'](#), 15 January 2020

Egypt	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2020	01 Nov 2018 - 31 Oct 2019	23	1205	24	18	42
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	17	54	17	25	20
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	128	209	1	7	21

10.1.5 The table below was produced by CPIT to show the number of Christians killed or attacked, and the number of churches and other Christian buildings destroyed or damaged, as recorded by Open Doors International in its World Watch List and reported in its Egypt dossiers for 2021¹⁶¹, 2022¹⁶² and 2023¹⁶³. Open Doors stated that these were minimum figures, and that a 'symbolic round figure', marked with an asterisk from its WWL 2022 onwards, was provided where a precise number could not be given. It noted that the actual number in such cases could be at least 10 times greater than the symbolic figure. All figures in the table pertain to violence for faith-related reasons¹⁶⁴.

	WWL 2021 (reporting period 1 Oct 2019 - 30 Sept 2020)	WWL 2022 (reporting period 1 Oct 2020 - 30 Sept 2021)	WWL 2023 (reporting period 1 Oct 2021 - 30 Sept 2022)
Christians killed (including state-sanctioned executions)	8	8	5
Christians raped or otherwise sexually harassed	10	10*	10*
Christians otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death threats)	19	51	19
Churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, etc.) attacked, damaged, burned down, etc.	10	2	1

¹⁶¹ Open Doors, '[...Egypt: Country Dossier](#)' (Violence section), 13 January 2021

¹⁶² Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 36), January 2022

¹⁶³ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 38), January 2023

¹⁶⁴ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 37-38), January 2023

Shops or businesses of Christians which have been attacked, damaged, burned down, etc.	9	15	0
Christians forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country	10	117	2
Christians forced to leave the country	7	0	7

10.1.6 With regard to specific instances of violence, the US State Department Report on International Religious Freedom for Egypt 2021 (2021 USSD religious freedom report), dated 2 June 2022, stated:

‘On July 27 [2021], Copt Shenouda Salah Asaad was stabbed to death, allegedly by a Salafist neighbor, in Assiut Governorate. In April [2021], sectarian clashes in al-Mudmar village in Sohag Governorate resulted in at least one death and six injuries that required hospitalization.’¹⁶⁵

10.1.7 Referring to events in 2022, the 2023 USCIRF annual report noted:

‘Reports of individual violent assaults against Copts increased, with several attacks unfolding in April during the seasons of Christian Easter and Muslim Ramadan. This included crimes such as the fatal stabbing of Father Arsanios Wadid and the deadly shooting of Rani Ra’fat by six men, one of whom posted social media videos confirming a militant Islamist motivation for the murder. In July, another assailant stabbed the father and son owners of a shop in Giza that sold alcohol—a practice associated with non-Muslims...’¹⁶⁶

10.1.8 Open Doors UK, in an article ‘Egyptian Christian murdered for being Facebook friends with Muslim woman’, dated 15 June 2022 (2022 Open Doors UK article), reported that a man admitted in a YouTube video that he killed Rani Ra’fat ‘because Rani was friends with a Muslim woman on Facebook’¹⁶⁷.

10.1.9 For more information on this case, see [Protection from and prosecution of actions against Christians](#).

10.1.10 Quoting from correspondence between the IRBC’s Research Directorate and a Trinity Western University professor, the 2022 IRBC response reported, ‘The Professor stated that the security situation in Egypt “improved” for Coptic Christians between 2020 and 2022; with the government having “driv[en] Islamist movements into exile or underground,” sectarian violence is “not common,” though it still occurs in a “restrained” but “unpredictabl[e]” manner, particularly on Coptic religious holidays such as Coptic Christmas or Easter (Professor 1 Apr. 2022).’¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ USSD, ‘[2021 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (Executive Summary), 2 June 2022

¹⁶⁶ USCIRF, ‘[2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter](#)’ (page 54), May 2023

¹⁶⁷ Open Doors UK, ‘[Egyptian Christian murdered for being Facebook friends...](#)’, 15 June 2022

¹⁶⁸ IRBC, ‘[Responses to Information Requests](#)’, 6 May 2022

10.1.11 Referring to the fatal stabbing of Father Arsanios Wadid, the 2022 IRBC response quoted a post-doctoral research associate at a US university who published a book on Copts as saying in an interview with the IRBC's Research Directorate that such an attack 'is "exceptional"'¹⁶⁹. The same IRBC response, citing various sources, stated:

'Sources indicate that sectarian violence is "more prevalent" in rural and southern Egypt (Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022) or occurs "mainly" in rural areas of southern Egypt (AP 8 Apr. 2022). The Professor also noted that individual and family conflicts between Christians and Muslims are "common" in rural areas, though conflicts between the two communities are "less common" in larger urban centres (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). According to sources, "mob attacks" against Christians in rural areas of Egypt occur "regularly" (MEMO 21 May 2021) or continued to be "endemic" in 2020 (US 21 Apr. 2021, 67). The Postdoctoral Research Associate notes that, because the State is less "effective" in rural areas and villages, in such areas individuals with less money or social power are "more vulnerable" to sectarian violence by Muslim neighbours (Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022).'¹⁷⁰

10.1.12 The response noted that the Western Trinity University professor 'indicated that while there have been "public displays of patronage," such as government-funded church-building, over the last two years and the current regime endorses a "positive relationship" with Copts, Coptic Christians at the local level still experience "discrimination that is not extended in the same way to the majority of Egyptians" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022).'¹⁷¹ The same response quoted the post-doctoral research associate as saying in an interview that Coptic Christians are viewed as "second-class citizens" by Egyptian society¹⁷².

10.1.13 The US State Department, in its '2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Egypt' (USSD HR report 2022), dated 20 March 2023, covering events in 2022, stated <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/egypt/>: 'In August [2022] rights groups and media reported the killing of two Coptic men in the Gelbana area in Sinai. Members of ISIS-Sinai Province reportedly shot and killed Salama Moussa Waheeb and Hani Salama Moussa while they were farming.'¹⁷³

10.1.14 The 2023 Open Doors dossier reported on the same incident, stating that during its reporting period (1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022): 'In April 2021, a video appeared of the execution of Nabil Habashy Salama, a Christian from north-Sinai who had previously been abducted by the Islamic State group. In August 2022, a Coptic father and son were found murdered in the same area; it is assumed that they were also victims of IS-related militants.'¹⁷⁴

10.1.15 The dossier also noted that the 2 Christians killed were 'two of the at least

¹⁶⁹ IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

¹⁷⁰ IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

¹⁷¹ IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

¹⁷² IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

¹⁷³ USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights...](#)', 20 March 2023

¹⁷⁴ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 25), January 2023

five Christians reported to have been killed [in the reporting period].¹⁷⁵

10.1.16 The 2023 Open Doors dossier stated: 'General security has improved under President al-Sisi. No large-scale terror attacks have taken place since 2018... Despite the president's inclusive rhetoric, sectarian violence and religious discrimination remain problematic, especially in upper Egypt, in rural areas and in economically disadvantaged urban areas...'¹⁷⁶

10.1.17 The dossier also noted, 'Radical Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood have nationwide support, but violent Islamic militants are only openly active in the north-eastern area of the Sinai peninsula.'¹⁷⁷

10.1.18 The dossier stated:

'Christians in Egypt report that freedom of religion violations occur mostly at the community level, with many Christians regularly facing discrimination. In addition, incidents take place such as Christian women being harassed in the street (especially in rural areas), Christian children being bullied at state schools or in rare incidents, Muslim mobs forcing Christians to move out after an alleged blasphemy accusation. These sort of incidents take place mostly in Upper Egypt, where Salafist movements are active in the rural communities. The Islamic Salafi al-Nour party continues to exist and operate legally, although the Constitution prohibits religious parties (Art. 74). Their influence is considerable in rural societies where there is a high percentage of illiteracy and poverty.'¹⁷⁸

10.1.19 The dossier further stated:

'Upper Egypt, the southern part of the country, is known to be more Islamically conservative and radical than the north. Most incidents and mob attacks take place in this region, with the Minya Governate being the most notorious and having the highest number of attacks on Christians per capita. However, Christians in the economically disadvantaged rural areas in the north experience a similar degree of oppression by radical Muslims, especially in the Nile Delta villages and towns.'¹⁷⁹

10.1.20 According to the dossier:

'... Levels of pressure and discrimination vary; there is often less pressure in urban areas compared to rural areas...

'Monitoring occurs at different levels. Local communities and Islamist groups know where the Christians live in their neighborhood or villages. They watch and observe them, making sure the Christians do not disrespect Islamic principles by evangelizing or causing problems in others ways. This tension is less in urban places, but remains a problem in poor neighborhoods and rural areas, especially in upper Egypt. In recent years, several Christians have been attacked after allegedly insulting Islam or allegedly having a relationship with a Muslim woman. Police presence and government control is less strict in poor and/or rural areas and mob attacks often go

¹⁷⁵ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 39), January 2023

¹⁷⁶ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 21), January 2023

¹⁷⁷ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 25), January 2023

¹⁷⁸ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 6), January 2023

¹⁷⁹ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 25), January 2023

unpunished...'¹⁸⁰

10.1.21 As regards specific instances of local sectarian violence, Watani, in its article 'Police contain attack against Luxor church granted legality', dated 25 June 2022, described how a riot broke out following the granting of legal status to a village church: 'Coptic eyewitnesses said that once the church became legal and guards were stationed at its entrance, a general rejection of the situation was fostered and egged on by fundamentalists among the village Muslims. "Thursday [23 June] evening," said a Coptic villager to Watani, "a large crowd of Muslims gathered, some of them not from our village, screaming slogans hostile to Copts. They threw stones at our houses and set fire to Coptic-owned vehicles and motorbikes. We kept to our homes for safety's sake; this led to no casualties."¹⁸¹

10.1.22 With regard to violence relating to church construction, the Coptic Solidarity construction article 2023 stated:

'On September 5, 2023, a Muslim mob rose against and attacked a Coptic Christian man's property on the false assumption that he was building a church. The incident occurred in the village of al-Khiyari, in the Abu Qurqas center [in Minya governorate].

'The Muslims apparently confused two developments. Because the village has no church, a Coptic priest had been traveling to and meeting with the Christians of al-Khiyari in a certain area near the home of Imad Wajih, the aforementioned Coptic man. In that same area, Christians had submitted a request for a permit to build a church, so they could hold proper worship services, as opposed to meeting with a traveling priest in random spots.

'In the meantime, Imad began building a smaller private home on his property. Although it had nothing to do with the proposed church, local Muslims began inciting one another, including on social media, where they complained that "the Copts are building a church without a permit!"

'Accordingly, they attacked Imad's property and stole building materials, including concrete blocks and reinforced iron. A fire also broke out in the vicinity.

'To be sure, this scenario has played out countless times in Egypt: whenever there is even a rumor that a Coptic church is being built or repaired—local Muslim mobs riot and attack Christians.'¹⁸²

10.1.23 With regard to fires at churches, the 2022 USSD religious freedom report stated:

'In August [2022], local and international media outlets reported on a series of fires inside churches and public places around the country, including an August 13 fire in the Abu Sefein Church in the Giza suburbs of Cairo that killed 41 persons. According to some sources, authorities suspected arson in only one case, a minor fire in Alexandria in which a person allegedly threw lighted cigarettes at a church. Police made no arrests in that case. Some clerical personnel and laypersons said the government bore partial

¹⁸⁰ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 34), January 2023

¹⁸¹ Watani, '[Police contain attack against Luxor church granted legality...](#)', 25 June 2022

¹⁸² Coptic Solidarity, '[Where is the Equality?...](#)', 13 September 2023

responsibility for the church fires because its pre-2016 legacy of blocking church renovations and registrations led to overcrowded buildings in crowded urban areas with dangerous or poorly maintained electrical wiring.’¹⁸³

10.1.24 In relation to societal treatment of Coptic women, the 2023 USCIRF annual report cited the cases of Mariam Waheeb (Maryam Wahib) and Naveen Sobhi, stating, ‘Coptic women suffered both anti-Christian and female targeted abuse.’¹⁸⁴

10.1.25 For further information on the cases of Waheeb and Sobhi, see [Converts from Christianity to Islam](#) and [Reconciliation committees](#).

10.1.26 The 2023 Open Doors dossier noted, ‘Although all women in Egypt experience some forms of (sexual) harassment, Christian women are particularly vulnerable because they do not veil themselves.’¹⁸⁵

10.1.27 The dossier further stated that during the WWL 2023 reporting period, ‘... at least several young [Christian] women were groomed and sexually abused, while others were forced to marry Muslims. In addition, hundreds have experienced sexual harassment.’¹⁸⁶

10.1.28 For information on the abduction of women, see [Abductions, interfaith relationships and coerced conversion to Islam](#).

10.1.29 With regard to desecration of cemeteries, USCIRF, in a factsheet ‘Destruction of Cemeteries: September 2021’, reported:

‘Although the desecration of burial sites for Egypt’s religious minority communities is a relatively rare phenomenon, reports occasionally emerge of such incidents. However, these incidents typically represent societal discrimination rather than state policy. For example, in 2020, a video widely circulated on Facebook showed a group of villagers in the New Valley governorate exhuming the body of a Coptic boy who had recently died, accompanied by the wails of the deceased’s mother. According to local reports, neighbors had objected to the boy’s burial in a predominantly Muslim cemetery despite the lack of a specifically Christian cemetery in the vicinity, and a group of them took it upon themselves to dig up his grave. It is unclear where the boy’s remains were taken, and the video has since been removed from Facebook.’¹⁸⁷

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10.2 Hate speech

10.2.1 The 2023 MRG report noted: ‘Copts are subjected to different form[s] of hate speech, in addition to the incitement of hatred by religious elites who portray them as unbelievers and “kafirs”. This in turn exposes them to different forms of verbal and physical assault. Additionally, the repeated calls to avoid congratulating Christians on their holy feasts and disallow prayers for their

¹⁸³ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (section 2), 15 May 2023

¹⁸⁴ USCIRF, ‘[2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter](#)’ (page 54), May 2023

¹⁸⁵ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 34), January 2023

¹⁸⁶ Open Doors, ‘[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)’ (page 39), January 2023

¹⁸⁷ USCIRF, ‘[Factsheet on Destruction of Cemeteries](#)’, 1 September 2021

deceased contribute to further incitement to enmity...'¹⁸⁸

10.2.2 The same report stated:

'Many forms of hate speech that fuel aggression and violence are tied to sectarian assaults on Christians... These statements are often intertwined with conflicts between local minority communities and their majority neighbours that take on a sectarian form through incitement and hatred. While monitoring many incidents of sectarian violence against Copts, it is clear that speech inciting violence is commonplace in Egyptian society, not least in the form of rumours, calls on social media platforms and preaching carried out within mosques.'¹⁸⁹

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10.3 Converts from Islam

10.3.1 The 2023 Open Doors dossier reported: 'Christians with a Muslim background have great difficulties in living out their faith since they face enormous pressure from their families to return to Islam.'¹⁹⁰

It also stated, '...converts from a Muslim background face pressure in particular from their (extended) family for shaming values like the honor of the family.'¹⁹¹

10.3.2 The dossier noted: 'It is difficult for converts from Islam to Christianity to live as a Christian family. They can only be baptized in secret. Giving their children Christian names would be socially questionable. In general, marriage and burial can only happen according to Islamic rites. In addition, if their new faith becomes known, converts are likely to be forced into divorce, lose custody of their children and be disinherited.'

10.3.3 The dossier stated: 'There is a small but growing number of Christian converts who bear the brunt of violations, most often at the hands of family members, but also by the security services. The former punish converts for abandoning the Islamic faith, often by means of beatings or expulsion from the family home.'¹⁹²

It reported that '[family members may] even kill them.'¹⁹³ It did not give specific data or examples.

10.3.4 The dossier also noted, 'Most converts refrain from publishing [online] anything indicating their new faith, mainly out of fear of repercussions from family or society.'¹⁹⁴

10.3.5 The dossier noted that during the WWL 2023 reporting period, 'Especially converts from Islam to Christianity were forced to relocate inside or outside the country.'¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁸ MRG, [The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities](#)' (pages 22-23), 2 March 2023

¹⁸⁹ MRG, [The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities](#)' (page 23), 2 March 2023

¹⁹⁰ Open Doors, [Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 6), January 2023

¹⁹¹ Open Doors, [Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 28), January 2023

¹⁹² Open Doors, [Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 26), January 2023

¹⁹³ Open Doors, [Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 31), January 2023

¹⁹⁴ Open Doors, [Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 32), January 2023

¹⁹⁵ Open Doors, [Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 39), January 2023

10.3.6 For further information on Christian converts, see [State treatment and non-blasphemy prosecutions](#), [Employment](#), [Media and social media](#), [Protection from and actions against Christians](#) and [Internal relocation](#).

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10.4 Abductions, interfaith relationships and coerced conversion to Islam

10.4.1 US-based Coptic advocacy NGO Coptic Solidarity, in a report ‘Jihad of the Womb: Trafficking of Coptic Women & Girls in Egypt’, dated 10 September 2020, based on various sources and published by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), referred to the ‘abduction and trafficking’ of Coptic women and girls in Egypt and stated: ‘According to a priest in the Minya Governorate, at least 15 girls go missing every year in his area alone. His own daughter was nearly kidnapped had he not been able to intervene in time.’¹⁹⁶

10.4.2 The report further noted:

‘One reason for the lack of action and international attention to the issue of trafficking Coptic women is the difficulty in documenting all the cases, and secondly the excuse used by Egyptian government officials that the girls and women have gone willingly. While few cases are genuine marriages, Coptic Solidarity estimates about 500 cases within the last decade, where elements of coercion were used that amount to trafficking...

‘Some of the most common scenarios in the enforced kidnapping and disappearance of Coptic women and girls include:

‘1. Overpowering and kidnapping women, identified as Coptic by not wearing hijab, or wearing a necklace with a cross; this can occur while alone in public such as on the way back from schools or workplaces, while traveling in public transportation such as tuk-tuks, and while walking alone on public roads.

‘2. Luring minor Coptic girls into romantic relationships by Muslim men; the typical scenario includes promises of eloping to start a new life together after which the girl discovers she has been tricked but is then at the mercy of her captors; these girls are the most likely to be forcibly converted to Islam and married. Often, the captors take videos of the girls being sexually abused and threaten to share the videos with their families and communities as a means of enforcing the shame culture and deterring the girls from trying to return to their families...

‘3. Engaging in superficial theological debates, by those ignorant and disparaging of Christianity’s basic tenets, targeting the youngsters and relatively uneducated. Given the overwhelming propaganda, through education and media, constantly hammering a message claiming the superiority of Islam, this can be effective, in particular in the countryside where the majority of villages are denied permits to have churches and hence some Copts may be inadequately prepared to counter-debate.’¹⁹⁷

10.4.3 The same report further noted:

¹⁹⁶ Coptic Solidarity, [“Jihad of the Womb”: Trafficking of Coptic Women...’](#), 10 September 2020

¹⁹⁷ Coptic Solidarity, [“Jihad of the Womb”: Trafficking of Coptic Women...’](#), 10 September 2020

‘There is ample evidence pointing to organized networks, related to Salafist groups, which are actively engaging in the phenomenon that we call ‘Jihad of the Womb.’ As explained by [author and Gatestone Institute fellow¹⁹⁸] Raymond Ibrahim, “Because numbers always mean strength, Muslim clerics present this ‘procreation’ jihad as a way of killing two birds with one stone: seize and seed non-Muslim women with Muslim babies. Doing so depletes the infidels’ ranks of women and the non-Muslim babies they might have birthed, while simultaneously increasing both for Islam.”

‘According to a former member of one of these kidnapping rings, the abduction of such girls is now at an all-time high. “Salafist networks began in the seventies and it’s reached its highest levels now, in the era of President Sisi... A group of kidnapers meets in a mosque to discuss potential victims. They keep a close eye on Christians’ houses and monitor everything that’s going on. On that basis, they weave a spider’s web around [the girls].”

‘The tactics include utilizing or planting Muslim female neighbors, colleagues, coworkers or friends to invite Coptic women to their home or travel across town during which time they are kidnapped by the groups who organized with the known female.

‘The former kidnapper stated that his group “rented apartments in different areas of Egypt to hide kidnapped Coptic girls. There, they put them under pressure and threaten them to convert to Islam. And once they reach the legal age, a specially arranged Islamic representative comes in to make the conversion official, issue a certificate and accordingly they change their ID”.

‘These networks are often supported by like-minded members (including high-ranking officials) of the police, national security and local administrations. Their roles include refusal to lodge official complaints by the victims’ families, falsifying police investigations, organizing the formal sessions of conversion to Islam at Al-Azhar, or harassing families into silence and acceptance of the de facto trafficking of their loved ones.

‘The variety of scenarios—some in which women are obviously kidnapped contrary to their will, and others in which a Coptic girl initially agrees to an elopement (or similar arrangement)—has made it difficult to hold the Egyptian government to account for these crimes. To date, the Egyptian government claims that the vast majority of these cases include Coptic girls who willingly converted and left their homes and families with Muslim men.’¹⁹⁹

10.4.4 With regard to possible forced conversions of women, the 2023 Open Doors dossier stated:

‘During the WWL 2023 reporting period, at least 60 young Coptic women were reported missing. It often remains unclear whether the young woman in question escaped from an abusive home or a forced marriage, fell in love with a (Muslim) man and voluntarily ran away or if someone was groomed and converted to Islam by force. There are indications, though, that Salafi groups specifically target (young) Coptic women to convert them to Islam and that financial incentives are offered to (young) Muslim men to marry

¹⁹⁸ Raymond Ibrahim, ‘[About](#)’, undated

¹⁹⁹ Coptic Solidarity, ‘[“Jihad of the Womb”: Trafficking of Coptic Women...](#)’, 10 September 2020

them. Although this number is comparatively low compared to the overall number of Copts, there are numerous legal and cultural elements that make them particularly vulnerable to such practices, including (legal) difficulty to reconvert to Christianity and family honor preventing Christian women from returning to their families.’²⁰⁰

10.4.5 The table below was produced by CPIT to show the number of Christians abducted and the number forced into marriage to non-Christians, as recorded by Open Doors International in its World Watch List and reported in its Egypt dossiers for 2021²⁰¹, 2022²⁰² and 2023²⁰³. Open Doors stated that these were minimum figures, and that a ‘symbolic round figure’, marked with an asterisk from WWL 2022 onwards, was provided where a precise number could not be given. It noted that the actual number in such cases could be at least 10 times greater than the symbolic figure.²⁰⁴

	WWL 2021 (reporting period 1 Oct 2019 - 30 Sept 2020)	WWL 2022 (reporting period 1 Oct 2020 - 30 Sept 2021)	WWL 2023 (reporting period 1 Oct 2021 - 30 Sept 2022)
Christians abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)	10	5	3
Forced marriages of Christians to non- Christians	1	10*	2

10.4.6 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:

‘On more than 10 occasions during the year [2022], Coptic families announced the disappearance of female relatives, several of whom were minors. In some cases, families said the disappearances were related to abductions or forced conversions to Islam. Government authorities reportedly often worked to return these women and girls to their families. In at least two cases, Coptic women appeared in videos saying they had willingly converted to Islam and showing conversion certificates... Clerics and laypersons from the Coptic community stated these cases were often rooted in family disputes, mixed-religion romantic relationships, or efforts by Coptic women to seek divorces that were often not permitted under Coptic religious bylaws.

‘[Privately-owned Egyptian news website] Al-Masrawy reported that in April, dozens of Copts demonstrated in the Diocese of Beni Suef in Beni Suef

²⁰⁰ Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 8), January 2023

²⁰¹ Open Doors, [‘...Egypt: Country Dossier’](#) (Violence section), 13 January 2021

²⁰² Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 36), January 2022

²⁰³ Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 38), January 2023

²⁰⁴ Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 37-38), January 2023

Governorate to protest the disappearance of Maryam Wahib, a Copt, and her infant daughter, and to demand police intervention to find them. Social media users circulated a video of Wahib announcing her conversion to Islam. Her husband, Joseph Saad, said his wife appeared distressed in the video, indicating to him that she had converted under duress. Two days after her disappearance, Wahib returned home with her daughter and reportedly renounced her conversion. Her family publicly thanked President Sisi, Pope Tawadros, and security authorities at all levels for their efforts in the case.²⁰⁵

10.4.7 With regard to Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men, the 2023 Open Doors dossier stated:

‘There is a striking imbalance between the faiths: Whereas a Christian women [sic] can easily convert to Islam and marry a Muslim man, it is culturally and legally impossible for a Christian man to marry a Muslim woman. The latter is in the first place forbidden by law, but more importantly, women are considered the bearers of the (family) honor and (Islamic) pride. The slightest rumor that a Christian man is in a relationship with a Muslim woman is often enough to cause mob violence against Christians.’²⁰⁶

10.4.8 For more information on attacks relating to interfaith relationships, see [Societal violence and discrimination](#) and [Protection from and prosecution of actions against Christians](#).

10.4.9 With regard to the possible existence of a forced conversion of a man, the USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated:

‘In September [2022], social media activists circulated a photograph depicting a certificate of conversion to Islam issued by al-Azhar’s Islamic Research Academy on behalf of a young Christian, Saad Fahim, from a village in Beni Suef Governorate. They also circulated a medical certificate for the same man from a hospital in Beni Suef that indicated Fahim suffered from a “psychological disorder and a delay in mental abilities” and had previously been committed to the hospital for psychological treatment. The activists questioned how al-Azhar could accept such a conversion, and whether it was an indicator of “forced conversion campaigns.”’²⁰⁷

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10.5 Employment

10.5.1 The 2022 USSD religious freedoms report stated: ‘Religious discrimination in private sector hiring continued, according to human rights groups and religious communities...’²⁰⁸

10.5.2 The 2023 Open Doors dossier reported: ‘Discrimination against Christians in the job market remains evident, especially in governmental institutions. This applies in general to all Christians in Egypt, but converts from a Muslim background are particularly vulnerable.’²⁰⁹ The dossier did not provide further information to illustrate this.

²⁰⁵ USSD, [‘2022 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#) (section 2), 15 May 2023

²⁰⁶ Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 8), January 2023

²⁰⁷ USSD, [‘2022 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#) (section 2), 15 May 2023

²⁰⁸ USSD, [‘2022 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#) (Executive Summary), 15 May 2023

²⁰⁹ Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 16), January 2023

10.5.3 Quoting a Canadian professor and a postdoctoral research associate whose respective work focused on Copts, the 2022 IRBC response stated:

'The Professor, in discussing access to employment and other services in Cairo and Alexandria, stated that, compared to those in rural areas, Coptic Christians living in larger cities experience "greater general discrimination" in employment and noted that they will face "significant challenges" in seeking employment if they lack local contacts in the city (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The Postdoctoral Research Associate stated that in Cairo and Alexandria employment is "typically" accessed through family connections rather than state-sponsored services and that Copts from Upper Egypt resettling in either city without an existing network of relatives would find it "near impossible" to obtain employment (Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022). The same source added that "most" industries operating in Cairo and Alexandria, including construction, petroleum, public school teaching and the public sector, either refuse to hire Coptic Christians or avoid promoting them; in "most cases," it is Copts who employ other Copts (Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022). The Professor similarly noted that Coptic Christians are "most likely" to work for other Copts, as sectarian identity affects employment access (Professor 1 Apr. 2022).'²¹⁰

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10.6 Housing

10.6.1 The 2022 IRBC response stated:

'According to a 2019 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing on a visit to Egypt from September to October 2018, Coptic Christians are among several groups that face "discrimination" in accessing housing in Egypt (UN 3 Oct. 2019, para. 105). In a statement immediately after the 2018 visit, the same source indicated that Coptic survivors of sectarian violence in the Governorate of Minya (Upper Egypt) had been "displaced from their homes by their own neighbours without sufficient protection from security officials" and were unable to return due to safety concerns (UN 3 Oct. 2018). In the 2019 report, the Special Rapporteur added that Coptic families in Basra village in Amreya [Ameriya], Alexandria; Nag Al-Taweel in Tud, Luxor; Shibin Al Qanatir [Shebin Al Qanater] in Al-Qalyubiyah [Qalyubia, Kalyubia, Kalyoubia, Kalioubieh]; and Maiana Bahnasia in Kafr Darwish, Beni Suef [Banī Suwayf] had also faced "forced evictions" (UN 3 Oct. 2019, para. 82).'²¹¹

10.6.2 The response further stated:

'Sources reported that Coptic Christians [from Upper Egypt (Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022)] seeking housing access in Cairo and Alexandria would face "significant challenges" without "local connections" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022) or it would be "near impossible" without family in the city (Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022). The Postdoctoral Research Associate stated that, in both Cairo and Alexandria, services such as housing are "typically" not provided by the State but rather through family networks in "poor, informal settlements" on the outskirts of the city

²¹⁰ IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

²¹¹ IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

(Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022). The Professor noted that Copts who are “willing and able to pay above-market prices” are “less likely” to struggle to find housing (Professor 1 Apr. 2022).²¹²

10.6.3 For more information, see [Internal relocation](#).

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10.7 Education

10.7.1 USCIRF, in a report ‘Assessing Religious Freedom in Egyptian Curriculum Reform’, dated August 2022, stated:

‘A comparison of the curricula for the academic years 2021–2022 and 2017–2018 revealed that the government made only slight modifications to the textbooks, most of which have nothing to do with the content of this study. These changes stand in contrast to officials’ pledges to develop the curricula.

‘The review of the EMEC [Egyptian Mandated Education Curriculum] yielded the following insights:

- The textbooks examined in this report do not include lessons that directly encourage violence against religious minorities, but they contain many lessons that encourage discrimination and incite contempt for those who practice other religions, especially Judaism, and who are referred to as enemies...
- The religionization of the EMEC is broadly embedded in diverse subjects like Arabic language, history, and social studies as many lessons include Quranic verses and hadiths, and forces students of different religions to study them, memorize them, and recite them in exams.
- The curricula emphasize that Islam is the only source of positive virtues and values, in a way that depicts other religions as immoral or, at the very least, frames other religions as not having these same virtues. Similarly, relying on Islamic references for topics that are not religious facilitates discrimination and gives preference to Islam over other religions and beliefs.
- Promoting the idea that Islam is the basis of human values and communal solidarity, rather than citizenship, opens the door for radical interpretations which are not welcoming of diversity.
- Imposing religious values and teachings that may contradict what Christians believe in is a violation of the constitution which seeks to promote equality between citizens...

‘...The pervasive influence of Islam, whether in the form of Quranic text to teach the Arabic language or through anecdotal examples of piety or honorable behavior in social sciences, leaves non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim students excluded or under-represented.’²¹³

10.7.2 The 2022 USSD religious freedom report stated:

²¹² IRBC, ‘[Responses to Information Requests](#)’, 6 May 2022

²¹³ USCIRF, ‘[Assessing Religious Freedom in Egyptian Curriculum Reform...](#)’, August 2022

‘In both public and private schools that teach the national curriculum, in all grades Muslim students are required to take courses on “principles of Islam” and Christian students are required to take courses on “principles of Christianity.” The religious studies courses they take are based on their official identity card designations, not personal or parental decisions. Students who are neither Muslim nor Christian must choose one or the other course; they may not opt out or change from one to the other once selected. A common set of textbooks for these two courses is mandated for both public and private schools, including parochial schools. Al-Azhar maintains a separate school system that serves an estimated two million students from kindergarten through secondary school, using its own curriculum.’²¹⁴

10.7.3 With regard to scheduling exams, Watani, in an article ‘Education Ministry responds to Coptic complaints about exam dates’, dated 13 December 2022, reported:

‘The Ministry of Education and Technical Education issued directives today to education directorates across Egypt, urging them to take into consideration dates of Christian feasts when setting the schedule for mid-year examinations in 2023. Accordingly, the Ministry stressed that it is not allowed to hold any exams on 7 January—Coptic Christmas—or the following day 8 January, out of respect for the Christian feast. The Ministry of Education pointed out that directorates of education across Egypt are to begin the exams schedule not earlier than 9 January 2023.

‘The Ministry of Education decision came in the wake of news published by Watani to the effect that the Sharqiya governorate had scheduled exams on 8 January, the day directly following Coptic Christmas. Watani commented that this would deprive Copts from celebrating Christmas, and would put pressure on Coptic children and parents on their feast day.

‘It later turned out that Assiut [governorate] had also scheduled an exam on 4 January, thus violating the dates previously set by the Ministry.

‘Following the Ministry’s decision of today, the dates were revised.’²¹⁵

10.7.4 However, the 2023 USCIRF update stated:

‘Egypt has continued to make progress on integrating religious tolerance as a value into its educational curriculum, in alignment with the goals outlined in the National Strategy for Human Rights. However, the rolling, multiple-year plan for textbook reforms to remove material harmful to religious minorities has resulted in the continued use of inflammatory material in textbooks for grades or subjects which have not yet undergone revision. Further, public schools offer only Muslim and Christian education, forcing students who do not ascribe to these religions to either attend classes on a religion of which they are not a member or, in some cases, to skip instruction altogether and expose themselves as a religious minority. Ministry of Education officials suggested that members of certain religious communities could turn to foreign embassies for religious education in their own traditions.’²¹⁶

²¹⁴ USSD, ‘[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’ (Executive Summary), 15 May 2023

²¹⁵ Watani, ‘[Education Ministry responds to Coptic complaints about exam...](#)’, 13 December 2022

²¹⁶ USCIRF, ‘[Egypt Country Update](#)’, 4 August 2023

- 10.7.5 The same report stated: ‘In meetings with USCIRF, Ministry of Education officials noted that while they “respect everyone,” the small number of religious minorities makes offering additional religious education options unnecessary and pointed out students are not required to attend the religious lesson.’²¹⁷
- 10.7.6 Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), a UK-based organisation working to ‘ensure that the right to freedom of religion or belief is upheld and protected’²¹⁸, in an article ‘Christian students ordered to remove crucifix pendants and bracelets at school’, dated 10 November 2021, reported: ‘The headmaster and several other teachers at a school in Ezbat Beshri, Samalout, Minya governorate, ordered Coptic Christian students to remove any pendants or bracelets bearing a cross last week. ‘CSW’s sources report that some Christians students at Al-Thawra school were beaten by teachers and Muslim students after the order was given. In one incident, a female teacher beat a Christian student and encouraged other students to beat him, snatch his pendant and destroy the cross. ‘Nader Shokry, a Christian journalist covering sectarian incidents, reported: “There is an investigation and the directorate of education is following up the incident. Things have changed from the past, sectarian incidents still occur but there is a quick response now and things are dealt with more quickly.”’²¹⁹
- 10.7.7 With regard to academic freedom in relation to religion, the USSD HR report 2022 stated: ‘In September the Supreme Administrative Court rejected an appeal seeking the reinstatement of Mona Prince, an instructor at Suez University. The university dismissed Prince in 2018 after she posted video clips of herself dancing and encouraging students to do so as well, according to media reports. The court justified the decision, saying such videos degraded the prestige of a university professor. The court also explained Prince departed from approved curriculum and did not adhere to accepted religious dogma while teaching Paradise Lost by John Milton. The court condemned her instruction methods and asserted that religious dictates necessarily limited academic freedom.’²²⁰

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10.8 Healthcare

- 10.8.1 MRG, in a report ‘Understanding barriers to health care for minorities and indigenous peoples in Egypt, Iraq and Tunisia’, dated 28 June 2023, based on various sources, stated, not specifically in regard to Christians, that: ‘When asked about how easy it is to obtain health care for minorities in Egypt, the field study’s participants provided a complex intersectional view on how minorities are affected. One of the main issues raised by the participants is the issue of the centralization of the Egyptian health system. This means health resources are unequally distributed, where major cities

²¹⁷ USCIRF, ‘[Egypt Country Update](#)’, 4 August 2023

²¹⁸ CSW, ‘[About us](#)’, undated

²¹⁹ CSW, ‘[Christian students ordered to remove crucifix pendants...](#)’, 10 November 2021

²²⁰ USSD, ‘[2022 Country Report on Human Rights...](#)’, 20 March 2023

benefit from the concentration of these resources while rural and peripheral areas lack even essential care. This imposes an additional barrier to accessing quality health care for many minorities, who mainly live on the outskirts of the main cities in Egypt. This has major implications not only for the health outcomes of minorities but also for the largest part of the Egyptian population since 57 per cent of them live in rural areas...

'In Egypt, where about a third of population live below the poverty line, the question of the affordability of health care plays a key role in determining access to health. Minorities experience an intersectional limitation in their access to health, between identity-based discrimination and economic marginalization. According to the fieldwork, when poverty and marginalization are combined within Egypt's centralized health system, the result is that many minorities are deprived of their right to health...

'The fieldwork highlighted the systemic discrimination minorities face when accessing health care. It is entrenched in a larger reality of marginalization in their access to land, housing, employment and education. During the fieldwork medical professionals were asked about discrimination on the individual level and the quality of treatment of minorities. Not all interviewees belonging to a medical profession think that minorities receive unequal care. Some witnessed minorities being exposed to harassment when seeking care. According to a doctor interviewed: 'discrimination in the health system against minorities exists when racism in the society is tolerated'...

'All participants agreed that women would face difficulties in navigating the health system. They acknowledge that women from minorities will experience double discrimination. In some cases, health complaints made by women are seen as exaggerated or insincere: "some doctors find it easier to prescribe painkillers instead of carrying out a full examination for a woman".

'The quality of services available for marginalized groups, minorities and refugees is very bad: "if you are from a minority, marginalized peripherally or geographically, refugees, services are very poor, even in the most basic health needs".'²²¹

10.8.2 Quoting a Canadian professor and a postdoctoral research associate, whose respective work focused on Copts, the 2022 IRBC response stated:

'When asked about accessing services such as healthcare in Cairo and Alexandria, the Professor stated that they were not aware of any instances of "discrimination" against Coptic Christians related to healthcare (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The same source added that while Copts "would face significant barriers" in accessing public services, they would "generally" still have access "equa[l]" to that of Muslim citizens (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). According to the Postdoctoral Research Associate, access to healthcare services, including mental health services, is "nonexistent" for Coptic Christians resettling from Upper Egypt in Cairo and Alexandria (Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022).'²²²

10.8.3 For information about healthcare in general, see the Country Information

²²¹ MRG, '[Understanding barriers to health care for minorities...](#)', 28 June 2023

²²² IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

Note [Egypt: Country Background Note](#).

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10.9 Culture

10.9.1 The 2023 MRG culture report stated: ‘More recently, Coptic festivals in relation to the journey of the Holy Family through Egypt were added to UNESCO’s List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2022. However, the preservation of minorities’ cultural identity, as a lived element that needs protection has seldom been highlighted in official contexts. Rather, the state refers to minority cultures as ‘historic’.²²³

10.9.2 The report further stated:

‘With respect to Egypt’s Coptic Christians, who are the largest Christian community in the Arab world, violations of cultural rights are also multiple. Christianity dates back nearly 2,000 years in Egypt and is one of the oldest religions in the country along with Judaism, which preceded it. Many ancient Coptic heritage sites can be found in the country, such as churches and monasteries protected under the Antiquities Protection Law.

‘The tangible cultural heritage of Egypt’s Coptic minority faces numerous threats. Perhaps the most serious of these are the attacks carried out against historic Egyptian churches, which escalated dramatically in 2013 due to the turbulent political situation in the country. The August 2013 social unrest resulted in attacks on several historic churches and the theft of some relics from various local museums...

‘Furthermore, the restoration of churches and monasteries is sometimes neglected, leading to partial collapse...

‘... [T]he preservation of tangible heritage would be strengthened by the introduction of legislative amendments that would ensure the state’s responsibility for both restoring and financing the restoration of minority cultural sites, in line with state practice concerning the restoration of Islamic sites. Those responsible for destroying and obliterating antiquities for financial gain must be held accountable. The state, with all its agencies, must also stop initiating investment deals on archaeological land, specifically land where minorities’ antiquities are located.’²²⁴

10.9.3 See [Church building law in practice](#).

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section updated: 1 November 2023

11. Protection from and prosecution of actions against Christians

11.1 Overview of protection

11.1.1 For information on the criminal justice system in general, including its ability to provide protection, see Country Background Note: Egypt.

11.1.2 The 2023 USCIRF update stated:

‘Although church leaders maintain good relations with government officials,

²²³ MRG, [The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities](#), 2 March 2023

²²⁴ MRG, [The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities](#), 2 March 2023

Copts' protection remains heavily dependent on personal relationships between the church and the government, without the benefit of an institutionalized policy. While the government supports church building efforts, local Coptic community leaders still feel pressure to engage in sensitive negotiations with local Muslim leaders to avoid conflict as well as vandalism of churches.²²⁵

- 11.1.3 Quoting from correspondence between the IRBC's Research Directorate and a professor of political and international studies at Trinity Western University in British Columbia, the IRBC response stated:

'According to the [UN] Special Rapporteur [on the Right to Housing in a 2019 report on a visit to Egypt from September to October 2018], "in several instances" law enforcement has "refused" to protect Coptic Christians who were forcibly evicted from their homes after sectarian conflicts and who wished to return (UN 3 Oct. 2019, para. 83). According to [pro-Palestinian media monitoring organisation] MEMO [Middle East Monitor], authorities are "[o]ften" forewarned of upcoming attacks against Coptic Christians, such as "looting and burning of people's homes," but they do not provide protection (MEMO 30 Nov. 2021).'²²⁶

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11.2 Police and security authorities' responses to violence

- 11.2.1 The 2022 IRBC response stated:

'According to the Professor, in both urban and rural contexts, the police are "not likely" to act on reports of "vigilante activity against Copts," and that Coptic Christians are already "generally unlikely" to trust that police will provide redress (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The same source added that this situation is "particularly acute" in "smaller centres," including Upper Egypt and the Delta (Professor 1 Apr. 2022).'²²⁷

- 11.2.2 Watani, an Egyptian weekly newspaper in which '[s]pecial attention is given to shedding light on Coptic culture and tradition as authentically Egyptian', in an article 'Police contain attack against Luxor church granted legality', dated 25 June 2022, reported that when a crowd of Muslims began throwing stones and setting fire to Coptic villagers' property in al-Halla, Luxor, following the granting of a licence to a local church, guards positioned outside the church were unable to contain the riot²²⁸.

- 11.2.3 The article continued:

'A bigger police force were quickly sent to Halla, and managed to bring the situation under control. A large number of rioters were caught. The police cordoned off the church and closed the streets leading to Coptic quarters for fear of a renewed attack the following day, Friday, after Muslim noon prayers. They also stationed squads near the main mosques...The police sent out warnings against any unlawful acts, stressing that such acts would be promptly dealt with.

²²⁵ USCIRF, '[Egypt Country Update](#)', 4 August 2023

²²⁶ IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

²²⁷ IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

²²⁸ Watani, '[Police contain attack against Luxor church granted legality...](#)', 25 June 2022

'In the statement issued by the Diocese, Anba Youaqim thanked the police and all local security authorities for containing the situation at the village of Halla.'²²⁹

- 11.2.4 The 2022 AI NHRS report stated, 'The NHRS' claim on addressing "individual sectarian incidents" is in stark contrast to Amnesty International's research on the authorities' consistent failure to protect the community from repeated sectarian attacks since 2013, to bring those responsible to justice and to provide victims with reparations.'²³⁰
- 11.2.5 Similarly, the 2023 Open Doors dossier stated, '... [T]he lack of serious law enforcement and the unwillingness of local authorities to protect Christians leave them vulnerable to attacks, especially in Upper Egypt.'²³¹
- 11.2.6 The 2023 USCIRF annual report stated, 'Authorities... arrested or detained individuals related to mob protests and attacks on Christian churches; however, several such detainees were members of targeted church communities.'²³²
- 11.2.7 A Watani article dated 7 September 2023 quoted a statement issued by the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Abu-Qurqas in Minya Governorate following an attack by local Muslims on property belonging to a Coptic villager they mistakenly believed was building an unlicensed church. According to the article, the statement said: 'The police arrived and arrested a number of men who had committed the outlaw activity. We are confident of the wisdom and ability of the political leaders and security chief in Minya to lawfully resolve the situation.'²³³
- 11.2.8 For further information on the incident, see [Church building law in practice](#) and [Societal violence and discrimination](#).
- 11.2.9 With regard to the authorities' response to disappearances of female Christians, the USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated, 'Coptic communities continued to report incidents of disappearances of female members of the community that, in some cases, families said were related to abductions or forced conversions to Islam; security authorities occasionally assisted efforts to locate them.'²³⁴
- 11.2.10 For further information on such disappearances, see [Abductions, interfaith relationships and coerced conversion to Islam](#).

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11.3 Court verdicts and sentences

11.3.1 The 2022 IRBC response stated:

'According to sources, on 17 December 2020 a Minya court acquitted three men who had been sentenced for participating in a "mob" assault, which included stripping a 70-year-old Coptic woman and the torching of her home in 2016, following allegations that her son was having an affair with a Muslim

²²⁹ Watani, '[Police contain attack against Luxor church granted legality...](#)', 25 June 2022

²³⁰ AI, '["Disconnected from reality": Egypt's National Human Rights Strategy...](#)', 21 September 2022

²³¹ Open Doors, '[Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...](#)' (page 16), January 2023

²³² USCIRF, '[2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter](#)' (page 55), May 2023

²³³ Watani, '[Minya Khayari village Copts attacked on suspicion of building church](#)', 7 September 2023

²³⁴ USSD, '[2022 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)' (Executive Summary), 15 May 2023

woman (The Media Line 23 Dec. 2020; The Tablet 5 Feb. 2021). The New Arab states that the case “highlights” the “routine lack of justice” for Coptic Christians regarding incidents of sectarian violence (The New Arab 4 Feb. 2020).²³⁵

- 11.3.2 The USSD Report on International Religious Freedom for Egypt 2021 (USSD religious freedom report 2021), dated 2 June 2022, stated:

‘Authorities executed Ahmad Saeed Ibrahim al-Sonbati on June 21 [2021] for the 2017 premeditated killing of Coptic priest Father Samaan Shehata of the church of Yulius al-Aqfahsi in the village of Ezbet Girgis, Beni Suef Governorate. In October [2021], Alexandria’s criminal court sentenced brothers Nasser and Ali al-Sambo to life in prison for the December 2020 killing of Coptic Christian Ramsis Boulos Hermina. On February 10 [2021], the Court of Cassation upheld 15-year prison sentences for 10 defendants who participated in a 2013 church burning in Kafr Hakim, Giza Governorate. Minya’s Criminal Court on June 15 [2021] sentenced 10 defendants to five-year prison terms on charges of “vandalism, violence, and burning the homes of Coptic citizens” during a 2016 sectarian riot in the village of Karm in Minya.’²³⁶

- 11.3.3 Citing an Associated Press article, the 2023 Open Doors dossier further stated that in June 2022, the perpetrator of the fatal stabbing of a Coptic Orthodox priest in April of the same year had been sentenced to death.²³⁷

- 11.3.4 For more information on violent attacks, see [Societal violence and discrimination](#). For more information on interfaith relationships, see [Abductions, interfaith relationships and coerced conversion to Islam](#).

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11.4 Ministerial pardon for police officers

- 11.4.1 The USSD religious freedom report 2022 stated, ‘The Ministry of Interior pardoned five police officers convicted of torturing a Coptic man to death in 2016 after they had served one year of a three-year sentence.’²³⁸

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11.5 Protection from hate speech

- 11.5.1 The 2023 MRG culture report noted that notwithstanding the relevant constitutional and legal provisions, ‘... hate speech is prevalent in Egyptian society, threatening the state’s peace and stability. Despite this situation, there are currently no serious attempts by the government to recognize the issue, and monitor and address hate speech in Egypt.’²³⁹

- 11.5.2 The 2023 USCIRF annual report stated: ‘In August [2022], the Heliopolis Misdemeanors Court announced the trial of... television personality, Islamic preacher and Al-Azhar instructor Mabrouk Attia, for on-air jokes about Jesus

²³⁵ IRBC, [‘Responses to Information Requests’](#), 6 May 2022

²³⁶ USSD, [‘2021 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#) (Executive Summary), 2 June 2022

²³⁷ Open Doors, [‘Full Country Dossiers \(Egypt\)...’](#) (page 7), January 2023

²³⁸ USSD, [‘2022 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#) (Executive Summary), 15 May 2023

²³⁹ MRG, [‘The State of Cultural Citizenship for Egyptian Minorities’](#), 2 March 2023

Christ following a lawyer's filing of a criminal complaint that the statements showed contempt for both Christianity and Islam.²⁴⁰

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section updated: 1 November 2023

12. Internal relocation

12.1 Geographical context

- 12.1.1 Egypt is roughly 1 million sq km²⁴¹, approximately 4 times the size of the UK²⁴², with a population estimated at between just over 104 million²⁴³ and just under 110 million²⁴⁴.
- 12.1.2 The population of Cairo is estimated at between 20.5 million²⁴⁵ and just over 22 million²⁴⁶, while the population of Alexandria is estimated at just under 5.6 million^{247 248}. As most of the country is desert, 95% of Egypt's population lives within 20 km of the Nile river and its delta²⁴⁹. The urban population is estimated at 43.1%²⁵⁰.
- 12.1.3 See the CIA World Factbook [Map of Egypt](#)²⁵¹.
- 12.1.4 More than a third of the population is aged 14 or younger, while just over 60% is aged 15 to 64 and just over 5% is aged 65 or over²⁵². As regards ethnicity, 99.7% of the population is ethnic Egyptian.
- 12.1.5 For religious affiliation, see [Demography](#).
- 12.1.6 For further information on geography and demography, see Country Background Note: Egypt.

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12.2 Freedom of movement

- 12.2.1 For information about freedom of movement in general, see the Country Information Note [Egypt: Country Background Note](#).
- 12.2.2 The 2023 FH report stated: 'The constitution guarantees freedom of movement, but internal travel and access are restricted tightly in North Sinai and to a lesser extent in other governorates along Egypt's borders. Sinai residents are subject to curfews, checkpoints, and other obstacles to travel. Individuals seeking to change their place of employment or education can

²⁴⁰ USCIRF, '2023 Annual Report – Egypt Chapter' (page 55), May 2023 <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2092550/Egypt.pdf>

²⁴¹ UN data, '[UN Data](#)', undated

²⁴² CIA World Factbook, '[United Kingdom - The World Factbook](#)', updated 29 August 2023

²⁴³ UN data, '[UN Data](#)', undated

²⁴⁴ CIA World Factbook, '[Egypt - The World Factbook](#)', updated 29 August 2023

²⁴⁵ UN data, '[UN Data](#)', undated

²⁴⁶ CIA World Factbook, '[Egypt - The World Factbook](#)', updated 29 August 2023

²⁴⁷ CIA World Factbook, '[Egypt - The World Factbook](#)', updated 29 August 2023

²⁴⁸ World Population Review, '[Alexandria Population 2023](#)', undated

²⁴⁹ CIA World Factbook, '[Egypt - The World Factbook](#)', updated 29 August 2023

²⁵⁰ CIA World Factbook, '[Egypt - The World Factbook](#)', updated 29 August 2023

²⁵¹ CIA World Factbook, '[Details - The World Factbook](#)', undated

²⁵² CIA World Factbook, '[Details - The World Factbook](#)', undated

encounter bureaucratic barriers and scrutiny from security officials...'²⁵³

12.2.3 The 2022 USSD HR report stated:

'The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, albeit with some exceptions, including the treatment of potential refugees and asylum seekers. Authorities imposed travel bans that limited the right to leave the country for individuals under open-ended criminal cases, including a number of human rights defenders and academic researchers...'²⁵⁴

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12.3 Relocation to Cairo and Alexandria

12.3.1 The 2022 IRBC response quoted the post-doctoral research associate interviewed in April 2022 as commenting:

'Coptic Christians who are resettled by the government to escape sectarian violence in Upper Egypt tend to relocate to other villages where they have family and that, to [the research associate's] knowledge, such individuals are "never resettled" in Cairo or Alexandria (Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022). The same source added that while Upper Egypt is connected by rail to Cairo and Alexandria, the ability to travel to these cities "depends" on a family's circumstances and resources (Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022).'

'The Professor further stated that, for Coptic Christians, resettlement in Cairo or Alexandria is "feasible but not easy" (Professor 1 Apr. 2022)...

'[The postdoctoral research associate] added that elderly people also face barriers to travelling and relocating to cities like Cairo and Alexandria; "most" will not resettle after a sectarian attack due to their reliance on existing family networks (Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022).'²⁵⁵

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12.4 Women

12.4.1 Human Rights Watch, in a report 'Trapped: How Male Guardianship Policies Restrict Women's Travel and Mobility in the Middle East and North Africa', dated 18 July 2023, based on various sources, stated:

'Women across the Middle East and North Africa region face varying restrictions preventing them from moving freely in their own country and from traveling abroad without the permission of their male guardians—typically their fathers or brothers, and when married, their husbands...

'Egypt's personal status laws provide that women can be deemed disobedient or recalcitrant by a court and lose the right to spousal maintenance (nafaqa) from their husbands if they leave the marital home or work without their husbands' consent, with some exceptions. A husband may file an obedience notice against his wife to return to the marital home. If she

²⁵³ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023...](#)', 10 March 2023

²⁵⁴ USSD, '[2022 Country Report on Human Rights...](#)', 20 March 2023

²⁵⁵ IRBC, '[Responses to Information Requests](#)', 6 May 2022

fails to file an objection to court specifying the legal grounds for why she did not return to the home within thirty days of receiving the notice, she is considered recalcitrant and is denied spousal maintenance from her husband. Christian and Jewish persons can have their own personal status laws apply to them, but they have similar provisions that a woman must obey her husband or remain in the marital home in return for spousal maintenance from the husband.²⁵⁶

12.4.2 The same report stated: ‘In practice, single unmarried women face discrimination trying to rent apartments and if they do, they can still face intrusion and monitoring by landlords, building personnel, or neighbors. Women have also reported in recent years that hotel staff prevented them from checking into a hotel room if they were alone or without a male spouse or relative...’²⁵⁷

12.4.3 The 2022 IRBC response quoted the Trinity Western University professor as saying that needing a male guardian’s permission made it ‘more challenging’ for women to relocate from rural areas to cities²⁵⁸.

The response stated: ‘The same source added that Christian women face “more acute” “discrimination,” since unlike Muslim women, they are “not likely” to be veiled, which makes them “more vulnerable to harassment” in public (Professor 1 Apr. 2022). The Postdoctoral Research Associate similarly stated that single Coptic Christian women are “very rare[ly]” able to travel by themselves to Cairo and Alexandria; “conceivably,” upper-middle-class women might travel by themselves to Cairo or Alexandria and stay there in church housing while completing post-secondary studies (Postdoctoral Research Associate 11 Apr. 2022).’²⁵⁹

12.4.4 For information on access to housing for Christians, see [Housing](#). For information on relocation by Christian converts, see [Converts from Islam](#).

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²⁵⁶ HRW, ‘[Trapped: How Male Guardianship Policies Restrict Women’s Travel...](#)’, 18 July 2023

²⁵⁷ HRW, ‘[Trapped: How Male Guardianship Policies Restrict Women’s Travel...](#)’, 18 July 2023

²⁵⁸ IRBC, ‘[Responses to Information Requests](#)’, 6 May 2022

²⁵⁹ IRBC, ‘[Responses to Information Requests](#)’, 6 May 2022

Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

All the COI included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s). Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared and contrasted to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

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Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToRs, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Background
 - Terminology
 - Christian community
 - Demography
- Legal framework
 - Constitution
 - Blasphemy laws
 - Christian conversion and proselytising laws
 - Anti-discrimination laws
 - Hate speech
 - Personal status and adoption laws
 - Identity cards
 - Christian denominations without legal recognition
 - Church building law
- State treatment
 - State attitude
 - State policies and initiatives
 - Interfaith dialogue
 - Protection from and prosecution of actions against Christians
 - State treatment and non-blasphemy prosecution
 - Prosecution under blasphemy laws
 - Church building law in practice
 - Reconciliation committees
 - Media and social media
- Societal treatment
 - Societal violence and discrimination
 - Converts from Islam
 - Interfaith relationships, abductions and coerced conversion to Islam

- Christians in public life
- Privately-owned media
- Employment
- Housing
- Education
- Healthcare
- Media and social media
- Culture
- Internal relocation
 - Overview
 - Freedom of movement
 - Relocation to Cairo and Alexandria
 - Male guardianship

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **5.0**
- valid from **21 December 2023**

Official – sensitive: Start of section

The information on this page has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: End of section

Changes from last version of this note

Update of country of information and assessment.

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Feedback to the Home Office

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The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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