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Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Iran: Christians and Christian converts

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Preface

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and policy guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether – in the event of a claim being refused – it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the policy guidance contained within this note; the available COI; any applicable caselaw; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies.

Country information

The COI within this note has been compiled from a wide range of external information sources (usually) published in English. Consideration has been given to the relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability of the information and wherever possible attempts have been made to corroborate the information used across independent sources, to ensure accuracy. All sources cited have been referenced in footnotes. It has been researched and presented with reference to the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the [European Asylum Support Office’s research guidelines, Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), dated July 2012.

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email [the Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to make recommendations to him about the content of the Home Office’s COI material. 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. IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI’s work and a list of the COI documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector’s website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

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Policy guidance

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1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by the state because the person :
- is a Christian; or
 - has converted to Christianity from another religion (or no religion) and/or
 - actively seeks to convert others to Christianity.

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 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](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Assessment of risk

i. Those born into the Christian religion

- 2.2.1 The Iranian Constitution recognises Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians as protected religious minorities. However the state discriminates against them on the basis of religion or belief, as all laws and regulations are based on unique Shi'a Islamic criteria. It is difficult for many Christians to live freely and openly in Iran. Such discrimination is prevalent throughout Iran (see [Ethnic minority churches](#)).
- 2.2.2 In general the level of discrimination faced by Christians born into the religion, who are not actively evangelising, is not such that it will reach the level of being persecutory or otherwise inhuman or degrading treatment. Where the person has come to the attention of the authorities previously for reasons other than their religion, then that in combination with their religion, may put them at increased risk of persecution. Each case will need to be considered on its facts.

ii. Evangelical/house churches

- 2.2.3 Members of evangelical/house churches are subject to harassment, arrest, close surveillance and imprisonment by the Iranian authorities (see [Evangelical protestant churches](#) and [House churches](#)).

2.2.4 Christians who can demonstrate that they have, either in Iran or in the UK, practised evangelical or proselytising activities and will continue to do so on return to Iran because of their affiliation to evangelical churches, or that they would wear in public outward manifestations of their faith such as a visible crucifix, will attract the adverse notice of the authorities on return to Iran and will be at risk of persecution.

iii. [Christian converts](#)

2.2.5 Christians who have converted from Islam are considered apostates - a criminal offence in Iran. Sharia law does not allow for conversion from Islam to another religion, and it is not possible for a person to change their religious affiliation on personal documentation. There are reports of some Christian converts (and sometimes their family members) facing physical attacks, harassment, threats surveillance, arrest, detention, as well as torture and ill-treatment in detention (see [Christian converts](#)).

2.2.6 In the country guidance case of [SZ and JM \(Christians – FS confirmed\) Iran CG \[2008\] UKAIT 00082](#) (heard on 13 -15 May 2008 and promulgated on 12 November 2008) the Upper Tribunal found that conditions for converts to sacrament-based churches may be such that they could not reasonably be expected to return to Iran (para 145) As regards 'ordinary' converts (ie those who are not active evangelisers), the Tribunal found that there is a risk, but not a real risk, of serious harm if returned to Iran (para 148).

2.2.7 Although this country guidance case was heard over 8 years' ago the available country evidence indicates that the findings remain valid.

2.2.8 Those who have converted from Islam and whose conversion is likely to come to the attention of the authorities in Iran (including through evangelical or proselytising activities or the person having previously come to the adverse attention of the authorities for other reasons) are at real risk of persecution on return.

2.2.9 Some sources suggest that a person who has converted to Christianity abroad and returned to Iran would only be at risk if the authorities previously had an interest in their activities in Iran or if the convert would engage in evangelical or proselytising activities (see [Treatment of those returning to Iran who have converted abroad](#)).

2.2.10 Those persons who return to Iran having converted while abroad and who do not actively seek to proselytise may be able to continue practising Christianity discreetly.

2.2.11 In cases where the person will be discreet about their religion on return, the reasons for such discretion need to be considered in the light of [HJ \(Iran\)](#). Decision makers should take account of how the person has practised their religion whilst in the UK. A person should not be expected to conceal their religion, their conversion or their activities relating to the conversion of others, if they are not willing to do so. However, if the person would conceal his or her religion or religious activities for reasons other than for a fear of persecution, then the person would have no basis for their claim for international protection. Each case must be considered on its facts.

- 2.2.12 For further information and guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.3 Protection

- 2.3.1 As the person's fear is of persecution or serious at the hands of the state, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.3.2 For further information and guidance on assessing the availability or not of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Internal relocation

- 2.4.1 As the person's fear is of persecution or serious harm at the hands of the state, they will not be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.4.2 For further information on considering internal relocation and the factors to be taken into account, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Certification

- 2.5.1 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.
- 2.5.2 For further information and guidance on certification, see the [Asylum Instruction on Non-Suspensive Appeals: Certification Under Section 94 of the NIA Act 2002](#).

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3. Policy summary

- 3.1.1 Christianity is an officially accepted religion according to the constitution. However, Iran is an Islamic theocracy whose citizens do not in general enjoy religious freedom.
- 3.1.2 People born into the Christian religion face discrimination by the state. In general this is not such that it will reach the level of being persecutory or otherwise inhuman or degrading treatment.
- 3.1.3 Where the person has previously come to the attention of the authorities for reasons other than their religion, then that in combination with their religion, may put them at increased risk of persecution. Each case must be considered on its facts.
- 3.1.4 Members of Evangelical and house churches, and those who actively seek to evangelise and engage in proselytising activities, are at real risk of persecution in Iran and a grant of asylum is likely to be appropriate.
- 3.1.5 The right of Muslims to change their religion is not recognised under Sharia law. Christians who have converted from Islam and whose conversion is likely to come to the attention of the authorities - including through

evangelical or proselytising activities or the person having previously come to the adverse attention of the authorities for other reasons - are at real risk of persecution on return.

- 3.1.6 Converts and Christians born into the religion who are not active evangelisers and who have not previously come to the adverse attention of the authorities for other reasons, are not in general at real risk on return. Each case must be considered on its facts.
- 3.1.7 Where a claim falls to be refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded'

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4. Religion in Iran

4.1 Religious demography

4.1.1 In July 2015 the US State Department estimated the population of Iran to be at 81.8 million.¹ The estimated number of Christians living in Iran varied greatly. UN data from 2013 suggests that the number is 117,704.² The United States Religious Freedom report quote the figures from the World Christian database as stating there are approximately 285,000 Christians in Iran, whilst the Statistical Center of Iran reports there are 117,700.³ Open Doors UK estimate there to be nearer 800,000⁴ with some other reports suggesting the figure may be as high as 1,000 000.⁵

4.1.2 The US State Department Religious Freedom Report for 2015 noted that:
'The majority of Christians are ethnic Armenians concentrated in Tehran and Isfahan. Estimates by the Assyrian Church of the total Assyrian and Chaldean Christian population put their combined number at 7,000. There are also Protestant denominations, including evangelical groups, but there is no authoritative data on their numbers. Christian groups outside the country estimate the size of the Protestant community to be less than 10,000, although many Protestants or converts reportedly practice in secret.'⁶

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4.2 Legal framework

4.2.1 The US State Department Religious Freedom Report for 2015 noted that:
'The constitution states Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognized religious minorities who, "within the limits of the law," have permission to perform religious rites and ceremonies and to form religious societies. They are also free to address personal affairs and religious

¹ United States Department of State, 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256265> [date accessed 25 October 2016]

² United Nations Statistics Division, <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=POP&f=tableCode%3A28> [date accessed 25 October 2016]

³ United States Department of State, 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256265> [date accessed 25 October 2016]

⁴ Open Doors, World watch list- country profiles; Iran, undated <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/iran.php> [date accessed 2 February 2017]

⁵ Christian Post, Over 450,000 Join Iranian House Church Movement, 'Great Number of Muslims Turning to Christ', 3 March 2016 <http://www.christianpost.com/news/over-450000-join-iranian-house-church-movement-great-number-of-muslims-turning-to-christ-158883/> [date accessed 25 October 2016]

⁶ United States Department of State, 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256265> [date accessed 25 October 2016]

education according to their own religious canon. The law bans these groups from proselytizing. Included in this legal grouping of three recognized religious minorities are Sabeen-Mandaeans, whom the government regards as Christians, even though the Sabeen-Mandaeans do not consider themselves to be Christians.’⁷

4.2.2 The US State Department Religious Freedom Report for 2015 noted that:

‘The constitution declares the country to be an Islamic Republic, the official religion to be Islam, and the doctrine followed to be Ja’afari Shiism. It states all civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on “Islamic criteria” and official interpretation of sharia.’

‘The constitution states all citizens shall enjoy human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, “in conformity with Islamic criteria.” It states the investigation of an individual’s beliefs in general is forbidden, and no one may be “molested or taken to task” for holding a certain belief. The constitution does not address the right of Muslim citizens to change or renounce their religious beliefs, nor does the penal code include provisions addressing apostasy, although apostasy is a crime punishable by death under sharia law, which judges may also apply. Under the law, a child born to a Muslim father is considered to be Muslim.’

‘By law, non-Muslims may not engage in public religious expression, persuasion, or conversion of Muslims. Such activities are considered proselytizing and are punishable by death.’

‘The penal code stipulates the death sentence for moharebeh (“enmity against God”) and sabb al-nabi (“insulting the prophets”).’⁸

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5. Restrictions on practising Christianity

5.1 Treatment of Christians

5.1.1 The March 2015 Christians in Parliament report on ‘The persecution of Christians in Iran’ found that:

5.1.2 ‘Christians continue to be arbitrarily arrested and interrogated because of their faith-related activities. They continue to be treated harshly, with some facing severe physical and psychological torture during periods of detention. The judiciary continues to construe legitimate Christian activities (such as meeting in private homes for prayer meeting and bible studies, or being in contact with Christians outside of Iran) as political activities that threaten the national security of Iran. Therefore Christians continue to be issued long

⁷ United States Department of State, 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256265> [date accessed 26 October 2016]

⁸ United States Department of State, 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256265> [date accessed 26 October 2016]

prison sentences and/or corporal punishment. Churches continue to be pressured into ceasing all services or activities in the national language of Persian (Farsi), or are closed down. Property belonging to Christians has continued to be seized, and Christians continue to face discrimination in the workplace and in educational institutions.'

'The panel gathered evidence of continued widespread and targeted persecution of Christians in Iran under Rouhani. The most severe abuse is faced by Christians who have converted from a Muslim background, and those who engage in ministry among Persian-speaking people of a Muslim background. However, restrictions and discrimination are faced by all Christians.'

'There continues to be a limit to how high religious minorities can ascend in their careers. The 'gozinesh criterion', a selection procedure requiring prospective state officials and employees to demonstrate allegiance to the Islamic Republic of Iran and the state religion, puts a glass ceiling onto the career prospects of religious minorities.'⁹

- 5.1.3 The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom noted in its annual report covering 2015/2016 [up to March 2016] that 'Over the past year, there were numerous incidents of Iranian authorities raiding church services, threatening church members, and arresting and imprisoning worshipers and church leaders, particularly Evangelical Christian converts. Since 2010, authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained more than 550 Christians throughout the country. As of February 2016, approximately 90 Christians were either in prison, detained, or awaiting trial because of their religious beliefs and activities.'¹⁰

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5.2 Arrests of Christians

- 5.2.1 Open Doors UK reported that 'At least 193 Christians were arrested or imprisoned in Iran in 2016.'¹¹

- 5.2.2 The March 2015 Christians in Parliament report on 'The persecution of Christians in Iran' found that:

'Christians are often arrested in private homes following house raids and taken to detention centres or prison for interrogation.'

'When Christians are arrested, often their families and friends are not notified of who has taken them, or where they have gone.'

⁹ Christians in Parliament, The persecution of Christians in Iran, March 2015 <http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf>, [date accessed 17 November 2015]

¹⁰ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2016 Annual Report, April 2016, <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202016%20Annual%20Report.pdf> [date accessed 3 July 2017]

¹¹ Open Doors, World watch list- country profiles; Iran, undated <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/iran.php> [date accessed 2 February 2017]

‘Interrogations of Christian detainees or prisoners are most often perpetrated by agents of the MOIS. Detainees often endure sessions of interrogation that last many hours, and face regular sessions across many days or weeks, in between which they are generally held in solitary confinement.’

‘The methods of interrogations in jail have become harsher. In several cases, Christians were seriously physically and mentally abused, including threats of execution.’

‘The most common form of mistreatment of Christians in prisons and detention centres is psychological. Christians are told that loved ones are sick, that spouses have been unfaithful, or that elderly parents are also imprisoned, to put pressure on the prisoner. Some guards, as well as interrogators, torment prisoners with psychological games.’

‘Those Christians whose cases are brought to court tend to be convicted on political rather than explicitly religious charges, usually under the vague and often abused ‘Security Laws’ section of the penal code. Sentences issued to Christians tend to range between one year and eight years.’

‘Moharebah is a charge most often used against dissident journalists, political activists and human rights defenders: it is a ‘sweeping and aggressive charge’, according to Dr. Shaheed, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran. In the aforementioned case, the charges were overturned at appeal. However, there are fears that these serious charges could be applied again to Christians in the future. Christians are not only in danger of facing long prison sentences: they can also face corporal punishment. One known Christian prisoner was sentenced to 70 lashes in December 2014: it is believed the punishment will be carried out when his prison term concludes. Lashes have been meted out in other cases during Rouhani’s presidency.’

‘The Inquiry heard that following release from detention or imprisonment, Christians often continue to be monitored and harassed.’

‘To avoid serving unjust prison sentences, many Christians and their families flee Iran, meaning that Iran’s harsh policies are prompting an exodus of Christians from the country.’¹²

5.2.3 A Finnish Immigration Service report on Christian converts in Iran, dated 21 August 2015, citing various sources stated;

‘As of 2015, the longest sentences handed down on imprisoned pastors have ranged from six to ten years for crimes related to national security. They have been convicted on political grounds for propaganda against the regime (proselytising), endangering national security (home church activities) and conspiring with enemy states (connections to international Christian organisations). There is no certain information on the number of Christians who have been arrested, because many are afraid to go public after their

¹² Christians in Parliament, The persecution of Christians in Iran, March 2015 <http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf>, [date accessed 17 November 2015]

arrest. According to Christian organisations operating in Iran, the actual numbers are clearly higher than those reported by the media.¹³

- 5.2.4 In its February 2016 submission to the UN Human Rights Council the Jubilee Campaign reported that 'Christians who are detained are often not provided due process. They are sometimes held without receiving a lawyer or even a formal charge, and often their sentences are unjustly elongated. It is also very common for Christians to face both physical and psychological torture while detained as an attempt by authorities to get information or confessions out of them. Furthermore, they can be placed in prison alongside criminals who have been arrested for violent crimes, which threatens the Christians' safety. Finally, while some receive basic medical attention, others are completely denied it.'¹⁴
- 5.2.5 The US State Department Religious Freedom Report for 2015 noted that: 'According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the police arrested 14 Protestants on November 10 [2015], in Varamin. Most of them were members of the Protestant Emmaus Church in Tehran, which authorities had forced to close in 2012 for conducting services in Farsi. There was no reported information on the charges leveled against the 14.'¹⁵
- 5.2.6 National Council of Resistance of Iran, reported in September 2016 that: 'security forces arrested at least 25 Christians in Southern City of Kerman and transferred them to an unknown location. The human rights websites in Iran reported security guards raided the homes of Christian citizens, searched the houses and confiscated the belongings and at least 25 people were arrested. There has been no information about the reason of arrests and whereabouts of these citizens so far.'¹⁶
- 5.2.7 In March 2016 Christian Post reported that: 'The Iranian government labels Christianity as a threat to the nation's Islamic identity and imprisons over 100 Christians for worshipping Christ.'¹⁷

¹³ Suuntaus project, Finnish Immigration Service, Christian Converts in Iran, 21 August 2015 http://www.migri.fi/download/62318_Suuntaus-raportti_Kristityt_kaannynnaiset_IranissaFINALFINAL160915_2_.pdf?dfc90b1525bfd288 [date accessed 9 November 2016]

¹⁴ Jubilee Campaign, Written statement submitted by the Jubilee Campaign, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status, 23 February 2016, http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1930_1459414617_g1603459.pdf [date accessed 3 February 2017]

¹⁵ United States Department of State, 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dld=256265> [date accessed 24 October 2016]

¹⁶ National Council of Resistance of Iran, At least 25 Christian citizens were arrested in Kerman, 28 September 2016 <http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/human-rights/21203-iran-at-least-25-christian-citizens-arrested-in-kerman> [date accessed 25 October 2016]

¹⁷ The Christian Post, Over 450,000 Join Iranian House Church Movement, 'Great Number of Muslims Turning to Christ', 3 March 2016 <http://www.christianpost.com/news/over-450000-join-iranian-house-church-movement-great-number-of-muslims-turning-to-christ-158883/print.html> [date accessed 25 October 2016]

- 5.2.8 In a comment to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) Mr Borji [spokesperson for the Council of United Iranian Churches (HAMGAAM)] stated in September 2016:

"The crackdown on Protestant Christians in Iran has continued under President Rouhani and in fact has worsened in the last few months. Any gathering of Christians, including social gatherings, such as birthday or engagement parties, is also perceived by Iranian security officials as a potential underground church activity and threat against national security." Mr Borji also pointed out that some of the recently arrested Christians, "including the five arrested in Firouzkooh, are former members of the official churches which were forced to shut down and cease their services in Farsi language."¹⁸

- 5.2.9 Since last year [2015], Iranian authorities have already put more than 200 Christians behind bars. At least 43 Christians were arrested in August alone.¹⁹

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5.3 Ethnic minority churches

- 5.3.1 In the Country Guidance case of [FS and others \(Iran – Christian Converts\) Iran CG \[2004\] UKIAT 00303](#) the court made the distinction of ethnic Christians who are 'members of ethnic Churches ...do not seek converts and even reject them' and they carry out their worship in a language other than Farsi, compared to 'other Christians who are members of Protestant or evangelical Churches' (para. 152).

- 5.3.2 The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHRI) report published in January 2013 titled 'The cost of faith- Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran' noted that:

'Broadly speaking, Iranian Christians can be grouped into two categories: ethnic and non-ethnic. Ethnic Christians include the Armenians and the Assyrians (or Chaldeans), who possess their own linguistic and cultural traditions. Most are members of their community's Orthodox church (the Apostolic Church of Armenia and the Assyrian Church of the East but some are also Catholics or Protestants. Non-ethnic Christians are for the most part members of Protestant churches, and most are converts who once personally identified as Muslim or came from Muslim backgrounds.'²⁰

¹⁸ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Five Christians arrested at picnic, 19 September 2016 <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016/09/19/news/3258/article.htm> [date accessed 2 November 2016]

¹⁹ Christian Today, Christian Converts In Iran Appeal 80 Lash Sentence For Taking Holy Communion, 11 October 2016 <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christian.converts.in.iran.appeal.80.lash.sentence.for.taking.holy.communio/97664.htm> [date accessed 25 October 2016]

²⁰ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 16 January 2013, Christianity in Iran https://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Christians_report_Final_for-web.pdf [date accessed 11 November 2016]

'Ethnic denominations are not allowed to hold services in the Persian language and authorities expect them to exclude nonArmenians and non-Assyrians from services. Many churches have experienced surveillance or have been forced to report their activities to the government. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has also limited churches' ability to renew their licenses, renovate their houses of worship, buy and sell church-owned property or construct new church buildings.'

'Ethnic Christians also are subject to a variety of discriminatory legal provisions that reserve certain ranking public posts such as judges and the president to Muslims, assign non-Muslims harsher punishment for certain crimes, favor Muslim family members in inheritance, and restrict inter-religious marriages.'²¹

5.3.3 The March 2015 Christians in Parliament report on 'The persecution of Christians in Iran' noted that:

'Since the 1979 Revolution, the government has not granted a licence for the establishment of a new church organisation or allowed the construction of any church building, Orthodox, Protestant, or other. It has required recognised churches to limit attendance to those who are not from a Muslim background, and to conduct services only in the minority languages of Assyrian or Armenian. Churches have also been closed down, and had leaders arrested, if they refused to comply with these restrictions.'²²

5.3.4 A Finnish Immigration Service report on Christian converts in Iran, dated 21 August 2015, citing various sources stated;

'The Ministry of Culture is responsible for the monitoring of all religious organisations: Official churches must report any new members joining their congregation, and their personal information is sent to the ministry. Authorities also check the identity of churchgoers in front of the places of worship before services. As a result of this pressure, official churches have discontinued baptising people outside their congregations. Since around 2006–2007, no Christian converts have been baptised in Iran.'²³

5.3.5 The UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, dated 10 March 2016 stated that:

'The Special Rapporteur received reports in December 2015 that an allegedly Shia "religious group" in the capital Tehran had confiscated land

²¹ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 16 January 2013, Christianity in Iran https://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Christians_report_Final_for-web.pdf [date accessed 11 November 2016]

²² Christians in Parliament, The persecution of Christians in Iran, March 2015 <http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf>, [date accessed 17 November 2015]

²³ Suuntaus project, Finnish Immigration Service, Christian Converts in Iran, 21 August 2015 http://www.migri.fi/download/62318_Suuntaus-raportti_Kristityt_kaannynnaiset_IranissaFINALFINAL160915_2_.pdf?dfc90b1525bfd288 [date accessed 8 November 2016]

belonging to an Assyrian Chaldean church. In an interview with Shargh newspaper, the head of the church also complained of broader legal discrimination against Iran's religious minorities, including in the country's civil code. In its response, the Government notes that the operation of house churches is unlawful because they have not acquired the necessary permits from the authorities, that the establishment of house churches is "unnecessary" because there are more than "20 active, half-active and historical churches" in Iran, and Christians have not "requested permission to build new churches" in the country. The Government also characterized the situation regarding the Assyrian Chaldean church as "a dispute between two Iranian citizens."²⁴

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5.4 Evangelical Protestant churches

5.4.1 The World Christian Database (WCD) in 2010 reported approximately 66,700 Protestant Christians in Iran, which represents about 25 percent of the Iranian Christian community.²⁵

5.4.2 The ICHRI report published in January 2013 noted that :
'Theoretically, Protestants, along with Armenians and Assyrians, are among the Christians recognized in the Islamic Republic's constitution. In practice however, they have been persecuted and discriminated against, and have faced significantly more aggressive government restrictions and human rights abuses than ethnic Christian groups.'²⁶

5.4.3 A Danish Immigration Service update on the situation for Christian converts in Iran, June 2014, citing various sources stated:
'With regard to the current situation of existing Protestant and Evangelical Churches in Tehran and other cities in Iran, Mansour Borji informed the delegation that the Iranian authorities shut down the last three churches offering Farsi services in Tehran last year (in 2013). The source further explained that the Emmanuel Presbyterian Church and St Peter's Evangelical Church in Tehran were the last two official churches offering Farsi-language services. There are still a few churches in Rasht, Shiraz and Esfahan with a very small congregation but according to the source, the church in Rasht for example is closely monitored and the pastor is obliged to make regular reports to the authorities. They are not allowed to baptize or accept new Farsi-speakers into membership. The source concluded that

²⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10 March 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56f1802b4.html> [date accessed 24 October 2016]

²⁵ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 16 January 2013, Christianity in Iran http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2013/01/cost_of_faith/ [date accessed 8 November 2016]

²⁶ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 16 January 2013, Christianity in Iran http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2013/01/cost_of_faith/ [date accessed 9 November 2016]

there are essentially no churches offering services in Farsi over ground anymore.’²⁷

5.4.4 A Finnish Immigration Service report on Christian converts in Iran, dated 21 August 2015, citing various sources stated;

‘In Iran, the six leading Protestant Churches, three of which have proselytised amongst the Muslims, belong to the Council of Protestant Churches founded in 1986. The total number of members of the three Evangelical Persian-language churches that operated in Tehran – the Presbyterian Emmanuel Church in Vanak, St Peter’s Church in Imam Khomeini, and the Ja-ma’ate Rabbani congregation’s main church on Taleghani – was in 2006 less than one thousand. Outside of Tehran, Persian language churches have operated at least in Isfahan, Shiraz, Rasht, Hamadan, Abadan, Mashhad, Ahvaz, the provinces of East and West Azerbaijan, and in Arak. Lately, practically all Persian-language Protestant Churches have either been closed down by the authorities or have had to limit their operations significantly.’

‘Iran’s Evangelical Protestant Churches have ties to the Pentecostal movement in Europe and the United States, which has increased the state’s suspicion of them. Elam, the most influential foreign actor in Iran, is a Christian organisation operating from Great Britain and the United States that aims to spread Christianity in Iran by offering theological learning materials and other guidance to Christians in the country. Elam organises, for instance, several unofficial home churches by training their pastors.’

‘Of the Christian community in Iran, Protestants have faced the most problems from the authorities, because their services are held in Persian, and the churches usually proselytise. In practise, all churches holding services in Persian have had to cease their activities. Even before this, those churches that were still open had to move their services from Friday to Sunday, which is a weekday in Iran, in order to reduce the number of churchgoers. Furthermore, churches have been instructed to provide lists of their members in order to avoid being closed down.’²⁸

5.4.5 The US State Department Religious Freedom Report for 2015 noted that:

‘Christians, particularly evangelicals and converts, continued to experience disproportionate levels of arrests and high levels of harassment and surveillance, according to reports from exiled Christians. Many arrests reportedly took place during police raids on religious gatherings, during which the authorities also confiscated religious property. Prison authorities

²⁷ Danish Immigration Service, ‘Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran: Report from the Danish Immigration Service’s Fact-Finding Mission to Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey and London, United Kingdom 25 March to 2 April 2014 and 10 April to 11 April 2014. Kesäkuu 2014. <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdonlyres/78D46647-A0AD-4B36-BE0A-C32FEC4947EF/0/RapportIranFFM10062014II.pdf> [date accessed 8 November]

²⁸ Suuntaus project, Finnish Immigration Service, Christian Converts in Iran, 21 August 2015 http://www.migri.fi/download/62318_Suuntaus-raportti_Kristityt_kaannynnaiset_IranissaFINALFINAL160915_2_.pdf?dfc90b1525bfd288 [date accessed 8 November 2016]

reportedly continued to withhold medical care from prisoners, including some Christians, according to human rights groups.’

‘According to human rights NGOs, the government also continued to enforce the prohibition on proselytizing. The authorities reportedly barred all nonmembers from entering church premises, closed churches, and arrested Christian converts. They reportedly continued to press evangelical church leaders to sign pledges saying they would not proselytize Muslims or allow Muslims to attend church services. Meetings for evangelical services remained restricted to Sundays. Christian advocacy groups stated the government, through such pressure and through church closures, had eliminated in recent years all but a handful of Farsi-language church services, restricting most services to the Armenian and Assyrian languages. Pastors of forcibly closed Farsi-language churches continued to report pressure from the government to leave the country, and the government prevented ordination of new ministers. Security officials remained posted outside congregation centers to perform identity checks on worshippers. Christians of all denominations reported the presence of security cameras outside their churches to confirm non-Christians did not participate in services. In response, many Protestants and other converts practiced their religion in secret.’²⁹

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5.5 House churches

5.5.1 The ICHRI report published in January 2013 noted that :

‘Space limitations as well as the government’s constraints on churches and its policies against conversion led many Protestants to form house churches, which are informal, unofficial (i.e. not recognized by the state) churches in private residences across the country where new Christians could gather, worship and proselytize.’

‘These underground churches became a place not only for converts, restricted from attending registered churches, to practice their new faith, but also a place where Iranians interested in Christianity could go to learn about the religion.’

‘Over the last few years, state officials and clerics who influence state policy have increasingly spoken out against the growth of evangelicalism and house churches, articulating a rationale for state repression. Since Iran’s constitution recognizes Christians as a religious minority with certain rights, and Christians are afforded certain protections under traditional Islamic jurisprudence as a “people of the book,” Iranian officials and clerics try to differentiate evangelicals and house churches from Christianity. They claim

²⁹ United States Department of State, 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256265> [date accessed 24 October 2016]

that evangelicals and house churches are a deviant form of Christianity, different from state-recognized Christianity.’³⁰

5.5.2 The March 2015 Christians in Parliament report on ‘The persecution of Christians in Iran’ found that:

‘Witnesses testified that raids on private homes of Christians, and subsequent arrests and detentions, are widespread in Iran. These raids are most often reported to have been orchestrated by agents of MOIS, and can sometimes involve violence.’

‘Raids on private residences tend to be directed against homes where Christians meet for church services or Bible studies, or where Christian leaders meet together.’³¹

5.5.3 A Finnish Immigration Service report on Christian converts in Iran, dated 21 August 2015, citing various sources stated;

‘Active home church activities have been reported to operate across the country, particularly in Tehran, Rasht, Shiraz and Isfahan. Some of the home churches are part of a more extensive network, operated from abroad by Christian organisations. Pastors act as the link between the home church and the organisation. At most a dozen people convene in individual home churches in order to not attract the attention of the neighbourhood. The leaders of the home churches have often taken courses in Christianity in neighbouring countries such as Turkey or Armenia, or received training over Skype via Christian networks proselytising in Iran.’³²

5.5.4 In March 2016 Christian Post reported that: ‘Such crackdowns on faith, however, have not prevented Iranian house churches from blossoming into a movement too big for the Iranian religious police to contain.’³³

5.5.5 Fox News reported in March 2016 that ‘In 2010, Iranian Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the country’s underground house churches “threaten the Islamic faith and deceive young Muslims”.’³⁴

³⁰ International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, The Cost of Faith – Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran – 16 January 2013, Christianity in Iran http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2013/01/cost_of_faith/ [date accessed 9 November 2016]

³¹ Christians in Parliament, The persecution of Christians in Iran, March 2015 <http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf>, [date accessed 17 November 2015]

³² Suuntaus project, Finnish Immigration Service, Christian Converts in Iran, 21 August 2015 http://www.migri.fi/download/62318_Suuntaus-raportti_Kristityt_kaannynnaiset_IranissaFINALFINAL160915_2_.pdf?dfc90b1525bfd288 [date accessed 9 November 2016]

³³ Christian Post, Over 450,000 Join Iranian House Church Movement, ‘Great Number of Muslims Turning to Christ’ 3 March 2016, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/over-450000-join-iranian-house-church-movement-great-number-of-muslims-turning-to-christ-158883/> [date accessed 26 October 2016]

³⁴ Fox News, Iran’s secret Christian movement grows, with help from abroad, 7 March 2016 <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/03/07/irans-secret-christian-movement-grows-with-help-from-abroad.html> [date accessed 9 November 2016]

- 5.5.6 The US State Department Religious Freedom Report for 2015 noted that: 'The authorities often arrested members of house churches on accusations of supporting and accepting assistance from enemy countries. [...] Official reports and the media continued to characterize Christian house churches as "illegal networks" and "Zionist propaganda institutions."' ³⁵

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6. Christian converts

6.1 Treatment

- 6.1.1 The March 2015 Christians in Parliament report on 'The persecution of Christians in Iran' found that:

'The most severe abuse is faced by Christians who have converted from a Muslim background, and those who engage in ministry among Persian-speaking people of a Muslim background'

'Christian converts in Iran - and any Christians who minister among individuals from a Muslim background - know they are either already being monitored by the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), or that MOIS may identify them and begin monitoring at any time.'

'Converts to Christianity have additional battles to face in daily life. Most converts still have names that identify them as having a Muslim heritage. Given that conversion is not tolerated, these individuals are still viewed and treated as Muslim in Iranian law and bureaucracy.'

'Furthermore, conversion away from Islam can lead to the loss of a job in state institutions, or in cases where the employer does not tolerate conversion.'

'With regards to education, according to Dr Shaheed, University regulations continue to officially grant admission only to Muslims or members of officially recognized minority religions. Christian converts and unrecognised religious minorities can face pressure within academic institutions; or lose opportunities for education or the right to complete educational courses because of their faith.' ³⁶

- 6.1.2 Amnesty Internationals annual report for 2015/16 noted that:

'Members of religious minorities, including [...] Christian converts from Islam, [...] faced discrimination in employment and restrictions on their access to education and freedom to practise their faith. There were reports of arrest and imprisonment of dozens of ... Christian converts and members of other religious minorities.' ³⁷

³⁵ United States Department of State, 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dId=256265> [date accessed 9 November 2016]

³⁶ Christians in Parliament, The persecution of Christians in Iran, March 2015 <http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf>, [date accessed 17 November 2015]

³⁷ Amnesty International, Annual report 2015/2016; Iran 24 February 2016,

- 6.1.3 Freedom House reported in its annual report covering 2015 that; ‘there is an ongoing crackdown on Christian converts. In the past three years, a number of informal house churches have been raided and their pastors detained.’³⁸
- 6.1.4 The US State Commission on International Religious Freedom noted in its annual report covering 2015/2016: ‘Over the past year, there were numerous incidents of Iranian authorities raiding church services, threatening church members, and arresting and imprisoning worshipers and church leaders, particularly Evangelical Christian converts.’³⁹
- 6.1.5 The US State Department noted in its annual report covering 2015 that ‘Muslim converts to Christianity reportedly continued to face harassment, arrest, and detention.’⁴⁰
- 6.1.6 Human Rights Watch noted in its annual report covering 2016 that ‘Security and intelligence forces also continued to target Christian converts from Islam, Persian-speaking Protestant and evangelical congregations, and members of the home church movement. Some faced charges such as “acting against the national security” and “propaganda against the state.”’⁴¹

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6.2 Arrests of converts

- 6.2.1 According to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center database of prisoners, as reported by the U.S. Department of State, at least 380 religious practitioners remained imprisoned at the end of for their membership in or activities on behalf of a minority religious group, including approximately 250 Sunnis, 82 Bahais, 26 Christian converts, 16 Sufis, 10 Yarsanis, three Sunni converts, and two Zoroastrians.⁴²
- 6.2.2 The March 2015 Christians in Parliament report on ‘The persecution of Christians in Iran’ found that:

‘Whenever any convert to Christianity is arrested, pressure is put on them to persuade them to return to Islam during interrogation and throughout their time in detention.’⁴³

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/> [date accessed 26 October 2016]

³⁸ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2016, 7 March 2016,

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/iran> [date accessed 26 October 2016]

³⁹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2016 Annual report, 2 May 2016 <http://www.uscifr.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report> [date accessed 25 October 2016]

⁴⁰ United States Department of State, 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256265> [date accessed 24 October 2016]

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2016: Iran: Events of 2016, 12 January 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/iran> [date accessed 3 February 2017]

⁴² United States Department of State, 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256265> [date accessed 24 October 2016]

⁴³ Christians in Parliament, The persecution of Christians in Iran, March 2015 <http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf>, [date accessed 17 November 2015]

6.2.3 The UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, dated 10 March 2016 stated that the Special Rapporteur expressed:

‘..concern at the treatment of Iranian Christians from Muslim backgrounds, who continue to face arbitrary arrest, harassment and detention despite the fact that article 12 of the Iranian constitution recognises and protects adherents of the Christian faith. The Special Rapporteur notes that many of these individuals are often accused of acting against the national security or "propaganda against the state," and that under Iranian law, individuals, including Christians of Muslim backgrounds, can be prosecuted for the crime of apostasy. Dozens were reportedly detained in Iranian prisons as of January 2016, many for involvement in informal house churches.’⁴⁴

6.2.4 The US State Commission report on International Religious Freedom published in May 2016 noted that:

‘During the reporting period [2015], human rights groups inside Iran reported a significant increase in the number of physical assaults and beatings of Christians in prison. Some activists believe the assaults, which have been directed against converts who are leaders of underground house churches, are meant to intimidate others who may wish to convert to Christianity. In December 2015, authorities raided a number of private Christmas services and arrested nearly a dozen church members in Tehran. In April 2015, a revolutionary court upheld a one-year prison sentence and two-year travel bans on 13 Christian converts arrested in 2013.’⁴⁵

6.2.5 The US State Department Religious Freedom Report for 2015 noted that:

‘Christians, particularly evangelicals and converts, continued to experience disproportionate levels of arrests and high levels of harassment and surveillance, according to reports from exiled Christians. Many arrests reportedly took place during police raids on religious gatherings, during which the authorities also confiscated religious property. Prison authorities reportedly continued to withhold medical care from prisoners, including some Christians, according to human rights groups.’⁴⁶

6.2.6 The Human Rights Activists News Agency article ‘Increasing Pressure on Christians in Iran’ dated 22 September 2016 noted that;

‘On 12 August 2016...Seven Christian converts [...] who had gone to Firoozkooh with their families were detained by the Intelligence Ministry. Two

⁴⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 10 March 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56f1802b4.html> [date accessed 24 October 2016]

⁴⁵ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2016 Annual report, 2 May 2016 <http://www.uscifr.gov/reports-briefs/annual-report> [date accessed 25 October 2016]

⁴⁶ United States Department of State, 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 10 August 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256265> [date accessed 24 October 2016]

of these citizens were released immediately but the whereabouts and condition of five others are unknown so far.⁴⁷

6.2.7 Christian Today reported in October 2016 that;

‘Three Iranian men who converted to Christianity to Islam are appealing against criminal convictions for drinking alcohol. Yasser Mossayebzadeh, Saheb Fadaie and Mohammad Reza Omid were sentenced to 80 lashes for taking communion wine. Non-Muslims are allowed to drink alcohol in Iran. But because conversion to Christianity from Islam is forbidden and regarded as apostasy, the three men are still legally regarded as Muslims. The third man, Omid, already has a previous conviction for drinking alcohol. If he is convicted a third time, he is likely to face the death sentence. World Watch Monitor reports that the three men have also been charged with acting against national security.’⁴⁸

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6.3 Societal treatment of converts

6.3.1 A Finnish Immigration Service report on Christian converts in Iran, dated 21 August 2015, citing various sources stated;

‘The law does not offer protection for people who have publicly relinquished Islam, which puts them in a vulnerable position with the authorities. According to many religious scholars – including Ayatollah Khomeini – killing an apostate or a blasphemer without trial is allowed. The Criminal Code of Iran protects a person who has killed a perpetrator of one of the most serious crimes from the most severe qesas retribution punishments.’

‘Converts from religious families may face trouble with their own relatives, if their relatives be-come aware of the conversion. Those living in religious neighbourhoods may also become the target of their neighbours’ attention if they do not visit the mosque and participate in other Muslim religious practices. Converts with relatives working in government jobs may be subjected to pressure, as the family members are afraid of losing their reputation or post. For reasons of greed, or, for instance, child custody issues, relatives may also turn in their family member who has converted to Christianity to the police because, according to Iranian law, no-one except another Muslim may inherit a Muslim or raise a Muslim child.’⁴⁹

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⁴⁷ Human Rights Activists News Agency, Increasing Pressure on Christians in Iran 22 September 2016 <https://hra-news.org/en/increasing-pressure-christians-iran> [date accessed 26 October 2016]

⁴⁸ Christian Today, Christian Converts In Iran Appeal 80 Lash Sentence For Taking Holy Communion, 11 October 2016 <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christian.converts.in.iran.appeal.80.lash.sentence.for.taking.holy communion/97664.htm> [date accessed 25 October 2016]

⁴⁹ Suuntaus project, Finnish Immigration Service, Christian Converts in Iran, 21 August 2015 http://www.migri.fi/download/62318_Suuntaus-raportti_Kristityt_kaannynnaiset_IranissaFINALFINAL160915_2_.pdf?dfc90b1525bfd288 [date accessed 9 November 2016]

7. Treatment of family members

7.1.1 A Danish Immigration Service update on the situation for Christian converts in Iran, June 2014, citing various sources stated that:

‘... many pastors are forced to leave Iran as they are pressured by the authorities through threats to family members, for example kidnapping of family members, rape of their daughters and similar violence.

‘Regarding whether family members to a convert may face consequences due to their family member’s conversion, Amnesty International’s International Secretariat (AIS) considered that it could depend on whether or not a family member is actively campaigning for their relatives who have converted. [...] AIS, has over the years, recorded many cases of harassment and intimidation of family members in order to stop them from campaigning. [...] There also have been cases of family members who have been arrested and tortured or otherwise ill-treated in order to pressure individuals to make “confessions” to certain charges, however, AIS did not have information on specific cases regarding converts where this had happened.’

‘However, the same report stated that the greatest threat to the convert was the Iranian authorities, and that often, even where the family disapproved of the conversion, relatives took no action against the convert.’

‘Elam Ministries (Christian group) another respondent in the above report, stated that: ‘...many families in Iran do not necessarily follow Islamic practices. Some are quite anti-Islamic, while others may be very pro-Islamic.....Parents may for example pressure their children to stop their move towards Christianity out of fear of the system (authorities).’

‘Representatives of the Union Church informed the delegation (for the above report) that in relation to family and social network, the consequences of a conversion are often that the immediate family members create the biggest problems for the convert, because they consider that the convert has shamed the family.’⁵⁰

7.1.2 The Christians in Parliament report titled ‘The Persecution of Christians in Iran’ dated March 2015 noted:

‘Often the MOIS [Ministry of Intelligence and Security] particularly target Christian leaders, but family members of the individual can also find themselves targeted for harassment. For example, threats were faced for many years by a Christian internet pastor called Farhad, according to Elam Ministries. Farhad had learnt that the MOIS knew about his involvement in the distribution of Christian scriptures and books, which would provoke a harsh punishment. After a Christian friend of his was arrested and

⁵⁰ Danish Immigration Service, ‘Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran: Report from the Danish Immigration Service’s Fact-Finding Mission to Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey and London, United Kingdom 25 March to 2 April 2014 and 10 April to 11 April 2014. June 2014 <http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/ronlyres/78D46647-A0AD-4B36-BE0A-C32FEC4947EF/0/RapportIranFFM10062014II.pdf> [date accessed 9 November]

interrogated, Farhad feared he too would soon be arrested, and he decided to leave Iran. Following Farhad's departure, Farhad's elderly mother, and his sister and brother-in-law have continued to face threats on an almost daily basis. They have also had to relocate to another city because agents of MOIS informed the local community that they are 'apostates' from Islam.'

'Church members are also often subject to harassment following the arrest of their leader.'⁵¹

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8. Treatment of those returning to Iran who have converted abroad

8.1.1 A Danish Immigration Service update on the situation for Christian converts in Iran, June 2014, citing various sources stated that:

'With regard to the situation of converts who return to Iran after being baptized abroad, be it in Turkey, Armenia, UAE or another country, the source found that they may return to Iran quietly and not encounter any problems. If the person is already monitored by the authorities, he or she could risk consequences upon return to Iran.'

'According to AIIS [Amnesty International's International Secretariat] it is difficult to obtain information on potential risks an individual may face upon returning to Iran after conversion abroad. If Iranian informants have gathered information regarding an individual who has returned to Iran, the authorities may arrest them for questioning. It is possible that charging and conviction will ensue the arrest and questioning. A wide group of people could be in that position: students, political activists, family members of political persons might even be questioned as well as Christian converts.'

'Regarding whether baptism abroad would put a person at risk from the authorities in Iran, AIIS considered that the importance of baptism should be balanced against how the Iranian authorities perceive a convert. A person who has attended trainings and sessions abroad may be considered a convert, although he or she may not have officially been baptized.'

'Asked about the situation for a convert who returns to Iran after having converted abroad, i.e. in Europe or a Western country, Mansour Borji [Advocacy Officer for Article 18] found that there would be no difference in the way the Iranian authorities would deal with the case. If the person is known to the authorities and they have shown an interest in him or her before he or she left the country, there could be a risk to him or her upon returning. If the person is unknown to the authorities, the source did not consider that there would be a huge threat towards him or her. The source referred to a case of a family who went back to Iran and upon return, they were threatened and followed around/harassed. It was considered that

⁵¹ Christians in Parliament All Party Parliamentary Group and All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief joint report, The Persecution of Christians in Iran, March 2015 <http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf> [date accessed 16 November 2016]

perhaps relatives or others had reported them to the authorities causing the harassment. Ultimately, the family left Iran again. They had secretly begun to attend a house church.'

'Concerning the consequences for an individual upon return to Iran after having converted abroad, CSW [Christian Solidarity Worldwide] said that any convert who wishes to practice his or her faith upon return, would face serious risk.'

'When asked about the consequences of returning to Iran after having been baptized abroad, Elam Ministries said that many Iranians do go abroad and return to Iran after a while. If the authorities in Iran become aware of the fact that a person has been baptized abroad such an individual may risk interrogation and repercussions. The source considered that the authorities may find out that an individual has been baptized through informers and telephone/internet tapping.'

'It was considered that persons who return from Western countries after converting would have to be very careful about doing any evangelizing. When considering the situation of an individual who has converted in Europe who then returns to Iran, their situation would be much the same as that of Iranians who convert in Iran. Such individuals would have to lay low and not speak openly about their conversion. If their conversion is uncovered and the authorities are notified, there is a risk that such an individual will be suspected of links with foreign organizations much the same as a convert who has been living in Iran.'

'The source added that those who are outside of Iran for extended periods of time may be more at risk in that the authorities may suspect them of spying. It was further added that this counts not only for Christian converts but also for other Iranians.'

'Asked about the situation of Christian converts who return to Iran after coming to Turkey or another country, and meeting with other believers, the representatives of the Union Church informed the delegation that if the converts stay "quiet"; i.e., they do not associate with other believers, they may not be discovered and the visits to a foreign country will then not make a lot of a difference for them.'

'According to the representatives of the Union Church, even if not known to authorities, converts can face shunning and even "honor killing" by their families.'

'If a Christian convert is not affiliated with a house church, an international organisation in Turkey said that the risk to him or her [upon return] would depend on how he or she lives his or her Christian life. If such an individual plainly prays at home and does not share his or her faith to others, there would be no risk to him or her. However, within the evangelical groups that these converts may follow, evangelizing is important and therefore if he or she starts doing this, there could be a risk of harm from the authorities.'

'Elam Ministries said that if such a person who returns from abroad is not connected to a house church or network, there would be no particular threat, however as far as his or her Christian faith is concerned all aspects of his or

her life will be affected because of their new faith and as a result, he or she will run into the same issues that other converts face for example with regards to school, marriage, university, employment and housing. They must be secret believers and are unable to speak of their faith to anyone else and to live an openly Christian lifestyle.’⁵²

- 8.1.2 A Finnish Immigration Service report on Christian converts in Iran, dated 21 August 2015, citing various sources stated: ‘No research data on the return of Christian converts to Iran is available, but the common perception is that they will get into trouble mainly if they try to proselytise or otherwise make their religious views public. The state's interest is focused more on the public practice of religion and proselytising than on one's private convictions.’⁵³

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⁵² Danish Immigration Service, ‘Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran: Report from the Danish Immigration Service’s Fact-Finding Mission to Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey and London, United Kingdom 25 March to 2 April 2014 and 10 April to 11 April 2014. June 2014.

<https://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/ronlyres/78D46647-A0AD-4B36-BE0A-C32FEC4947EF/0/RapportIranFFM10062014II.pdf> [date accessed 30 November]

⁵³ Suuntaus project, Finnish Immigration Service, Christian Converts in Iran, 21 August 2015 http://www.migri.fi/download/62318_Suuntaus-raportti_Kristityt_kaannynnaiset_IranissaFINALFINAL160915_2_.pdf?dfc90b1525bfd288 [date accessed 30 November 2016]

Version control and contacts

Contacts

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Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **27th February 2017**

Changes from last version of this note

Slight change to policy, updated country information, and change to the layout of information.

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