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COI QUERY RESPONSE - Iran

Situation of individuals who have converted from Islam to Zoroastrianism

While Zoroastrianism was the original pre-Islamic religion of ancient Persia,¹ today, Zoroastrians are one of the recognised protected minorities living in the Muslim-majority Iran.² Zoroastrians have lived historically in Yazd and Kerman provinces and have also moved to urban centres, including to Tehran.³ According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), all non-Muslim minorities in Iran together represent some 0.3 % of the Iranian population⁴ that is estimated at some 88 million people.⁵ While there are no precise figures of Zoroastrians living in Iran,⁶ available sources provide estimates ranging from 11 000 to 25 000,⁷ or up to 50 000 people.⁸ In contrast to these figures, a 2020 religion survey by the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (GAMAAN) found that 8 % of their respondents identified as Zoroastrian. In February 2022, GAMAAN conducted a political systems survey in which 1 % of the respondents identified as Zoroastrians, while in December 2022, the same source conducted a nationwide protest survey in which 5 % of the respondents identified as Zoroastrian.⁹

Zoroastrians are represented by one seat in the country's 290-seat parliament.¹⁰

1. Legislation

Information on legislation specifically concerning Muslims who have converted to Zoroastrianism could not be found in consulted sources in time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Zoroastrianism, last updated 3 May 2025, [url](#); ICLRS, The Zoroastrian Community Post-Religious Persecution, 12 September 2024, [url](#)

² USCIRF, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2025 Annual Report; USCIRF–CPC: Iran, March 2025, [url](#), p. 2

³ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran, September 2023, [url](#), p. 87

⁴ USCIRF, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2025 Annual Report; USCIRF–CPC: Iran, March 2025, [url](#), p. 2

⁵ US, CIA, The World Factbook - Iran, updated 21 May 2025, [url](#)

⁶ Stausberg, M. et al. Survey Zoroastrians: Online Religious Identification in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1 August 2023, in: Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, [url](#)

⁷ Stausberg, M et al. Survey Zoroastrians: Online Religious Identification in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1 August 2023, in: Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, [url](#)

⁸ France24, Iran's Zoroastrians keep ancient, sacred flame burning, 23 July 2023, [url](#)

⁹ Stausberg, M. et al. Survey Zoroastrians: Online Religious Identification in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1 August 2023, in: Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, [url](#), pp. 836. The original 2020 survey is available at: GAMAAN, Iranians' attitudes toward religion: A 2020 survey report, 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 6

¹⁰ USCIRF, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2025 Annual Report; USCIRF–CPC: Iran, March 2025, [url](#), p. 2

Article 13 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran states:

‘Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are considered the only recognized religious minorities. They may exercise their religious ceremonies within the limits of the law. They are free to exercise matters of personal status and religious education and they follow their own rituals.’¹¹

According to the Article 14 of the constitution:

‘[...] the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Muslims are required to treat the non-Muslim individuals with good conduct, in fairness and Islamic justice, and must respect their human rights. This principle is valid for those persons who have not conspired or acted against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran.’¹²

According to a 2024 report by the Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran established by the United Nations Human Rights Council, the ‘vaguely phrased’ article 14 of the Constitution ‘allows for arbitrary interpretation, placing protected rights at serious risk, including the rights to freedom of religion, belief, and expression’.¹³

While Zoroastrianism is one of the three officially recognized minority religions in Iran, together with Judaism and Christianity,¹⁴ conversions from Islam to Zoroastrianism are not recognised by the state¹⁵ and converting from Islam to another religion is punishable by law.¹⁶ Even though apostasy is not codified in the Iranian penal code, conversions can be seen as apostasy under the Sharia law, in which case it is an act punishable by death,¹⁷ and those suspected of conversions can be also sentenced under other criminal charges.¹⁸ Non-Muslims accused of attempting to convert a Muslim to another faith can be charged with proselytizing and imprisoned.¹⁹

¹¹ Iran, Islamic Republic of, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979, [url](#)

¹² Iran, Islamic Republic of, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979, [url](#)

¹³ UN, Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, “They have dehumanized us”: Minority rights violations during the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran, August 2024, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁴ Humanists International, The Freedom of Thought Report, Iran, last updated 24 October 2023, [url](#).
HRW, “The Boot on My Neck” - Iranian Authorities’ Crime of Persecution Against Baha’is in Iran, April 2024, [url](#), pp. 23, 24, 39; University of Essex Human Rights Centre Clinic, Anti-Discrimination Laws in Middle East and North Africa; Egypt, Iran, Türkiye, and Tunisia, 30 June 2023, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁵ Iran International, Cleric Says Some Iranian Muslims Converting To Other Religions, 11 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶ Humanists International, The Freedom of Thought Report, Iran, last updated 24 October 2023, [url](#); USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 9, 11

¹⁷ UNHRC, Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, 19 March 2024, [url](#), para. 102; USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁸ HRRC, The Status of Religious Freedom in Iran, 16 November 2023, [url](#); USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁹ HRW, “The Boot on My Neck” - Iranian Authorities’ Crime of Persecution Against Baha’is in Iran, April 2024, [url](#), p. 21; UNHRC, Detailed findings of the independent international fact-finding mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, 19 March 2024, [url](#), para. 993; USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 9

2. Treatment by state authorities

Information on the treatment of individuals who have converted from Islam to Zoroastrianism by state authorities could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

For general information about religious conversions and apostasy in Iran, see [Iran – Country Focus, Country of Origin Information Report, June 2024](#), pp. 85-86.

Sources indicate that conversions from Islam to Zoroastrianism would take part in secrecy due to the fear of possible retribution by the authorities,²⁰ including the death penalty.²¹

Dr Paulina Niechciał, a professor at the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków specializing in Zoroastrianism,²² noted in a paper published in May 2025 that the ban on apostasy in Iran in practice ‘precludes conversion to Zoroastrianism and the dissemination of public pro-conversion opinions.’²³ The same source further noted that ‘the legal and political intergroup relations favor the isolation of Zoroastrian minorities, as conversion to Zoroastrianism has been illegal, impossible, or risky, intermarriages weaken the community, and the current legal system of Iran reinforces the idea of being born as a Zoroastrian’.²⁴

While not specifically mentioning converts to Zoroastrianism, in an article from March 2024, IranWire reported that ‘religious converts—individuals who have left Islam and embraced other religions—are also excluded from the rights granted to Muslim citizens.’²⁵ Similarly, in its report covering 2023, the United States Department of State (USDOS) wrote, referring to information provided by Christian NGOs, that ‘converts from Islam or other recognized faiths, continued to experience disproportionate levels of arrests and detentions and high levels of harassment and surveillance’.²⁶

3. Treatment by society

Information on treatment of individuals who have converted from Islam to Zoroastrianism by society could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within time constraints. However, the following information may be relevant.

²⁰ CAIS, Conversion to Zoroastrianism, n.d., [url](#); Canada, IRB, Iran: Zoroastrianism, including its areas of practice and activities; situation and treatment of Zoroastrians by society and authorities; religious texts; whether all members have access to religious texts (2020–February 2022), 2 March 2022, [url](#);

²¹ Medium, Mahsa Amini and Iranian protests (updated 2025), 20 January 2025, [url](#)

²² Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Centre For Comparative Studies Of Civilisations, Dr Paulina Niechciał, n.d., [url](#)

²³ Niechciał, P., Modern Iranian Zoroastrian Identity in Transition: Identity Strategies and Directions of Change, in: Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, 9 May 2025, [url](#), p. 18

²⁴ Niechciał, P., Modern Iranian Zoroastrian Identity in Transition: Identity Strategies and Directions of Change, in: Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, 9 May 2025, [url](#), p. 24

²⁵ IranWire, Iran's Minority Rights: Constitutional Guarantees vs. Discriminatory Realities, 4 March 2024, [url](#)

²⁶ USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 33

Sources indicate that there is no single unified view among Zoroastrians on whether conversions into the faith are allowed in the first place²⁷ and some hold a view that since being a Zoroastrian is an ethnic identity one must be born into it and cannot simply convert into the faith.²⁸ Dr Paulina Niechciał, in an academic article with a focus on Zoroastrians in diaspora, noted while referring to the situation in Iran that because of their status as ‘an at-risk minority’, Zoroastrians have developed ‘boundary-maintenance mechanisms’ and traditionally perceived non-Zoroastrians as impure²⁹ and converts into the religion were not easily accepted.³⁰ On the other hand, an article by the Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies (CAIS) indicated that Iranian Zoroastrians are likely to accept converts and the main problem is the fear of possible penalties by the authorities, therefore, ‘conversions in Iran are done very quietly’.³¹

A 2022 information request response by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) on Zoroastrians in Iran states that they are ‘generally [...] respected’ by society. Concerning the situation of converts to Zoroastrianism, the same source referred to a study from 2015 that quoted a political scientist stating that ‘there is a trend amongst Iranian youth of converting from Islam to Zoroastrianism, with the report noting that there are no official statistics due to fear of state persecution’. The same source also added that “[i]n principle” Muslims living in Iran view “all” other religions as “impure”.³²

In March 2023, in an article describing the issue of Iranian Muslims converting to other religions, Iran International reported on a Muslim cleric in Qom stating that ‘there is a strange tendency among members of the Bakhtiari tribe to convert to Zoroastrianism’, without further elaborating on the phenomenon and its consequences.³³

Sources indicate that some Muslims may see a conversion to Zoroastrianism as a form of opposition to the Islamic Republic as opposed to the real religious motivation.³⁴ A study on

²⁷ ASPIRANTUM, All You Need to Know about Zoroastrianism, 22 March 2022, [url](#); Niechciał, P., Modern Iranian Zoroastrian Identity in Transition: Identity Strategies and Directions of Change, in: Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, 9 May 2025, [url](#), p. 18; CAIS, Conversion to Zoroastrianism, n.d., [url](#); Niechciał, P., Second-Generation Iranian Zoroastrians in a New American Homeland: A Case Study in California, Published online by Cambridge University Press, in: Iranian Studies, 27 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁸ CAIS, Conversion to Zoroastrianism, n.d., [url](#); Niechciał, P., Modern Iranian Zoroastrian Identity in Transition: Identity Strategies and Directions of Change, in: Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, 9 May 2025, [url](#), p. 24

²⁹ Niechciał, P., Modern Iranian Zoroastrian Identity in Transition: Identity Strategies and Directions of Change, in: Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, 9 May 2025, [url](#), p. 7; Niechciał, P., Second-Generation Iranian Zoroastrians in a New American Homeland: A Case Study in California, Published online by Cambridge University Press, in: Iranian Studies, 27 April 2022, [url](#)

³⁰ Niechciał, P., Second-Generation Iranian Zoroastrians in a New American Homeland: A Case Study in California, Published online by Cambridge University Press, in: Iranian Studies, 27 April 2022, [url](#)

³¹ CAIS, Conversion to Zoroastrianism, n.d., [url](#)

³² Canada, IRB, Iran: Zoroastrianism, including its areas of practice and activities; situation and treatment of Zoroastrians by society and authorities; religious texts; whether all members have access to religious texts (2020–February 2022), 2 March 2022, [url](#)

³³ Iran International, Cleric Says Some Iranian Muslims Converting To Other Religions, 11 March 2023, [url](#)

³⁴ Niechciał, P., Modern Iranian Zoroastrian Identity in Transition: Identity Strategies and Directions of Change, in: Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, 9 May 2025, [url](#) p. 18; Stausberg, M. et al., Survey Zoroastrians: Online Religious Identification in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1 August 2023, in: Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, [url](#), p. 831



religious identification in the Islamic Republic of Iran published in August 2023 in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion indicated that those who have identified as Zoroastrians may not want to ‘officially convert’, considering the possible death penalty and a smaller importance given to the official religious conversion, preferring ‘a privatized conception of lived religion’ instead.³⁵

Sources indicate that while the conversions into traditional Zoroastrian communities in Iran have been limited, it is easier to convert to the religion abroad.³⁶

4. Access to justice

Information on access to justice of individuals who have converted from Islam to Zoroastrianism by society could not be found in consulted sources in time constraints.

³⁵ Stausberg, M. et al., Survey Zoroastrians: Online Religious Identification in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1 August 2023, in: Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, [url](#), p. 834

³⁶ ASPIRANTUM, All You Need to Know about Zoroastrianism, 22 March 2022, [url](#); Niechciał, P., Second-Generation Iranian Zoroastrians in a New American Homeland: A Case Study in California, Published online by Cambridge University Press, in: Iranian Studies, 27 April 2022, [url](#)

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