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Country Policy and Information Note

Pakistan: Christians and Christian converts

Version 5.0

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Executive summary

Christians in Pakistan are a minority religious group constituting under 2% of the total population, split between Catholics and Protestants, the majority of whom reside in Punjab province. Christians can generally practise their faith, attend church, and participate in religious activities and festivals. Christians can experience official discrimination, arbitrary arrest, harassment from security forces and violence in custody, however the available evidence does not suggest this is systemic or widespread.

Christians experience societal discrimination, including hostile attitudes and actions towards them from those of other faiths. Christian converts can face ostracism, restrictions on their movements including surveillance and 'house-arrest' by their family, discrimination, intimidation, violence and vigilante attacks on them and their property. Accusations of blasphemy are used against all faiths to settle personal scores or for personal gain. Whether or not an allegation of blasphemy is found to be true, the accused, their family and the whole community sometimes face vigilante violence and less commonly, targeted killings.

There is no law against religious conversion, but renouncing Islam (apostasy) is widely considered to be a form of blasphemy. Between 2020 and 2023, 23 Christians were accused of blasphemy however it is not known how many cases were charged, prosecuted, or convicted. Blasphemy laws carry severe penalties ranging from fines to maximum sentences of 10 years imprisonment or the death penalty, although executions are not enforced.

In general, born Christians are unlikely to face treatment by state and/or non-state actors which is sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition, or an accumulation of various measures, which is sufficiently severe to amount to persecution.

Christians who seek to proselytise and/or those who are known to have converted from Islam (apostates), may find themselves facing a charge of blasphemy. If a person can demonstrate a charge of blasphemy is being actively pursued either by state or non-state actors, they may be able to establish a real risk of persecution.

In general, a Christian convert who is open about their faith and conversion may be able to demonstrate the treatment they face by non-state actors is sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition, or an accumulation of various measures, which is sufficiently severe to amount to persecution.

A person who returns to Pakistan having converted from Islam to Christianity while abroad, who does not actively seek to proselytise or publicly express their faith, and/or considers their religion a personal matter, may be able to continue practising Christianity discreetly, although consideration must be given to reasons for such discretion ([see the Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#))

In general, the state is both willing and able to offer effective protection to Christians and a born Christian is likely to be able to internally relocate. Internal relocation is not likely to be reasonable for Christian converts who are open about their faith and conversion and can demonstrate a credible blasphemy allegation raised by non-state actors is being actively pursued against them.

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.

Assessment

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 likely to face a real risk of persecution/serious harm by the state or non-state actors because the person is a Christian.
- is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- can relocate within a country or territory to avoid persecution/serious harm
- merits a grant of asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave
- if a claim is refused, it is likely 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.

There are several Christian denominations, each with varying beliefs and practices. Christians in Pakistan include Catholics, Protestants (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Lutheran) and other smaller movements including Evangelists and Renewalists.

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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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- 1.1.4 The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use only.

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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 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](#).

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3. Risk

3.1 Risk from state actors – Christians

- 3.1.1 In general, born Christians are unlikely to face treatment by state actors which is sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition, or an accumulation of various measures, which is sufficiently severe to amount to persecution.
- 3.1.2 Christians who seek to proselytise may find themselves facing a charge of blasphemy. If a person can demonstrate a charge of blasphemy is being actively pursued, they may be able to establish a real risk of persecution. However, each case must be considered on its facts.
- 3.1.3 The 2023 census results recorded Pakistan's total population as 241.49 million, but this was not broken down by religion at time of publication of this CPIN. Data on religion is based on the 2017 census, which recorded a total population of 207.68 million, the majority of whom were Muslim (96.47%). The Christian population was recorded as 2.64 million (1.27%), whilst other estimates put it at over 4 million (see [Demography](#)).
- 3.1.4 The Christian population, the majority of whom reside in Punjab province, is

split between Catholics and Protestants. Open Doors International defines adherents to the Catholic Church and Church of Pakistan as ‘historical Christian communities’, and followers of Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal groups as ‘non-traditional’ (see [Churches and Christian communities](#)).

- 3.1.5 In the country guidance (CG) case [AK & SK \(Christians: risk\) Pakistan \(CG\) \[2014\] UKUT 569 \(IAC\) \(15 December 2014\)](#), heard on 16, 17, 19 and 20 June 2014 and 24 July 2014 and promulgated on 15 December 2014, the Upper Tribunal (UT) held that ‘Christians in Pakistan are a religious minority who, in general, suffer discrimination but this is not sufficient to amount to a real risk of persecution’ (paragraph 240).
- 3.1.6 The UT further held that ‘Unlike the position of Ahmadis, Christians in general are permitted to practise their faith, can attend church, participate in religious activities and have their own schools and hospitals’ (para 241).
- 3.1.7 The constitution declares Islam as the state religion, but also that ‘subject to law, public order and morality’ minorities are equal citizens of Pakistan and are free to profess their religion and visit their places of worship. Churches, although concentrated in Punjab exist throughout Pakistan’s provinces, with around 2,652 churches recorded nationally. There are no laws that specifically discriminate against Christians, and they have their own personal laws regarding marriage and divorce. The Christian Marriage and Divorce Bill, which allows greater scope for divorce, is pending ratification at the time of publication. Christian festivals are officially recognised and celebrated (see [Background](#) [Legal context](#) and [Christian festivals](#)).
- 3.1.8 In May 2020, the government established the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and in August 2023 the NCM Bill was passed by the National Assembly but dropped at Senate level. The Bill had been criticised by civil society groups for not fully upholding the rights and protection of minority communities. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (MORA) provides monetary support to religious minorities to help repair and maintain places of worship, financial assistance for individuals, and scholarships. Training of judges, prosecutors and public officials on issues related to religious rights and freedoms have taken place (see [Protecting and supporting minority rights](#)).
- 3.1.9 The constitution reserves seats for non-Muslim members in parliament and provincial assemblies, although the positions of president and prime minister are restricted to Muslims only. Since the 2024 national elections, not all provincial assemblies have updated their published information with member details but there were 6 Christians in the Punjab Assembly in 2024. Federal and provincial governments reserve 5% of all government positions for religious minorities although nearly half of the quota lie vacant. Most posts filled by non-Muslims are in the lowest paid jobs and Christians in public sector employment are disproportionality represented in the sanitation industry (see [Political representation](#) and [Employment and income](#)).
- 3.1.10 The government has taken steps to remove content deemed offensive or discriminatory to religious minorities in educational textbooks. By law non-Muslim students are not required to study Islam, and in some state schools

non-Muslim students may study the alternative subject 'ethics' (see [Education and literacy](#)).

- 3.1.11 Christians can experience discrimination, arbitrary arrest, harassment from security forces and violence in custody. However, the available evidence does not suggest this is systemic or widespread. There are a few examples of Christians being killed in detention; one source reports 10 deaths since 2009. However, there are also examples of police officers being arrested for religiously motivated killings (see [Discrimination and mistreatment](#)).
- 3.1.12 In [AK & SK](#) the Upper Tribunal held that:
'Evangelism by its very nature involves some obligation to proselytise. Someone who seeks to broadcast their faith to strangers so as to encourage them to convert, may find themselves facing a charge of blasphemy. In that way, evangelical Christians face a greater risk than those Christians who are not publicly active. It will be for the judicial fact-finder to assess on a case by case basis whether, notwithstanding attendance at an evangelical church, it is important to the individual to behave in evangelical ways that may lead to a real risk of persecution' (paragraph 242).
- 3.1.13 Pakistan's Supreme Court ruled in August 2022 that 'Preaching of Christianity is not a crime nor can it be made into one because of the Fundamental Right "to profess, practice and propagate his religion."' According to the World Christian Database there are over 1 million evangelical Christians in Pakistan and the Centre for Law and Justice noted thousands of evangelical household churches have emerged across Pakistan. According to Open Doors International, there has been a growth in non-traditional Christian groups due to Christians transferring from 'historical' churches and many Christians avoid discussing their faith beyond their immediate family, or keeping Christian material unless for immediate personal use, for fear of being accused of blasphemy (see [Demography](#), [Churches and Christian communities](#) and [Proselytising, and possessing or displaying Christian material](#)).
- 3.1.14 The Upper Tribunal held in [AK & SK](#) that 'Along with Christians, Sunnis, Shi'as, Ahmadis and Hindus may all be potentially charged with blasphemy. Those citizens who are more marginalised and occupy low standing social positions, may be less able to deal with the consequences of such proceedings' (paragraph 243).
- 3.1.15 Blasphemy laws carry severe penalties ranging from fines to maximum sentences of 10 years imprisonment or the death penalty, although executions are not enforced. They apply to all religious groups but are often spurious and used to settle personal disputes. Though most cases of blasphemy are registered against Muslims, blasphemy laws are used against religious minorities, including Christians. In August 2023, the Senate passed a bill to amend the blasphemy law to increase sentencing to 'imprisonment for life which shall not be less than ten years', and to make the offence non-bailable. At the time of writing, the bill had not been passed into law (see Legal rights – [Blasphemy](#), [Application of blasphemy laws](#) and [Blasphemy-related convictions and dismissals](#)).
- 3.1.16 An NGO, the Center for Social Justice, reported that between 1987 and

2023 at least 2,449 persons were accused of committing blasphemy, 291 (12%) of whom were Christian. The same source reported between 2020 and 2023, 23 Christians were accused of blasphemy. It is not clear how many of these cases were prosecuted or convicted. Most convictions for blasphemy are overturned by higher courts and in 2021 and 2022 some cases concerning Christians were dismissed upon appeal or the accused were granted bail, though often after spending years in prison due to slow progress of cases. Although cases of blasphemy against Christians are reported, the numbers are low, particularly relative to the c.2.64 million people (see [Blasphemy](#), [Application of blasphemy laws](#) and [Blasphemy-related convictions and dismissals](#)).

- 3.1.17 The situation for Christians has not changed significantly since [AK & SK](#), and in general they remain unlikely to face a real risk of persecution from the state. Therefore, there are not very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to justify a departure from [AK & SK](#).
- 3.1.18 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3.2 Risk from state actors – Christian converts

- 3.2.1 Christians who are known to have converted from Islam (apostates), may find themselves facing a charge of blasphemy and are particularly at risk if they proselytise or seek to broadcast their faith to strangers to encourage them to convert. If a person can demonstrate a charge of blasphemy is being actively pursued, they may be able to establish a real risk of persecution. However, each case must be considered on its facts.
- 3.2.2 There is no law against religious conversion, but renouncing Islam (apostasy) is widely considered to be a form of blasphemy. The right to conversion is in practice limited to conversion to Islam, for example changing registered religion with The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), who issue identity cards and passports is possible where a person converts to Islam, but not if they convert from Islam to another faith (see Legal context – [Identity documents](#), [Apostasy](#) and [Blasphemy](#)).
- 3.2.3 In the CG case [AJ \(Risk, Christian Convert\) Pakistan CG \[2003\] UKIAT 00040 \(August 2003\)](#), heard on 21 July 2003 and promulgated on 15 August 2003, evidence assessed by the Tribunal fell, in the Tribunal's view 'far short of showing that a person who converts to Christianity faces as such in Pakistan a real risk of treatment which can be described as persecutory or otherwise inhuman or degrading treatment' (paragraph 36). However, the available country information indicates that converts facing blasphemy charges face arrest, detention, and lengthy prison sentences upon conviction. There are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to suggest the situation has deteriorated for Christian converts who face a real risk of a blasphemy charge being pursued against them since the promulgation of [AJ \(Risk, Christian Convert\)](#). **Therefore, decision makers must no longer follow this case.** However, each case must be considered on its facts.
- 3.2.4 A person who returns to Pakistan having converted from Islam to Christianity

while abroad, who does not actively seek to proselytise or publicly express their faith, and/or considers their religion a personal matter, may be able to continue practising Christianity discreetly.

- 3.2.5 In cases where the person will be discreet about their religion on return, the reasons for such discretion need to be considered (see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#))

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3.3 Risk from non-state actors – Christians

- 3.3.1 In general, born Christians are unlikely to face treatment by non-state actors which is sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition, or an accumulation of various measures, which is sufficiently severe to amount to persecution.
- 3.3.2 Christians experience societal discrimination, including hostile attitudes and actions towards them from those of other faiths. Due to societal attitudes that consider Christians to be ‘unclean’ (because they mostly descend from low-caste backgrounds) many are consigned to menial work and poorly paid jobs in the sanitation industry. Some students face discrimination in accessing education and at school (see [Economic, social and cultural rights](#)).
- 3.3.3 In [AK & SK](#) the Upper Tribunal held that:
- ‘The risk of becoming a victim of a blasphemy allegation will depend upon a number of factors and must be assessed on a case by case basis. Relevant factors will include the place of residence, whether it is an urban or rural area, and the individual’s level of education, financial and employment status and level of public religious activity such as preaching. These factors are not exhaustive.
- ‘Non-state agents who use blasphemy laws against Christians, are often motivated by spite, personal or business disputes, arguments over land and property. Certain political events may also trigger such accusations. A blasphemy allegation, without more will not generally be enough to make out a claim for international protection under the Refugee Convention. It has to be actively followed either by the authorities in the form of charges being brought or by those making the complaint. If it is, or will be, actively pursued, then an applicant may be able to establish a real risk of harm in the home area and an insufficiency of state protection’ (paragraphs 244 and 245).
- 3.3.4 Accusations of blasphemy are used against all faiths to settle personal scores or for personal gain. Many Christians avoid talking about their faith with Muslims to avoid attention or to avoid provoking blasphemy allegations ([Blasphemy-related convictions and acquittals](#) and [Proselytising, and possessing or displaying Christian material](#)).
- 3.3.5 Some lower courts allow spectators in blasphemy trials who often threaten the defendants, their lawyers, family members and supporters. Whether or not an allegation of blasphemy is found to be true, the accused, their family and the whole community sometimes face vigilante violence and less commonly, targeted killings. According to the Center for Social Justice (CSJ), between 1997 and 2016, there were 51 attacks against Christian communities and churches. Between 1987 and 2022, 23 Christians were extra-judicially killed following blasphemy allegations. From 2016 up until

August 2023, no major attack was reported on Christian churches (see [Blasphemy allegations and attacks against Christians](#)).

- 3.3.6 The UK's APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief visited Pakistan in February 2023. They noted a reduction in attacks against Christian communities since its previous visit in 2018. However, on 16 August 2023 at least 22 churches and more than 80 homes being burnt and looted in a series of mob-led attacks against the local Christian community in Jaranwala after rumours and allegations of blasphemy against 2 Christian brothers after announcements from mosque loudspeakers inciting violence and social media posts containing inflammatory language (see [Blasphemy allegations and attacks against Christians](#)).
- 3.3.7 In respect of forced conversions from Christianity to Islam, the Upper Tribunal in [AK & SK](#) held that:
- 'Pakistani law strictly forbids forced conversions, as does Islam. The Supreme Court has actively pursued cases related to forced conversion and discouraged it. In such cases, the courts have ensured that concerned individuals have an opportunity to express their wishes to convert or complain about any threat or pressure they may be facing in complete privacy and safety. The Supreme Court has also given them a period of reflection away from all sources that may influence their decision' (para 61).
- 3.3.8 When considering the evidence before them, the Upper Tribunal in [AK & SK](#) concluded that 'although there is some risk of abduction and forced conversion of young Christian girls, largely in rural areas and in Punjab, it does not amount to a serious risk in itself' (paragraph 238).
- 3.3.9 The UT in [AK & SK](#) held that 'Like other women in Pakistan, Christian women, in general, face discrimination and may be at a heightened risk but this falls short of a generalised real risk. The need for a fact-sensitive analysis is crucial in their case. Factors such as their age, place of residence and socio-economic milieu are all relevant factors when assessing the risk of abduction, conversions and forced marriages' (paragraph 246).
- 3.3.10 For the general situation of women in Pakistan see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Women fearing gender-based violence](#).
- 3.3.11 Instances of abduction and forced conversion to Islam and forced marriage of Christian women and girls continue to be reported. At least 100 cases were reported between January 2019 and October 2022, mostly in Punjab province (see [Forced conversions and forced marriage](#)).
- 3.3.12 The situation for Christians in general, including women and girls who fear forced conversion to Islam and forced marriage, has not changed significantly since [AK & SK](#), and there are not very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to justify a departure from it. In general, Christians remain unlikely to face a real risk of persecution from non-state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.3.13 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3.4 Risk from non-state actors - Christian converts

- 3.4.1 In general, a Christian convert who is open about their faith and conversion may be able to demonstrate the treatment they face by non-state actors is sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition, or an accumulation of various measures, which is sufficiently severe to amount to persecution.
- 3.4.2 A person who can demonstrate a credible blasphemy allegation raised by non-state actors is being actively pursued against them, may be able to establish a real risk of persecution. Each case must be considered on its facts.
- 3.4.3 Society is generally hostile to those who renounce Islam (apostasy), and it is widely considered to be a form of blasphemy. Many Christian converts practise their faith in secret as conversion is seen as shameful and an act of betrayal to their family and community. Some face ostracism, restrictions on their movements including surveillance and 'house-arrest' by their family and seizure of religious books used for private worship. Christian converts are unlikely to be able to attend church, due to fears of societal violence against the church community (see [Apostasy](#), [Blasphemy and Christian converts](#)).
- 3.4.4 Christians who are known to have converted from Islam experience discrimination, intimidation, violence from family and the Muslim community and vigilante attacks on them and their property. They also face accusations of blasphemy and are particularly at risk if they proselytise or seek to broadcast their faith to strangers to encourage them to convert. If reported to authorities and charges proceed, blasphemy charges carry penalties ranging from fines to maximum sentences of 10 years imprisonment or the death penalty, although executions are not enforced (see [Blasphemy](#) and [Application of blasphemy laws](#))
- 3.4.5 In the CG case [AJ \(Risk, Christian Convert\) Pakistan CG \[2003\] UKIAT 00040 \(August 2003\)](#), heard on 21 July 2003 and promulgated on 15 August 2003, evidence assessed by the Tribunal fell, in the Tribunal's view 'far short of showing that a person who converts to Christianity faces as such in Pakistan a real risk of treatment which can be described as persecutory or otherwise inhuman or degrading treatment' (paragraph 36). However, the available country information indicates that there are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to suggest the situation has deteriorated for Christian converts since the promulgation of [AJ \(Risk, Christian Convert\)](#). **Therefore, decision makers must no longer follow this case.** However, each case must be considered on its facts.
- 3.4.6 A person who returns to Pakistan having converted from Islam to Christianity while abroad, who does not actively seek to proselytise or publicly express their faith, and/or considers their religion a personal matter, may be able to continue practising Christianity discreetly.
- 3.4.7 In cases where the person will be discreet about their religion on return, the reasons for such discretion need to be considered (see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#))

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4. Protection

- 4.1.1 In general, the state is both willing and able to offer effective protection to Christians. A person's reluctance to seek protection does not necessarily mean that effective protection is not available. The onus is on the person to demonstrate why they would not be able to seek and obtain state protection.
- 4.1.2 The state has an effective criminal justice system capable of detecting, prosecuting, and punishing acts of persecution from non-state actors (see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Actors of protection](#)).
- 4.1.3 Christians are, in general, able to access their places of worship and state forces provide security where necessary during religious holidays, Sunday prayers and in response to specific threats. In Punjab, the province with the highest Christian population, full security is provided to Christian places of worship and educational institutions across the province. In Sindh, which has just under half a million Christians, a Special Protection Force for Minorities, with a mandate to protect churches, temples, and gurdwaras across the province was introduced in 2022 and 1200 police officers recruited (see [Christian festivals](#) and [Security and response to violence](#)).
- 4.1.4 The Government of Pakistan has expressed its commitment to prevent the misuse or abuse of blasphemy laws by requiring a senior police official to investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint may be filed. According to NGOs, although not followed in all cases, this has contributed to objective investigations and the dismissal of many blasphemy cases. Additional measures to reduce the misuse of blasphemy laws are mediation through the Council of Islamic Ideology, which can deal with allegations outside of the courts (see [Response to the misuse of blasphemy laws](#)).
- 4.1.5 In [AK & SK](#) the Upper Tribunal held that a blasphemy allegation '...has to be actively followed either by the authorities in the form of charges being brought or by those making the complaint. If it is, or will be, actively pursued, then an applicant may be able to establish a real risk of harm in the home area and an insufficiency of state protection' (paragraph 245).
- 4.1.6 Violence against Christians is reported, including by state forces. However, the police have arrested, investigated, and secured convictions of perpetrators of crimes against Christians. For example, the sentencing of 6 people for the murder of a Christian factory worker in April 2022 and the arrest of at least 140 in response to violent attacks on Christians, their churches, and homes in Jaranwala in Punjab in August 2023. Pakistan's National Commission for Human Rights, which initiated an inquiry into the Jaranwala incident, reported that as of 6 October 2023 all churches had been rebuilt or repaired and refurnished by the state, and approximately 80 families had received 2 million rupees (c.£5,600) in compensation (see [Security and response to violence](#) and [Response to the misuse of blasphemy laws](#)).
- 4.1.7 Laws exist which criminalise abduction, forced marriage and conversion to Islam of young women and girls. There are reported cases of state authorities having intervened in kidnapping and forced conversion situations. Prosecutions of perpetrators occur, although police sometimes fail to take allegations seriously and where cases progress to court, they tend to favour

the defendant with negative verdicts delivered based on Islamic creed and jurisprudence (see [Forced conversions and forced marriage](#)).

- 4.1.8 For further guidance on assessing state protection see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and [Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Actors of protection](#)

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5. Internal relocation

- 5.1.1 In general, there are parts of the country, such as (but not limited to) areas such as Sindh where just under half a million Christians reside, where a born Christian would not have a well-founded fear of persecution and it will be reasonable for them to relocate there.
- 5.1.2 Internal relocation is not likely to be reasonable for Christian converts who are open about their faith and conversion and can demonstrate a credible blasphemy allegation raised by non-state actors is being actively pursued against them.
- 5.1.3 While the onus is on the person to establish a well-founded fear of persecution or real risk of serious harm, decision makers must demonstrate that internal relocation is reasonable (or not unduly harsh) having regard to the individual circumstances of the person.
- 5.1.4 The Christian population, based on the 2017 census was recorded as 2.64 million (1.27%), whilst other estimates put it at over 4 million. It is split between Catholics and Protestants, the majority of whom reside in Punjab province. There are smaller but established Christian communities in Sindh and Islamabad (see [Demography](#) and [Churches and Christian communities](#)).
- 5.1.5 In the CG case of [AK & SK](#), the Upper Tribunal found that 'Relocation is normally a viable option unless an individual is accused of blasphemy which is being seriously pursued [by the state – that is to say formal charges have been brought against the person]. In that situation there is, in general, no internal relocation alternative' (paragraph 247).
- 5.1.6 In analysing the evidence before it, the Upper Tribunal in [AK & SK](#) noted, 'Figures of blasphemy charges, deaths and attacks on individuals, communities and churches are all of concern but they must be viewed against the size of the population and the fact that most take place in Punjab where radical Islamists have a strong presence. The option of internal relocation must be viewed against that background' (paragraph 227).
- 5.1.7 There are not very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to suggest a change in the situation for Christians in Pakistan generally since then.
- 5.1.8 Women without support of family or a male guardian may be less able to relocate. For further guidance see [Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Women fearing gender based violence](#).
- 5.1.9 For further guidance on considering internal relocation, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and [Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Internal relocation](#).

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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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7. Background

7.1 History and origins

7.1.1 Most Christians in Pakistan are descendants of low-caste Hindus – Dalits (a self-conscious name for untouchables in India that is rooted in marginalization and caste discrimination¹) – who converted during the British colonial rule, to escape caste discrimination^{2,3}.

7.1.2 Giving a more detailed explanation of the history behind converts to Christianity during the British era, Sara Singha wrote in a 2015 thesis, as part of her doctorate at Georgetown University, Washington DC:

‘During the nineteenth century in India, many Dalits converted to Christianity to escape caste persecution. In the 1870s in Punjab, a mass movement to Protestant Christianity flourished among the Dalit Chuhra caste. The Chuhra caste were the largest menial caste in Punjab and engaged in degrading occupations including sweeping and sanitation work. By the 1930s, almost the entire Chuhra caste converted to Protestant Christianity. In 1947, during the partition of India, the majority of Chuhra converts in Punjab became part of the Protestant community in Pakistan. After Partition, many uneducated Chuhra converts were confined to menial jobs in the sanitation industry. Today, the stigma of Dalit ancestry is a distinct feature of social discrimination against Chuhra Christians in Pakistan.’⁴

7.1.3 According to a study on religious minorities in Pakistan – which included views from 35 Christian respondents – by journalist, researcher, writer and Christian advocate, Asif Aqeel, published by the Centre for Law and Justice (CLJ) in 2020 (CLJ report):

‘The Pakistani Christian community is a mosaic of Goans, Anglo-Indians, westerners [sic], converts from Hindu, Sikh and Muslims but Punjabi Christians

¹ Singha, S., ‘[Dalit Christians and Caste Consciousness in Pakistan](#)’ (page 18), 23 April 2015

² MRGI, ‘[Pakistan Christians](#)’, June 2018

³ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.45), January 2022

⁴ Singha, S., ‘[Dalit Christians and Caste Consciousness in Pakistan](#)’ (page iii), 23 April 2015

dominate in number. During the British rule over India, thousands of Christian missionaries tried to convert Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims but they did not succeed. The success mainly came among an untouchable tribe of Scheduled Caste Hindus, then called in missionary reports and census as “Churha” (now a pejorative term). These people en masse converted to Christianity in Sialkot, Gujranwala, Narowal, Sheikhupura and Kasur from 1870s to 1920.⁵

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7.2 Demography

- 7.2.1 The Christian population in Pakistan varies according to different sources, cited below. Official figures have been taken from the 2017 census⁶.
- 7.2.2 According to the 2023 census results, Pakistan’s total population stood at 241.49 million⁷. The full 2023 census results were not available at time of publication of this CPIN, so data on religion is based on the 2017 census⁸. According to 2017 census data, the total population was then 207.68 million, the majority of whom were Muslim (200.36 million or 96.47%). The Christian population was recorded as 2.64 million (1.27%), the second largest religious minority after Hindus^{9 10}.
- 7.2.3 The 2017 census results recorded the number of Christians as follows:

Province	Urban	Rural	Total
Punjab	1,211,883	851,180	2,063,063
Sindh	383,854	24,447	408,301
Federal Capital (Islamabad)	52,776	34,071	86,847
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)	38,113	8,766	46,879
Balochistan	23,704	10,115	33,819
FATA*	1,362	1,777	3,139
Total	1,711,692	930,356	2,642,048

Source data: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS)¹¹. *FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018¹².

- 7.2.4 For a breakdown of the Christian population by district, see the 2017 census provincial tables – [Punjab](#), [Sindh](#), [KPK](#), [Balochistan](#) and [FATA](#).
- 7.2.5 Some stakeholders disputed the 2017 census figures, saying that minorities were undercounted^{13 14}, denying accurate representation in national and

⁵ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 43), 2020

⁶ PBS, ‘[Final Results of Census-2017](#)’ ([Table 9 - Pakistan](#)), 2021

⁷ PBS, ‘[Announcement of Results of 7th Population and Housing Census-2023...](#)’, 5 August 2023

⁸ PBS, ‘[Final Results of Census-2017](#)’ ([Table 9 - Pakistan](#)), 2021

⁹ CSJ, ‘[White Paper: Confusing Demographics of Minorities...](#)’ (page 5), May 2022

¹⁰ PBS, ‘[Final Results of Census-2017](#)’ ([Table 9 - Pakistan](#)), 2021

¹¹ PBS, ‘[Final Results of Census-2017](#)’ ([Table 9 - Pakistan](#)), 2021

¹² FAFEN, ‘[NA Passes 31st Constitutional Amendment](#)’, 24 May 2018

¹³ CSJ, ‘[White Paper: Confusing Demographics of Minorities...](#)’ (pages 3 to 4), May 2022

¹⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraphs 3.28 and 3.45), 25 January 2022

provincial parliaments¹⁵. Voice of America (VoA) stated in July 2021 that, according to Peter Jacob, director of the Center for Social Justice (CSJ), a Lahore-based research and advocacy group¹⁶, ‘... the number of Christians decreased 0.32% from the last [2017] census and now total about 2.5 million. “Even though Christians have migrated overseas and converted to Islam, our church records make us suspect that Christians may have been undercounted by at least half a million,” he said.’¹⁷

- 7.2.6 According to March 2022 figures obtained from Pakistan’s National Database and Registration Authority ([NADRA](#)) by the CSJ, out of 186.89 million total registrations on the NADRA database, around 1.87 million were Christian (approximately 1%)¹⁸.
- 7.2.7 According to statistics of the Catholic Church in Pakistan, as of 2021 there were nearly 1.349 million Catholics in the country¹⁹, approximately half of the 2.64 million Christians recorded in the 2017 census²⁰.
- 7.2.8 Open Doors International noted in its World Watch List (WWL) 2023 for Pakistan (covering the period 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022, published December 2022, based on background information sought by World Watch Research (WWR – Open Doors research department) and from the WWL questionnaire completed by in-country networks, country researchers and external experts, as per its [WWL Methodology](#)²¹) that according to the World Christian Database (WCD) there were approximately 4.19 million Christians in Pakistan²².

Pakistan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	1,137,000	27.1
Protestant	2,535,000	60.4
Independent	651,000	15.5
Unaffiliated	21,100	0.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-150,000	-3.6
Total	4,194,100	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,039,000	24.8
Renewalist movement	920,000	21.9

Source data: WCD, cited by Open Doors WWL 2023²³

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¹⁵ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section I), 15 May 2023

¹⁶ CSJ, ‘[About us](#)’, no date

¹⁷ VoA, ‘[Pakistan’s Religious Minorities Say They Were Undercounted in Census](#)’, 1 July 2021

¹⁸ CSJ, ‘[White Paper: Confusing Demographics of Minorities...](#)’ (page 9), May 2022

¹⁹ Catholics in Pakistan, ‘[Statistics of the Catholic Church in Pakistan \(2021\)](#)’, 2021

²⁰ PBS, ‘[Final Results of Census-2017](#)’ ([Table 9 - Pakistan](#)), 2021

²¹ Open Doors, ‘[Complete World Watch List Methodology](#)’ (pages 44, 58, 62), October 2023

²² Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 5), December 2022

²³ Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 27), December 2022

7.3 Churches and Christian communities

- 7.3.1 The Constitution provides for the right for all religious denominations to establish, maintain and manage their religious institutions²⁴. The US Department of State 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom (USSD IRF Report 2022), stated that ‘According to representatives of some minority religious groups, the government continued to allow most organized religious groups to establish places of worship and train members of the clergy.’²⁵
- 7.3.2 Open Doors WWL 2023 described the Catholic Church and Church of Pakistan as ‘historical Christian communities’, and Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal groups as ‘non-traditional’.²⁶
- 7.3.3 The 4 main Protestant denominations are united under The Church of Pakistan and include Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists and Lutherans²⁷. Other Protestant faiths include the United Presbyterian Church, Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, the Pentecostal Church, and other smaller churches²⁸.
- 7.3.4 According to the Catholic Church in Pakistan, as of 2021, there were 136 parishes across its 7 dioceses²⁹. A report by the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), published in The Express Tribune in April 2022, stated that there were ‘... around 2,652 churches in the country – 1 [one] church per 664 Christians, comparing one mosque per 2,249 Muslims in the UK.’³⁰
- 7.3.5 The World Council of Churches (WCC), a ‘fellowship of 352 churches from more than 120 countries, representing over 580 million Christians worldwide’³¹, noted there were 8 dioceses under the Church of Pakistan: Faisalabad, Hyderabad, Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar, Raiwind and Sialkot³². According to the Catholic Church in Pakistan, there were 7 ecclesiastical units in Pakistan comprising of 2 archdioceses (Lahore and Karachi), 4 dioceses (Faisalabad, Hyderabad, Islamabad-Rawalpindi and Multan), and one Apostolic Vicariate (Quetta)³³.
- 7.3.6 According to the CLJ 2020 report, whilst most Christians live in Punjab province (the majority in Lahore), Christians living outside the province – in Karachi and Hyderabad, Sindh Province, Quetta in Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan, as well as the remote town of Parachinar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – were of Punjabi origin³⁴.
- 7.3.7 A 2020 report by the Religious Freedom Institute (RFI), a US-based non-profit institution reporting on religious freedom, stated that ‘Punjab Province has the largest concentration of Christians, with significant populations in the cities of Lahore and Faisalabad. Yohannabad and Bahar Colony are two

²⁴ Pakistani.org, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Article 20)

²⁵ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

²⁶ Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 28), December 2022

²⁷ WCC, ‘[Church of Pakistan](#)’, no date

²⁸ Christianity in Pakistan, ‘[Protestantism in Pakistan](#)’, no date

²⁹ Catholics in Pakistan, ‘[Statistics of the Catholic Church in Pakistan \(2021\)](#)’, 2021

³⁰ The Express Tribune, ‘[Christian community set to celebrate Easter Sunday...](#)’, 16 April 2022

³¹ WCC, ‘[About the WCC](#)’, no date

³² WCC, ‘[Church of Pakistan](#)’, no date

³³ Catholics in Pakistan, ‘[Dioceses](#)’, no date

³⁴ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 44), 2020

predominantly Christian areas of Lahore...³⁵

- 7.3.8 A study on religious minorities in Pakistan – which included views from 35 Christian respondents – by journalist, researcher, writer and Christian advocate, Asif Aqeel, published by the Centre for Law and Justice (CLJ) in 2020 (CLJ 2020 report) noted that, ‘Thousands of evangelical household churches have emerged across Pakistan, which has dramatically decreased attendance in Catholic and other “mainline” churches.’³⁶ The Open Doors WWL 2023 also noted that the growth in non-traditional Christian groups was due to Christians transferring from ‘historical’ churches³⁷.

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8. Legal context

8.1 International and constitutional framework

- 8.1.1 As a member of the UN³⁸, Pakistan is party to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights³⁹, and a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)⁴⁰, both of which protect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, to change one’s religion or beliefs, and to practise one’s faith freely in public and private places^{41 42}.
- 8.1.2 Pakistan’s Constitution declares Islam as the state religion⁴³, but also states that ‘subject to law, public order and morality... every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion’ and ‘every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions.’⁴⁴
- 8.1.3 Whilst the constitution states that ‘All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law’⁴⁵, some articles favour Islam over minority religions, such as restricting the positions of president and prime minister to Muslims only⁴⁶. Furthermore, all existing laws shall conform with the rules of Islam and no law shall be enacted which is ‘repugnant’ to Islam⁴⁷.
- 8.1.4 The Government of Pakistan’s report on the implementation of the UN Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD), published on 10 February 2022, cited Articles 20, 21, 22, 26, 27 and 28 of the Constitution, under which ‘... minorities are equal citizens of Pakistan and are free to profess their religion and visit their places of worship.’⁴⁸

³⁵ RFI, ‘[Pakistan Religious Freedom Landscape Report](#)’ (page 23), 2020

³⁶ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 45), 2020

³⁷ Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 28), December 2022

³⁸ UN, ‘[Member States](#)’, no date

³⁹ UN, ‘[Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)’, 1948

⁴⁰ ICCPR, ‘[Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan...](#)’ (paragraph 1), 7 December 2022

⁴¹ UN, ‘[Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)’ (Article 18), 1948

⁴² OHCHR, ‘[ICCPR](#)’ (Article 18), 1966

⁴³ Pakistani.org, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Article 2)

⁴⁴ Pakistani.org, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Article 20)

⁴⁵ Pakistani.org, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Article 25)

⁴⁶ Pakistani.org, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Articles 41, 91)

⁴⁷ Pakistani.org, ‘[Constitution](#)’ (Article 227)

⁴⁸ UNCERD, ‘[Combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic...](#)’ (paragraph 11), 10 February 2022

See also [Churches and Christian communities](#)

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8.2 Personal laws

- 8.2.1 The Christian Marriage Act 1872, relates to the solemnisation of marriages for Christians in Pakistan⁴⁹. The dissolution of marriages for Christians is governed by the Divorce Act, 1869, though the law only allows adultery to be grounds for dissolution⁵⁰. In August 2019, the Federal Cabinet approved a draft Christian Marriage and Divorce Bill, which aimed to update the old laws, including to allow greater scope for divorce^{51 52}. The bill was pending ratification as of December 2023⁵³. In sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)) no further information could be found on the progress of the bill at the time of writing.

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8.3 Identity documents

- 8.3.1 The USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that ‘The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) designates religious affiliation on passports and requires religious information on national identity card and passport applications... National identity cards are required for all citizens upon reaching the age of 18. Identification cards are used for voting, pension disbursement, social and financial inclusion programs, and other services.’⁵⁴
- 8.3.2 Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs) do not display the holder’s religion, but this information is collected by NADRA during the application process⁵⁵.
- 8.3.3 In regard to the ability of a Pakistan citizen to change their religion from Islam to Christianity on official documents, the US-based human rights group, Jubilee Campaign, in its report on abduction, forced conversions and forced marriage of Christian women and girls in Pakistan, based on various sources⁵⁶ and covering the period from January 2019 and October 2022, noted that although converting to another faith was legal:
- ‘... in practice, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) puts a restriction on conversion away from the majority religion Islam. According to its policy, the modification “from other religions to Islam” in the religion column for citizens’ national identity cards is permissible, but it is absolutely prohibited to change the religion of citizens “from Islam to other religions”, after applicants have submitted a declaration stating them as Muslims and professing their religion as Islam at the time of registration with NADRA.’⁵⁷

⁴⁹ The Pakistan Code, ‘[Christian Marriage Act, 1872](#)’, 1872

⁵⁰ The Pakistan Code, ‘[Divorce Act, 1869](#)’, 1869

⁵¹ Daily Times, ‘[Christian Marriage and Divorce Act 2019 — a long awaited...](#)’, 4 September 2019

⁵² Dawn, ‘[Christian Marriage and Divorce Bill caught between feuding ministries](#)’, 5 November 2019

⁵³ Dawn, ‘[Call for repeal of “archaic” Christian marriage laws](#)’, 1 December 2023

⁵⁴ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

⁵⁵ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 5.40), January 2022

⁵⁶ Jubilee Campaign, ‘[Conversion without Consent...](#)’ (pages 59), November 2022

⁵⁷ Jubilee Campaign, ‘[Conversion without Consent...](#)’ (pages 1 to 2), November 2022

See also [Apostasy \(renouncing Islam\)](#) and [Christian converts](#)

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8.4 Apostasy (renouncing Islam)

- 8.4.1 Professor of Law, Javid Rehman, who investigated ‘the uses and abuses of certain interpretations of Sharia law and the Quran’, defined apostasy in a 2010 publication by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies:

‘Apostasy (also known as Ridda) occurs when a Muslim (by his words or actions) renounces and rejects Islam. Rejection or criticism of the All Mighty or His Prophet is perceived as an insult to Islam, offensive and routinely regarded as blasphemous... Blasphemy connotes the insult of God or Prophet Mohammad and other revered figures in Islam, and can be committed by believers and non-believers alike. Apostasy from Islam and blasphemy against Islam therefore remain (and have always remained) unacceptable.’⁵⁸

- 8.4.2 There is no law in Pakistan against religious conversion^{59 60}, though according to Shehryar Fazli, Senior Analyst and Regional Editor at the International Crisis Group (ICG), speaking at an EUAA – European Union Agency for Asylum (formerly European Asylum Support Office, EASO) conference on Pakistan in October 2017, ‘A person who converts out of Islam will be accused of apostasy.’⁶¹ The source did not however, explain how he could confirm all converts would be accused of apostasy.
- 8.4.3 According to a country expert cited in the Open Doors WWL 2023 report, ‘It remains a great challenge to achieve the official recognition of conversions. Converts from Islam will never be recognized officially and they continue having to live as Muslims. The biased approach of the government and officials becomes clear when the recognition of conversions to Islam from a Christian or Hindu background is swiftly accepted and the National Identity Card easily changed.’⁶²
- 8.4.4 In January and February 2021, the All Party Parliamentary Group for Pakistani Minorities (APPG Pakistan Minorities) held an inquiry on the abduction, forced conversion and marriage of religious minorities in Pakistan and heard from multiple stakeholders on the issue. The subsequent report, which summarised the evidence heard, noted that, whilst there was no law against conversion, ‘If a Muslim changes his or her religion, they are ostracised from family and society and face substantial risks of being charged with Pakistan’s draconian blasphemy laws.’⁶³
- 8.4.5 The USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that ‘The penal code does not explicitly criminalize apostasy, but renouncing Islam is widely considered by clerics to be a form of blasphemy, which may carry the death penalty.’⁶⁴
- 8.4.6 In a study on violence and discrimination against women of religious minority

⁵⁸ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, ‘[Freedom of expression, apostasy...](#)’, March 2010

⁵⁹ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 184), November 2020

⁶⁰ Jubilee Campaign, ‘[Conversion without Consent...](#)’ (page 1), November 2022

⁶¹ EUAA, ‘[COI Meeting Report – Pakistan](#)’ (page 42), February 2018

⁶² Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 43), December 2022

⁶³ APPG Pakistan Minorities, ‘[APPG for the Pakistani Minorities Inquiry](#)’ (page 29), September 2021

⁶⁴ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

backgrounds by the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID), published in November 2020, it was deemed that the ‘... right to conversion in a Pakistani context means conversion to Islam only. The environment does not allow conversion to another religion from Islam, which is treated as apostasy, punishable by death according to common interpretation of Islamic Sharia.’⁶⁵

See also [Christian converts](#)

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8.5 Blasphemy

- 8.5.1 Pakistan’s so-called blasphemy laws, which consist of articles in Chapter XV ‘Of Offences Relating to Religion’ in the Pakistan Penal Code, criminalise insults or derogatory remarks against religion or religious feeling, which can result in penalties ranging from fines to one to 10 years imprisonment, to the death penalty⁶⁶.
- 8.5.2 The GoP stated in its report on implementation of the UNCERD that ‘Application of Blasphemy Law in the country is within the parameters of international human rights standards.’⁶⁷
- 8.5.3 The table below outlines blasphemy laws under the penal code:

Blasphemy laws – Articles 295 to 298-A		
Penal Code	Title	Penalty
295	Injuring or defiling place of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class	Up to 2 years imprisonment, or fine, or both
295-A	Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs	Up to 10 years imprisonment, or fine, or both
295-B	Defiling... of Holy Quran	Life imprisonment
295-C	Use of derogatory remarks... in respect of the Holy Prophet	Death or life imprisonment and a fine
298	Uttering words... with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings	Up to one year imprisonment, or fine, or both
298-A	Use of derogatory remarks... in respect of holy personages	Up to 3 years imprisonment, or fine, or both

For full legal text, see the [Pakistan Penal Code](#)⁶⁸

- 8.5.4 For information on Articles 298-B and 298-C, also known as Anti-Ahmadi laws because they are specifically directed towards Ahmadis, see the

⁶⁵ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 184), November 2020

⁶⁶ Pakistani.org, ‘[Pakistan Penal Code](#)’ (chapter XV), 1860

⁶⁷ UNCERD, ‘[Combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic...](#)’ (paragraph 62), 10 February 2022

⁶⁸ Pakistani.org, ‘[Pakistan Penal Code](#)’ (chapter XV), 1860

[Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Ahmadis.](#)

- 8.5.5 In January 2023, the National Assembly, the lower house of Pakistan's federal Parliament, unanimously passed an amendment to the blasphemy law through the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act, 2023. The amendment proposed that Article 298-A increase the punishment to 'imprisonment for life which shall not be less than ten years', and to make the offence non-bailable⁶⁹. In August 2023, the bill was passed in the Senate^{70 71}, but requires presidential assent to become law^{72 73}. In sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)) no further information could be found on the progress of the bill at the time of writing.
- 8.5.6 The GoP stated in its report on implementation of the UNCERD that 'Blasphemy law in Pakistan is non-discriminatory in nature as it deals with offences against all religions and applies to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.'⁷⁴ The GoP said in the same report that 'Generally, the blasphemy law is misunderstood that it only protects Muslims, but it equally protects all Pakistani communities against desecration of their places of worship including Churches...'⁷⁵ The GoP repeated these sentiments in its December 2022 report to the ICCPR⁷⁶.
- 8.5.7 A report on the situation of religious minorities in Pakistan, published in March 2021 by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), cited a December 2020 report by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Ahmadis and Christians in Pakistan, which described the blasphemy laws (Articles 295 to 298A) 'as "asymmetrical" ("niet 'symmetrisch")', because insulting or desecrating Mohammed and the Koran [Quran] are explicitly punishable, but there is no comparable provision for insulting Jesus Christ or the Bible.'⁷⁷

See also [Application of blasphemy laws](#)

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9. Economic, social and cultural rights

9.1 Global rankings on religious freedom

- 9.1.1 Various sources ranked Pakistan in terms of religious freedom, though not all reports were specifically referring to the situation of Christians.
- 9.1.2 The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), a research organisation which provides data on religious freedom⁷⁸, published the [Global Religious Freedom Data Spectrum](#), which aimed to '... provide a comparative framework for viewing a wide range of data from organizations'

⁶⁹ HRCP, '[Amendments to blasphemy laws create further room for persecution](#)', 20 January 2023

⁷⁰ Dawn, '[Senate passes bill to ramp up punishment for blasphemy to at least 10...](#)', 8 August 2023

⁷¹ CSW, '[Concerns about two Bills that increase blasphemy punishment and fail...](#)', 11 August 2023

⁷² Friday Times, '[Amendments to Blasphemy Law by Senate Ignite Sectarian...](#)', 21 August 2023

⁷³ Express Tribune, '[President objects to CrPC amendment bill](#)', 22 August 2023

⁷⁴ UNCERD, '[Combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic...](#)' (paragraph 62), 10 February 2022

⁷⁵ UNCERD, '[Combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic...](#)' (paragraph 64), 10 February 2022

⁷⁶ ICCPR, '[Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan...](#)' (paragraph 94), 7 December 2022

⁷⁷ ACCORD, '[Pakistan: Religious Minorities](#)' (page 17), March 2021

⁷⁸ IIRF, '[Vision and Mission](#)', no date

country rankings on the issues of freedom of religion or belief.’ Its summary, drawn from the rankings surveyed from 13 sources⁷⁹ as of 2022, noted that ‘Reports generally agree that Pakistan has low religious freedom. They all state discrimination against religious minority groups as reasoning.’⁸⁰

- 9.1.3 In December 2023, the USSD redesignated Pakistan a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the [International Religious Freedom Act of 1998](#) for having engaged in or tolerated ‘particularly severe violations of religious freedom’, which it defined as “systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom,” including violations such as: (1) torture; (2) prolonged detention without charges; (3) forced disappearance; or (4) other flagrant denial of life, liberty, or security of persons.’⁸¹ Pakistan was first categorised as a CPC in 2018⁸². The source did not state to what extent this designation was due to the treatment of Christians.
- 9.1.4 In January 2024, the GoP issued a notice categorically rejecting the latest designation and stated that it was based on a ‘biased and arbitrary assessment, detached from ground realities’, adding that ‘Pakistan is a pluralistic country, with a rich tradition of interfaith harmony. In line with its Constitution, Pakistan has undertaken wide ranging measures to promote religious freedom and protect minority rights.’⁸³
- 9.1.5 Pakistan ranked 7 out of the 76 countries and scored 86 in the Open Doors WWL 2023 (covering the period 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022), which analysed countries where Christians face high (41-60 points), very high (61-80 points) or extremely high (81-100 points) levels of persecution, defined in the WWL as ‘Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians.’⁸⁴.

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9.2 Political representation

- 9.2.1 As noted in the USSD IRF Report 2022, under the constitution, the position of president and prime minister is reserved for Muslims and that all members of parliament must swear an oath to protect the country’s Islamic identity⁸⁵.
- 9.2.2 The same report added:
- ‘The constitution reserves seats for non-Muslim members in Parliament and provincial assemblies. The 342-member National Assembly (the lower house of Parliament) has 10 reserved seats for non-Muslims. The 100-member Senate has four reserved seats for non-Muslims, one from each province. In the provincial assemblies, there are three such reserved seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; eight in Punjab; nine in Sindh; and three in Balochistan. Reserved seats are distributed to political parties in proportion to the number of seats the parties win in the general electorate. Party leaders choose the

⁷⁹ IIRF, ‘[Global Religious Freedom Data Spectrum](#)’ (Methodology), 2022

⁸⁰ IIRF, ‘[Global Religious Freedom Data Spectrum](#)’ (Pakistan), 2022

⁸¹ USSD, ‘[Countries of Particular Concern, Special Watch List Countries...](#)’, 29 December 2023

⁸² USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2021](#)’ (Executive summary), 2 June 2022

⁸³ MOFA, ‘[Pakistan rejects designation as ‘a Country of Particular Concern’...](#)’, 8 January 2024

⁸⁴ Open Doors, ‘[WWL 2023 Country scores and ranks](#)’ (page 3), January 2023

⁸⁵ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

minority individuals who hold these seats; they are not elected directly by the minority constituencies they represent. There is no obligation to appoint members to the reserved seats in proportion to their community's share of the population.⁸⁶

- 9.2.3 Freedom House noted in its Freedom in the World 2023 report for Pakistan that 'A joint electorate system allows members of non-Muslim minorities to participate in the general vote. They are also represented by reserved seats in the national and provincial assemblies through the party-list system. However, non-Muslims' political participation remains marginal. Political parties nominate members to reserved legislative seats, leaving non-Muslim voters with little say in the selection process.'⁸⁷
- 9.2.4 The USSD IRF Report 2022 stated regarding reserved minority seats that: 'Some religious minority leaders continued to criticize the process by which political party leaders selected parliamentarians for reserved minority seats through internal deliberations rather than elections. According to these minority leaders, only "rich businessmen" were selected through this process, and many were not well regarded by the minority communities they are meant to represent. Others said parliamentarians occupying reserved seats had little influence in either their parties or the legislatures because they did not have a voting constituency. Women from religious minority communities criticized political parties for nominating only men to seats reserved for religious minorities in all legislative bodies, and they demanded amendments to the law to make mandatory the appointment of religious minority women to these seats.'⁸⁸
- 9.2.5 Prior to provincial assemblies being dissolved due to forthcoming national elections, there were 3 Christians in the Punjab Assembly⁸⁹, one in the Sindh Assembly⁹⁰, and one in KPK⁹¹. The Balochistan Provincial Assembly website did not divulge members religious affiliation⁹². Since the 2024 national elections, not all provincial assemblies have updated their websites with member details however there were 6 Christians recorded in the Punjab Assembly from 2024⁹³.

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9.3 Christian festivals

- 9.3.1 Minority religious festivals, including Christmas and Easter, were celebrated at an official level⁹⁴ and were public holidays⁹⁵, although the CLJ 2020 report described Christian holidays as 'somewhat vague', owing that 25 December was an official public holiday on account of the birth of the founder of

⁸⁶ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (section II), 15 May 2023

⁸⁷ Freedom House, '[Freedom in the World 2023: Pakistan](#)' (B4), 2023

⁸⁸ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (section II), 15 May 2023

⁸⁹ Punjab Assembly, '[Members' List by Religion: Christianity](#)', no date

⁹⁰ Sindh Assembly, '[Member Profile: Mr Anthony Naveed](#)', no date

⁹¹ KPK Assembly, '[Minority – Reserved Seats \(Wilson Wazir\)](#)', no date

⁹² Balochistan Assembly, '[Members directory](#)', no date

⁹³ Punjab Assembly, '[Members' List by Religion: Christianity](#)', 2024

⁹⁴ MORA, '[Interfaith Harmony Activities/Public Awareness](#)', no date

⁹⁵ The Express Tribune, '[Christian community set to celebrate Easter Sunday...](#)', 16 April 2022

Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Easter day falls on a Sunday⁹⁶, already a non-work day for federal and provincial governments⁹⁷. However, 26 December was a public holiday for Christians^{98 99}, and Good Friday and Easter Monday were optional holidays for government employees^{100 101}.

- 9.3.2 On their respective occasions in 2022 and 2023, the President and Prime Minister offered the Christian community Easter^{102 103} and Christmas greetings^{104 105 106}. On Christmas Day 2023, the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Interfaith Harmony and Chair of the Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC), Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, visited the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Karachi to celebrate with the Christian community^{107 108}, while Chief of Army Staff, General Syed Asim Munir, joined the Christian community at Christ Church, Rawalpindi¹⁰⁹.
- 9.3.3 In 2023, provincial governments paid advance salaries and gave Christmas leave to their Christian employees, according to Pakistan Today¹¹⁰.
- 9.3.4 In 2023, Pakistan's mainstream English-language media reported on Easter^{111 112 113} and Christmas celebrations^{114 115 116} that occurred across the country, whilst also noting the state security arrangements in place to protect the community and its churches^{117 118 119 120}.

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9.4 Education and literacy

- 9.4.1 The USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that students must declare their religious affiliation on application forms to enter all public or private educational institutions, including universities, and that non-Muslims must have their religious affiliation verified by the head of their local religious community¹²¹.

⁹⁶ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 33), 2020

⁹⁷ Gulf News, '[Friday or Sunday, what will be the new weekend in Pakistan?](#)', 21 February 2019

⁹⁸ INCPak, '[Public Holidays in Pakistan 2023 \[Complete List\]](#)', 26 December 2022

⁹⁹ INCPak, '[List of Public Holidays in Pakistan For 2024](#)', 20 December 2023

¹⁰⁰ INCPak, '[Public Holidays in Pakistan 2023 \[Complete List\]](#)', 26 December 2022

¹⁰¹ INCPak, '[List of Public Holidays in Pakistan For 2024](#)', 20 December 2023

¹⁰² APP, '[PM greets Christian community on Easter](#)', 17 April 2022

¹⁰³ Pakistan Today, '[Leaders extend warm wishes to Christian community on Easter](#)', 9 April 2023

¹⁰⁴ Daily Times, '[PM felicitates Christian community on Christmas](#)', 25 December 2022

¹⁰⁵ President of Pakistan, '[President Dr Arif Alvi's Message on the occasion...](#)', 25 December 2023

¹⁰⁶ Pakistan Today, '[President, PM extend wishes Christian community on...](#)', 25 December 2023

¹⁰⁷ APP, '[Muslims, minorities united for country's development: Ashrafi](#)', 25 December 2023

¹⁰⁸ Pakistan Observer, '[Constitution of Pakistan gives equal rights to followers...](#)', 25 December 2023

¹⁰⁹ ISPR, '[General Syed Asim Munir, NI \(M\), Chief of Army Staff \(COAS\)...](#)', 25 December 2023

¹¹⁰ Pakistan Today, '[All set to celebrate Christmas in Pakistan tomorrow](#)', 24 December 2023

¹¹¹ Dawn, '[Special services, festivities mark Easter in KP](#)', 10 April 2023

¹¹² Dawn, '[Christian community in Karachi celebrates Easter](#)', 10 April 2023

¹¹³ Dawn, '[Easter services held in churches throughout city](#)', 10 April 2023

¹¹⁴ Dawn, '[In pictures: Christians revel in Christmas festivities across Pakistan](#)', 25 December 2023

¹¹⁵ Daily Times, '[Christmas celebrated with great zeal and enthusiasm](#)', 26 December 2023

¹¹⁶ Pakistan Today, '[All set to celebrate Christmas in Pakistan tomorrow](#)', 24 December 2023

¹¹⁷ Dawn, '[Easter services held in churches throughout city](#)', 10 April 2023

¹¹⁸ Daily Times, '[CM directs to ensure security arrangements on Easter](#)', 9 April 2023

¹¹⁹ Pakistan Today, '[All set to celebrate Christmas in Pakistan tomorrow](#)', 24 December 2023

¹²⁰ Dawn, '[In pictures: Christians revel in Christmas festivities across Pakistan](#)', 25 December 2023

¹²¹ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (section II), 15 May 2023

9.4.2 The same report stated that:

‘The constitution states that no person attending any educational institution shall be required to attend religious instruction or take part in any religious ceremony relating to a religion other than the person’s own. It also states that no religious denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of its denomination in an educational institution maintained by the denomination.

‘The constitution states the government shall make Islamic studies compulsory for all Muslim students in schools, but students of other religious groups are not legally required to study Islam. Most schools do not offer parallel studies in religious beliefs other than Islam or their own respective religious tradition. In some state-run schools, however, non-Muslim students may study ethics. Parents may send children to private schools, including religious schools, at the family’s expense. In Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, private schools are also required to teach Islamic studies and the Quran to Muslim students.’¹²²

9.4.3 However, the USSD IRF Report 2022 also noted that:

‘The government continued to implement the Single National Curriculum, which it renamed the National Curriculum of Pakistan in July [2022]. The initiative aimed to standardize primary school instruction across the country’s three types of educational institutions – private, public, and religious. Religious minority groups criticized the curriculum’s emphasis on an Islamic perspective in non-religious subjects, including Urdu, English, and geography, and argued the curriculum violated constitutional restrictions on “compulsory religious instruction” and the constitution’s delegation of most authority for education to provincial governments. Since October, when the Sindh provincial government agreed to use the new curriculum, all four provinces now use it. The Punjab provincial government granted the Islamic Ulema Board a role in reviewing and approving the curriculum, but not leaders from religious minority groups.

‘The Supreme Court continued to review a petition from Shoaib Suddle of the court’s commission for the protection of religious minorities, that objected to Islamic religious content in compulsory education; the petition remained pending before the court at year’s end. In his petition, Suddle stated that the compulsory curriculum, including Urdu- and English-language courses and other non-Islamic general courses, contained extensive Islamic content (as well as negative stereotypes of non-Muslims) and therefore forced religious minority students to receive Islamic religious instruction. Suddle recommended removing Islamic content from these subjects and concentrating it solely in Islamic studies textbooks, because that subject was compulsory only for Muslim students. The chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology opposed the petition. The Advocates General of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces told the court that their textbooks were in conformity with the law.

‘While the law only requires schools to teach Islamic studies and the Quran to Muslim students, sources continued to report many non-Muslim students

¹²² USSD, [‘IRF Report 2022’](#) (section II), 15 May 2023

had to participate in these courses because their schools did not offer parallel courses in their own religious beliefs or ethics.¹²³

- 9.4.4 In a report assessing the compliance of the 2014 Supreme Court judgement on minority rights between June 2022 and June 2023, the CSJ noted that hate speech from school textbooks had been largely removed¹²⁴. Commenting on the progress of the One-Man Commission on Minorities Rights in August 2023, Commission chair, Shoaib Suddle, also noted the removal of hate material from textbooks¹²⁵.
- 9.4.5 In a positive step towards inclusion, national newspaper, Dawn, reported in March 2023 that the National Curriculum Council (NCC) agreed that religious education books could be published for students of 7 minority groups, including Christians, who were enrolled in educational institutions supervised by the federal government¹²⁶. However, as of December 2023, curriculum guidelines for all religious minorities were still 'in progress', according to the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training¹²⁷. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (MORA) also provided a scholarship fund for religious minorities^{128 129}.
- 9.4.6 The Presbyterian Education Board (PEB) of Pakistan noted that it provided education to over 6,000 children (40% of whom were Christian) in at least 21 schools, from primary to high school^{130 131}. The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC), Pakistan, regulated schools in dioceses across the country, under its Catholic Boards of Education¹³², including the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) of Islamabad / Rawalpindi Diocese, which noted that it ran 45 schools catering for nearly 25,000 children, both Muslim and non-Muslim¹³³. Between 2021 and 2023, 11 schools for impoverished Christian children were built by the charity, Barnabas Aid¹³⁴.
- 9.4.7 According to the Open Doors WWL 2023:
- 'Discrimination at school (and elsewhere) is a daily experience for Christian schoolchildren. At school, children of Christian parents are often not allowed to use the same water fountain as their Muslim classmates to avoid "defiling" the drinking-water, and they are often bullied. Many Christian children are asked to clean the latrines or sweep the floor as Christians are commonly perceived as being sweepers. Some schoolbooks incite hatred against Christians. Even in some Christian institutions, some non-Christian students would choose not to socialize or even eat with Christians. This attitude is not always purely religious but also has its background in caste considerations since a majority of Christians come from low caste and even previously

¹²³ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (section II), 15 May 2023

¹²⁴ CSJ, '[Quest for Justice](#)' (page 5), 2023

¹²⁵ APP, '[Police must protect Constitutional rights of minorities: Dr Shoaib Suddle](#)', 11 August 2023

¹²⁶ Dawn, '[Minority students to have their own religious textbooks](#)', 6 March 2023

¹²⁷ Ministry of Federal Education..., '[NCC Religious Education – Introduction](#)', no date

¹²⁸ MORA, '[Minority's Scholarship Management System](#)', no date

¹²⁹ MORA, '[FAQS-IH](#)' (Questions 7 to 11), no date

¹³⁰ PEB, '[Frequently Asked Questions](#)', no date

¹³¹ PEB, '[Message from Veda Shaheen Gill](#)', no date

¹³² NCEC, '[Catholic Boards of Education](#)', no date

¹³³ DBE, '[Introduction – Diocesan Board of Education](#)', no date

¹³⁴ Barnabas Aid, '[Barnabas completes 11th new school building for...](#)', 31 October 2023

“untouchable” backgrounds.’¹³⁵

- 9.4.8 An August 2021 report on Christians in public sector jobs in Punjab province, published by the Pakistan Partnership Initiative, a faith-based NGO, noted:

‘The literacy rate of Christians in Punjab is low. Through discussions with various stakeholders, it was revealed that literacy rate of Christians in urban areas of the Punjab are higher than those living in rural areas. Christians are denied equal opportunity in education. Only 2% Christian students complete higher education. Christian students face religious discrimination when applying to university or any educational institutes. Most Christian children must work instead of going to school, thus continuing the cycle of illiteracy and poverty, but that the children who do go to school face discrimination.’¹³⁶

- 9.4.9 A report by the Catholic news agency, UCA News, dated June 2022, stated that ‘Christian educationists blame the nationalization of Pakistan’s private schools in 1972 for the low literacy level among the Christian community, weakened church institutions and creating fear among them. Nearly half of church-run schools and colleges are still under the control of provincial governments.’¹³⁷

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9.5 Employment and income

- 9.5.1 The Australian Government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) report on Pakistan, published January 2022, based on ‘DFAT’s on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Pakistan and elsewhere’ and ‘information from government and non-government sources’¹³⁸, noted that ‘Christians are among the most economically vulnerable groups in Pakistan. Many live in slums and are employed as “sweepers” (sanitation workers), household servants or bonded labourers in brick kilns... Job advertisements, including those for municipal and other government agencies, often specify sanitation work can only be done by Christians or other “non-Muslims”.’¹³⁹

- 9.5.2 The USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that ‘Christian religious freedom activists continued to report widespread discrimination against Christians in private employment. They said Christians continued to have difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor, with some advertisements for menial jobs specifying they were open only to Christian applicants.’¹⁴⁰

- 9.5.3 A fact-finding report by the NCHR on discrimination against minorities, published in May 2022, noted that:

‘In 2009, the Government of Pakistan released a notification instructing all government offices, both federal and provincial, to reserve 5% of all government positions from BPS-01 to BPS-22 [Basic Pay Scales, with one being the lowest and 22 the highest¹⁴¹] for religious minorities. This was

¹³⁵ Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 37), December 2022

¹³⁶ PPI, ‘[State of Public Sector Jobs for Minorities in Punjab...](#)’ (page 12), August 2021

¹³⁷ UCA News, ‘[Pakistan’s Christian institutes battle corruption, nepotism](#)’, 28 June 2022

¹³⁸ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 1.4), January 2022

¹³⁹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.46), January 2022

¹⁴⁰ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section III), 15 May 2023

¹⁴¹ Tax.Net, ‘[Revised Pay Scales 2022-23 | Budget 2022-23 Pakistan Salary Increase](#)’, 4 July 2022

progressive step towards ensuring minority participation at every level of the government. However, evidence shows that nearly half of the minority posts under the quota lie vacant. Even within the posts that are filled, 80% of Non-Muslim minorities are employed in low paid work from BPS 01-BPS 04.¹⁴²

- 9.5.4 A study undertaken in 2019 by PPI on issues faced by Christian youth, based on data obtained from 474 males and females from across the country aged between 15 and 29¹⁴³, considered that ‘... Christians, are inextricably stuck at the lower rungs of the ladder; mostly working as sanitary workers, domestic helpers, farm workers, factory employees or inter alia – living in a vicious cycle daunted by poverty that is economic and social in nature.’¹⁴⁴ The study found that ‘The majority of the youth belong to poor families, living on a total household income ranging between (PKR) Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 30,000 [around £28 to £85 as at 17 January 2023¹⁴⁵] per month.’¹⁴⁶ According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), the average monthly wage per person was Rs. 24,028 [approx. £68¹⁴⁷] (2020-2021)¹⁴⁸.
- 9.5.5 The NCHR found that Christians were disproportionately represented in sanitation work, government jobs that were frequently advertised for non-Muslims only¹⁴⁹.
- 9.5.6 The 2021 PPI report on public sector jobs for minorities noted that:
‘Discussions with stakeholders revealed that Christians are subject to employment discrimination and work primarily in menial occupations. Christians are often “herded into low menial tasks” partly due to the high rates of illiteracy and poverty among Christians, and also because of societal attitudes that consider Christians to be “unclean”. Discussions indicate that Christians typically work as street sweepers and sewer cleaners. In whole country 90 percent of sewer workers are Christians. Further, some job advertisements for cleaning jobs specify that the jobs are for Christians only, indicate that Christian cleaners are indefinitely employed as “temporary” workers with contracts that expire and are renewed every year. Because they are not considered permanent workers, they have no access to benefits, pensions, sick leave, and vacation time, even if they hold the same job over a period of decades. Christian girls often work as maids or nurses and are at risk of sexual assault in these jobs.’¹⁵⁰
- 9.5.7 According to a 2021 report by Catholic news agency, UCA News, ‘An estimated 60-70 percent of nurses in Pakistan belong to the Christian community. Pakistan has more than 160 registered nursing institutions where most students belong to the Christian community.’¹⁵¹
- 9.5.8 Following discussions with stakeholders, the 2021 PPI report found that

¹⁴² NCHR, ‘[Unequal Citizens... NCHR Fact Finding Report](#)’ (page 4), May 2022

¹⁴³ PPI, ‘[Challenges of Christian Youth in Pakistan – People’s Perspective](#)’ (page 12 to 13), no date

¹⁴⁴ PPI, ‘[Challenges of Christian Youth in Pakistan – People’s Perspective](#)’ (page 8), no date

¹⁴⁵ Xe.com, ‘[10,000 PKR to GBP](#)’, ‘[30,000 PKR to GBP](#)’, 17 January 2024

¹⁴⁶ PPI, ‘[Challenges of Christian Youth in Pakistan – People’s Perspective](#)’ (page 9, 17), no date

¹⁴⁷ Xe.com, ‘[24,028 PKR to GBP - Pakistani Rupees to British Pounds](#)’, 17 January 2024

¹⁴⁸ PBS, ‘[Labour Force Survey 2020-21 \(Annual Report\)](#)’ (page 43), March 2022

¹⁴⁹ NCHR, ‘[Unequal Citizens... NCHR Fact Finding Report](#)’ (pages 1, 4, 5), May 2022

¹⁵⁰ PPI, ‘[State of Public Sector Jobs for Minorities in Punjab...](#)’ (page 11), August 2021

¹⁵¹ UCA News, ‘[The challenges of Christian nurses in Pakistan](#)’, 21 June 2021

around 60% of Christians were unemployed (compared to around 6.3% of the general labour force¹⁵²). Of those employed, about 10% worked in the public sector and 80% worked in the private sector. The report explored the nature of jobs and found that Christians in the private sector were employed in health, education and sanitation, whilst in the public sector most worked in sanitation. The same source also noted that the majority of Christians in Punjab were daily wage earners and that in rural areas they were disproportionately victims of bonded labour in agriculture and the brick kiln industry¹⁵³.

9.5.9 Referring to Christians that ran their own businesses, which included beauty salons, clothing, fruit and vegetable shops, the 2021 PPI report commented that the majority of Christian businesses were established in their own communities ‘... due to various reasons including fear of losing their business and sense of discrimination.’¹⁵⁴

9.5.10 Also referring to Christians in business, the Open Doors WWL 2023 stated: ‘A country expert describes the general attitude towards Christians when doing business: “Christians are discriminated against as any money paid to Christians is seen as money not given to the ‘Umma’ [Muslim community]. Therefore the financial/business success of Christians continues to remain elusive and the Christian community alone is too small to sustain businesses.” Another expert provides a drastic example for this mindset: “Government contracts are never been given [sic] to Christians. Christians are also totally excluded from food businesses as Muslims will not buy meat sold by Christians. In my locality one Christian man started a Chicken Meat Shop, Muslims asked to stop the shop immediately because the meat sold by Christians is ‘haram’ (unclean to eat) for them. When he refused they attacked and killed him.”’¹⁵⁵

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9.6 Healthcare

9.6.1 Reports indicated there were over 50 Christian missionary hospitals in Pakistan, offering healthcare to the underprivileged at lower costs, although resources were stretched as the hospitals often relied on donations^{156 157}. According to Arab News, reporting in December 2019, ‘The missionary hospitals are located in different cities of the country, including Peshawar, Abbottabad, Chitral, Lahore, Sahiwal, Quetta, and Karachi.’¹⁵⁸

9.6.2 The Open Doors WWL 2023 stated in regard to access to healthcare that: ‘Many hospitals, pharmacies and other facilities have welfare schemes, which are being increasingly denied to Christians. Christians are also often told to pay exorbitant fees for health care or take out loans. Such costs are unpayable and hence block access to medical treatment. In government

¹⁵² ILOSTAT, ‘[Country profiles Pakistan unemployment rate %](#)’, 2021

¹⁵³ PPI, ‘[State of Public Sector Jobs for Minorities in Punjab...](#)’ (pages 11 to 12), August 2021

¹⁵⁴ PPI, ‘[State of Public Sector Jobs for Minorities in Punjab...](#)’ (page 12), August 2021

¹⁵⁵ Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 40), December 2022

¹⁵⁶ Arab News, ‘[Pakistan's missionary hospitals look for donors to expand...](#)’, 15 December 2019

¹⁵⁷ UCA News, ‘[Pakistan's Christian institutes battle corruption, nepotism](#)’, 28 June 2022

¹⁵⁸ Arab News, ‘[Pakistan's missionary hospitals look for donors to expand...](#)’, 15 December 2019

hospitals, Christians are not allowed to have access to the free medicines which have been supplied through Zakat funding (Islamic donations). As Christians do not pay Zakat, they do not benefit from a “[health card](#)” introduced in 2021 supplying government credit for treatment at hospitals (The Telegraph, 21 October 2021)...¹⁵⁹

- 9.6.3 It should be noted that the article by [The Telegraph](#), cited in the Open Doors WWL 2023, reported on the roll-out of the Sehat health card, a Pakistan government funded health insurance scheme, but it did not indicate that the scheme was linked to the payment of Zakat¹⁶⁰. Instead, the Sehat Sahulat Program (SSP) was reported to be eligible to all permanent residents of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and District Tharparker, Sindh, who are holders of a Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC) and require inpatient treatment^{161 162 163}.
- 9.6.4 According to the Open Doors WWL 2023 ‘Patients in hospitals frequently do not like to share wards with Christians, so Christians must often wait in hallways and corridors. Hospitals run by Christian associations do not benefit from Zakat and are slowly squeezed out of funds.’¹⁶⁴
- 9.6.5 For further information on the general availability of healthcare see the [Country Information Note on Pakistan: Medical and healthcare provisions](#).

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Section updated: 19 March 2024

10. State treatment and attitudes

10.1 Protecting and supporting minority rights

- 10.1.1 In May 2020, the government established the [National Commission for Minorities](#) (NCM), as per a 2014 [Supreme Court ruling](#) ordering the government to take steps to ensure and protect minority rights^{165 166}. However, the USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that ‘Religious freedom activists and civil society groups continued to raise concerns regarding the limited powers of the National Commission for Minorities...’ and that the ‘... commission continued to function without legislative authority and without power to resolve problems.’¹⁶⁷
- 10.1.2 The NCM completed its tenure on 10 May 2023¹⁶⁸, following which the National Assembly (NA) passed the National Commission for Minorities Bill in August 2023, which aimed to safeguard minority rights, though this was criticised by rights’ and civil society groups for not including their recommendations and for ignoring the directives of the 2014 Supreme Court

¹⁵⁹ Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 40), December 2022

¹⁶⁰ The Telegraph, ‘[Pakistan’s “miraculous” new health card scheme provides...](#)’, 21 October 2021

¹⁶¹ SSP, ‘[FAQ – Who are included in SSP](#)’, no date.

¹⁶² SSP, ‘[About the program – Treatment packages](#)’, no date

¹⁶³ The Lancet, ‘[Sehat sahlut: A social health justice policy leaving no one behind](#)’, 18 October 2022

¹⁶⁴ Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 40), December 2022

¹⁶⁵ USCIRF, ‘[USCIRF Welcomes Establishment of Pakistan’s National Commission...](#)’, 8 May 2020

¹⁶⁶ MRGI, ‘[Beyond Commissions: Institutionalizing Minority Rights In Pakistan](#)’, 2 June 2020

¹⁶⁷ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

¹⁶⁸ MORA, ‘[National Commission for Minorities](#)’, no date

ruling^{169 170 171}. The bill was not presented before the Senate prior to the NA's dissolution (due to forthcoming elections) and therefore it lapsed.¹⁷²¹⁷³ On 12 March 2024 civil society organisations (CSOs) formed a working group to draft a new bill and pledged to work with the government to introduce the bill in parliament¹⁷⁴. In sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)), no further information on the progress by the government on the NCM bill could be found.

- 10.1.3 The USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that the NCM sat under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (MORA), which minority religious leaders claimed was '... dominated by conservative clerics who had manifested biases against minorities in past public statements and actions, and that it was primarily concerned with regulating and facilitating the annual Hajj to Mecca.'¹⁷⁵
- 10.1.4 However, on a positive note, the USSD IRF Report 2022 stated that the MORA had a budget which '... covers assistance to indigent minorities, repair of minority places of worship, establishment of minority-run small development projects, celebration of minority religious festivals, and provision of scholarships for religious minority students.'¹⁷⁶ The MORA's [Minorities Welfare Fund](#) allocated a total of Rs. 60 million (around £170,500¹⁷⁷) for small development schemes and financial assistance to individuals, and an additional Rs. 45 million (approximately £128,000¹⁷⁸) scholarship fund¹⁷⁹.
- 10.1.5 According to the GoP, in its report on the UNCERD:
'The Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR) is... undertaking a comprehensive training of all lower judiciary in Balochistan. By the end of 2020, some 175 judges and 150 members of the prosecution have been trained on Human rights and International Treaty obligations, including ICERD. Similar trainings have been conducted in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Government of Punjab has initiated a program to sensitize trainers involved in training of public officials on issues of religious rights and freedoms. Interfaith harmony seminars are being arranged in Punjab and other provinces to raise awareness regarding religious rights and freedom.'¹⁸⁰
- 10.1.6 APP reported on 11 August 2023 (National Minority Day) that Dr Shoaib Suddle, chair of the One-Man Commission on Minorities Rights [established in January 2019 by the Supreme Court to help implement its 2014 ruling¹⁸¹], said at an event organised by the National Police Bureau in Islamabad and

¹⁶⁹ Express Tribune, '[Fault-lines in the Minorities Commission Bill](#)', 25 August 2023

¹⁷⁰ Eurasia Review, '[Uncertain Future Of Pakistan's Minority Rights Commission](#)', 18 August 2023

¹⁷¹ Friday Times, '[National Commission For Minorities: An Attempt For...](#)', 24 August 2023

¹⁷² Senate of Pakistan, '[Government Bills: Bills transmitted by the National Assembly](#)', no date

¹⁷³ Eurasia Review, '[Uncertain Future Of Pakistan's Minority Rights Commission](#)', 18 August 2023

¹⁷⁴ The White Post, '[Working Group Formed](#)', 12 March 2024

¹⁷⁵ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (section II), 15 May 2023

¹⁷⁶ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (section II), 15 May 2023

¹⁷⁷ Xe.com, '[60,000,000 PKR to GBP - Pakistani Rupees to British Pounds](#)', 29 January 2024

¹⁷⁸ Xe.com, '[45,000,000 PKR to GBP - Pakistani Rupees to British Pounds](#)', 29 January 2024

¹⁷⁹ MORA, '[Minorities Welfare Fund](#)', no date

¹⁸⁰ UNCERD, '[Combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic...](#)' (paragraph 5), 10 February 2022

¹⁸¹ APPG FoRB, '[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)' (page 13), September 2019

attended by officials of the Police Force, Civil Society Organisations and representatives from religious minority communities, that the Commission had made progress on minority rights ‘... in terms of recovery of communal property, removal of hate material from textbooks, and implementation of a five per cent minority job quota. He however stressed that policing could be further made responsive to the issues of religious minorities.’¹⁸² At the same event, the Director General of the National Police Bureau stated that ‘... the criminal justice system in Pakistan should be responsive to play a very instrumental role in the protection of the rights of minorities. While policing issues of minorities, the officers must consider other social facts that enhance the marginality of the minorities.’¹⁸³

- 10.1.7 At another event on 20 August 2023, Dawn news reported that Dr Suddle blamed bureaucracy for the lack of implementation of the 2014 Supreme Court ruling on minority rights and expressed his ‘... “pessimism” about any change in the situation for the minorities without changing the national mindset and society’s attitude.’¹⁸⁴
- 10.1.8 In an open letter to the Prime Minister in the wake of an attack in August 2023 against the Christian community in Jaranwala, Faisalabad, Pakistan’s National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) said ‘Despite the establishment of a comprehensive legal and constitutional framework for promotion and protection of human rights, such acts of violence against religious minorities pose serious questions regarding implementation and role of duty bearers.’¹⁸⁵
- 10.1.9 In his Christmas message on 25 December 2023, caretaker Federal Minister for Human Rights, Khalil George, said that the Christian community, alongside all minorities, ‘... enjoyed complete religious freedom in Pakistan.’¹⁸⁶

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10.2 Discrimination and mistreatment

10.2.1 The USSD IRF Report 2022 stated that:

‘Members of religious minority communities continued to say that the Ministries of Law and Justice, Interior, and Human Rights inconsistently applied laws safeguarding minority rights and enforcing the protections of religious minorities. Religious minority community members also stated the government was inconsistent in safeguarding against societal discrimination and neglect, and that official discrimination against Christians... persisted to varying degrees.’¹⁸⁷

10.2.2 The same report noted that:

‘In August [2022], the Ministry of the Interior ordered the Punjab provincial government to take action against the Center for Social Justice (CSJ), an

¹⁸² APP, ‘[Police must protect Constitutional rights of minorities: Dr Shoaib Suddle](#)’, 11 August 2023

¹⁸³ APP, ‘[Police must protect Constitutional rights of minorities: Dr Shoaib Suddle](#)’, 11 August 2023

¹⁸⁴ Dawn, ‘[Speakers deplore plight of minorities in Pakistan](#)’, 20 August 2023

¹⁸⁵ NCHR, ‘[Jaranwala: Incident Report](#)’ (page 6), October 2023

¹⁸⁶ APP, ‘[Christmas bring people closer for ending their differences: Khalil...](#)’, 25 December 2023

¹⁸⁷ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

NGO, for a report it and other NGOs submitted to the UN Human Rights Council that described incidents of forced conversion of Christians and misuse of the country's laws against blasphemy in violation of international human rights obligations and the country's own laws. The government considered the NGO report "anti-government propaganda," according to the media...¹⁸⁸

'On December 16, CSJ filed a restraining order with the Lahore High Court against the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and the Punjab Provincial Department of Industries, Commerce, and Investment for harassment and threatening to cancel CSJ's NGO registration on "spurious, unfounded and vague grounds without any lawful justification." At the end of the year, the court had restrained the Punjab authorities from taking any action against CSJ while the litigation was ongoing.'¹⁸⁹

10.2.3 According to the Jubilee Campaign, in its November 2022 report on forced faith conversion, '... all citizens in Pakistan face obstacles in access to justice, [but] minority religious groups face even greater difficulties in the pursuit of justice.'¹⁹⁰ Also reporting on forced conversion, Pakistan's National Commission on the Rights of the Child (NCRC) stated in a December 2021 report that 'Widespread biases against minorities exist amongst the officials of law enforcement agencies including Police... These biases stem from the general intolerance and hatred spread in the communities against minorities, which in turn affects the mindsets of people and succeeds in distancing the minorities.'¹⁹¹

10.2.4 The NCRC report noted in regard to the attitude of the judiciary that: 'The general atmosphere of intolerance and inequality towards religious minorities penetrates into all segment[s] of society and members of judiciary too in some cases are overridden by ideological convictions rather than dictates of law. Like the police, there may be certain biases within the members of judiciary based on personal and religious beliefs that can cause hindrances in the dispensation of justice. Further, the judiciary may come under immense [sic] direct and indirect pressure from; inter alia, religious extremists, which may result in the interpretation and application of laws selectively and unequally.'¹⁹²

10.2.5 Reporting on government practices, the USSD IRF Report 2022 stated that: 'According to media reports, police at times killed, physically abused, or failed to protect members of religious minorities. In one case, on September 17 [2022], Bashir Masih, a Christian bus driver, was arrested by police in Zafarwali village and taken to the police station in Sambrial, Punjab, on charges of theft. Media reported that his former employer accused Masih of stealing a vehicle. Several hours later, his body was left in the nearby Sambrial hospital, listed as having no next-of-kin, despite multiple visits by his wife, Rozeena Bibi, to the police station earlier that day to inquire after his whereabouts and well-being. On September 18, after local residents

¹⁸⁸ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (Executive summary), 15 May 2023

¹⁸⁹ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (section II), 15 May 2023

¹⁹⁰ Jubilee Campaign, '[Conversion without Consent...](#)' (page 17), November 2022

¹⁹¹ NCRC, '[Policy Brief on forced conversion with recommendations...](#)' (page 11), December 2021

¹⁹² NCRC, '[Policy Brief on forced conversion with recommendations...](#)' (page 13), December 2021

protested and district police officer Faisal Kamran intervened, Rozeena Bibi was allowed to file a police complaint. Assistant Sub-Inspector Ghulam Murtaza and Constable Azmat Ali were later arrested for killing Masih.¹⁹³

10.2.6 According to the UK-based charity, British Asian Christian Association (BACA), Bashir Masih was the 10th incident of a Christian being killed whilst in police custody since 2009¹⁹⁴.

10.2.7 The USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that:

‘Members of religious minorities, particularly lower-caste Hindus and Christians, reported cases of forceful evictions from their homes and villages by government officials assisting individuals desiring their land. In February, local Christians from the Korangi District in Karachi protested in front of the Karachi Press Club against the local “land mafias” who they said came to their homes with false property deeds and police escorts to forcibly expel them. The Korangi Christian residents reported being beaten and threatened with violence, including rape, if they did not leave their homes.’¹⁹⁵

10.2.8 In October 2022, 115 houses of Christian slum dwellers in Islamabad were demolished by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) and possessions stolen by demolition workers, whilst houses belonging to Muslims were untouched, according to the BACA¹⁹⁶. The CDA returned on 8 January 2023 to complete the job, destroying makeshift homes and tents in the process. The BACA noted that a community leader sought police assistance after Christians protested at the desecration of their bibles. Senior police officers noted the communities concerns and arranged for the resident’s possessions to be retrieved from the CDA the following day¹⁹⁷. BACA stated that according to federal law, demolitions should not take place unless alternative housing was provided¹⁹⁸.

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10.3 Application of blasphemy laws

10.3.1 The USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that ‘The courts continued to enforce blasphemy laws, punishment for which ranged up to the death penalty, although the government has never executed anyone for blasphemy.’¹⁹⁹ The same source added ‘The government may use the antiterrorism courts, established as a parallel legal structure under antiterrorism legislation, to try cases involving violent crimes, terrorist activities, and acts or speech deemed by the government to foment religious hatred, including blasphemy.’²⁰⁰

10.3.2 According to the USSD IRF Report 2022, ‘... the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony is responsible for reviewing internet traffic and reporting blasphemous or offensive content to the Pakistan

¹⁹³ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

¹⁹⁴ BACA, ‘[Tenth Christian killed in police custody since 2009...](#)’, 20 September 2022

¹⁹⁵ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

¹⁹⁶ BACA, ‘[Christian slums destroyed by Pak-Government leaving hundreds...](#)’, 30 November 2022

¹⁹⁷ BACA, ‘[Despite international outrage, Pak-Authorities return to Islamabad...](#)’, 13 January 2023

¹⁹⁸ BACA, ‘[Christian slums destroyed by Pak-Government leaving hundreds...](#)’, 30 November 2022

¹⁹⁹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (Executive summary), 15 May 2023

²⁰⁰ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

Telecommunications Authority [PTA] for possible removal or to FIA [Federal Investigation Agency] for possible criminal prosecution.’²⁰¹ The PTA noted in its Annual Report 2022 that it had a dedicated unit that monitored unlawful online content²⁰².

10.3.3 The government warned against online publishing of, or how to report what might be deemed blasphemous content through periodic notices issued by the PTA^{203 204 205}. The USSD IRF Report 2022 stated ‘During the year, in a new video, the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) urged parents to monitor the online activity of their children to ensure they did not post potentially blasphemous content. The PTA stated the video was only a public service announcement, and that it would leave action against violators to law enforcement.’²⁰⁶

10.3.4 In its report on the UNCERD, the GoP commented that ‘Statistical data reveals that most of the cases under this [blasphemy] law are registered against Muslims.’²⁰⁷ However, the CSJ argued that data indicated that the blasphemy laws ‘continued to be applied disproportionately to religious minorities.’²⁰⁸

10.3.5 The USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that:

‘As reported by Catholic media in May, then UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Ahmed Shaheed said the country’s blasphemy law was a particularly grave violation of human rights and religious freedom. “That blasphemy law is creating havoc in Pakistan,” he said. “It’s costing lives” and it works “to undermine religious freedom.” He also stated, “The mere existence of the law has emboldened extremists...and resulted in a breakdown of law and order” in the country.’²⁰⁹

10.3.6 The CSJ report, published in March 2024, which used data based on ‘credible media sources... verified by CSJ’²¹⁰, found that between 1987 and 2023, at least 2,449 persons were accused of committing blasphemy, 291 (12%) of whom were Christian²¹¹. The CSJ recorded 792 blasphemy accusations from 2020 to 2023, 33 (4%) of which were against Christians²¹². The CSJ did not indicate whether those accused of blasphemy were formally charged and/or convicted under the blasphemy laws.

	Blasphemy accusations 2020 to 2023				
Religion	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Muslim	155	45	88	247	535
Ahmadi	39	25	75	65	184

²⁰¹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

²⁰² PTA, ‘[Annual Report 2022](#)’ (page 47), January 2023

²⁰³ PTA, ‘[Annual Report 2022](#)’ (page 47), January 2023

²⁰⁴ PTA, ‘[Alert - Attention Social Media / Internet Users](#)’, 29 November 2023

²⁰⁵ PTA, ‘[Public Notice For Social Media/Internet Users](#)’, 22 September 2022

²⁰⁶ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

²⁰⁷ UNCERD, ‘[Combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic...](#)’ (paragraph 62), 10 February 2022

²⁰⁸ CSJ, ‘[Human Rights Observer 2023](#)’ (page 7), March 2023

²⁰⁹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

²¹⁰ CSJ, ‘[Human Rights Observer 2024](#)’ (page 6, footnote 14) March 2024

²¹¹ CSJ, ‘[Human Rights Observer 2024](#)’ (page 31) March 2024

²¹² CSJ, ‘[Human Rights Observer 2024](#)’ (page 31) March 2024

Christian	11	7	4	11	33
Hindu	2	7	2	1	12
Unknown	1	0	2	5	8
Total	208	84	171	329	

Source data: CSJ Human Rights Observer 2024²¹³

- 10.3.7 The CSJ noted that most blasphemy accusations overall occurred in Punjab (the most populous province in Pakistan²¹⁴), with 534 accusations between 2020 and 2023²¹⁵. The CSJ did not break down the provincial data by religion.
- 10.3.8 The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), an independent human rights organisation²¹⁶, noted in its human rights report covering 2022 that police registered 35 blasphemy cases across Pakistan in that year, but did not cite the religion of the accused²¹⁷.
- 10.3.9 In September 2023, the HRCP conducted a fact-finding mission (FFM) to Sargodha district, Punjab province, after receiving reports of a series of First Information Reports (FIRs) filed against members of the Christian community in Maryam Town and surrounding villages between July and August 2023. At least 5 FIRs were issued to individuals or groups of individuals on separate occasions following allegations of blasphemy²¹⁸. Police officials explained to the HRCP that ‘... in cases of a religious nature, their primary approach was to seek amicable resolution through mediation, and lodging FIRs as their last option.’²¹⁹ Officials from the local administration suggested to the HRCP that ‘... lodging FIRs in such cases are, in fact, a means to pacify the situation and control extremist factions.’²²⁰ According to 2 members of the Christian community, due process was not followed when filing the FIRs²²¹.
- 10.3.10 The USSD IRF Report 2022 cited the arrest of Fansan Shahid, a Christian, accused of blasphemy in March 2022, who was allegedly beaten by police into confessing (see also [Discrimination and mistreatment](#))²²². The report added that ‘Bishop Azad Marshall of the Church of Pakistan condemned Shahid’s arrest and the government’s failure to combat false allegations of blasphemy, stating, “The government’s failure to curb the misuse of the blasphemy laws is emboldening false accusers.”’²²³

See also [Blasphemy allegations and attacks against Christians](#)

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10.4 Blasphemy-related convictions and acquittals

- 10.4.1 The GoP report on the ICCPR, dated December 2022, stated that:

²¹³ CSJ, ‘[Human Rights Observer 2024](#)’, (page 31) March 2024

²¹⁴ PBS, ‘[Announcement of Results of 7th Population and Housing Census-2023...](#)’, 5 August 2023

²¹⁵ CSJ, ‘[Human Rights Observer 2024](#)’, (page 31) March 2024

²¹⁶ HRCP, ‘[About us](#)’, no date

²¹⁷ HRCP, ‘[State of Human Rights in 2022](#)’ (page 22), 2023

²¹⁸ HRCP, ‘[Mob violence and the social ostracisation of the...](#)’ (pages 1 to 2), September 2023

²¹⁹ HRCP, ‘[Mob violence and the social ostracisation of the...](#)’ (page 3), September 2023

²²⁰ HRCP, ‘[Mob violence and the social ostracisation of the...](#)’ (page 3), September 2023

²²¹ HRCP, ‘[Mob violence and the social ostracisation of the...](#)’ (page 4), September 2023

²²² USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (Executive summary), 15 May 2023

²²³ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (Executive summary), 15 May 2023

‘Just like any other offender, a person accused of violation of Blasphemy Law undergoes a trial before the Court of law. There is also an effective process of appeal in case of conviction under the Blasphemy Law. If any accused is convicted and awarded capital punishment by Court of Sessions, the same is required to be confirmed by two judges of the High Court otherwise it cannot be implemented. After the decision of the High Court, the convict has the remedy to appeal to the Supreme Court of Pakistan. If the apex Court upholds the verdict of the High Court, a mercy petition can be submitted to the President of Pakistan who under Article 45 of the Constitution can grant pardon, reprieve and remit the sentence.’²²⁴

10.4.2 The January 2022 DFAT report noted that:

‘The conviction rate for blasphemy in the lower courts is high, and judges are often under enormous public pressure to deliver a guilty verdict. A Pakistani legal expert told DFAT most blasphemy convictions were overturned by the higher courts, but an accused blasphemer was likely to spend years in prison even if the accusation was eventually found to be baseless. Judges and defence lawyers are often reluctant to take on blasphemy cases due to the personal security risks involved, resulting in appeals being delayed until a new bench is constituted.’²²⁵

10.4.3 According to the USSD IRF Report 2022:

‘NGOs, legal observers, and religious minority representatives continued to raise concerns regarding the failure of lower courts to adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases. They also raised concerns about the slow pace of adjudicating these cases, including cyber cases, which led to some suspects remaining in detention for years as they waited for their initial trial or appeals, and some convicted persons spending years in prison before higher courts overturned their convictions and freed them for lack of evidence. According to legal advocacy groups, some lower courts continued to conduct proceedings with spectators from groups supportive of harsh punishment for blasphemy, such as the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) party, who often threatened the defendants’ attorneys, family members, and supporters. At other times, advocacy groups reported that for security reasons, blasphemy trials were held inside jails, resulting in a loss of transparency. Legal observers also reported judges and magistrates often delayed or continued trials indefinitely to avoid confrontation with, or threats or violence from, the groups provoking protests. In some cases, judges and court staff delayed trials in the hopes of having the case transferred to another judge. Police, prosecutors, and defense attorneys were similarly reluctant to appear in blasphemy cases, which further delayed investigations and trials, according to legal observers.’²²⁶

10.4.4 According to Al Jazeera, reporting in August 2023, ‘most convictions [for blasphemy] are thrown out on appeal by higher courts...’²²⁷ The US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent,

²²⁴ ICCPR, ‘[Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan...](#)’ (paragraph 99), 7 December 2022

²²⁵ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.35), January 2022

²²⁶ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (Executive summary), 15 May 2023

²²⁷ Al Jazeera, ‘[Pakistan’s blasphemy law: All you need to know](#)’, 18 August 2023

bipartisan US federal government agency²²⁸, cited the dismissal of a blasphemy case against a Christian women in 2023, but suggested that such acquittals were 'rare'²²⁹.

10.4.5 The USSD IRF Report 2022 stated that:

'According to civil society reports, at least four individuals charged with blasphemy during previous years received death sentences in 2022, two Christians and two Muslims. In one of those cases, a judge converted a life sentence for blasphemy to a death sentence. In other cases, courts overturned some blasphemy convictions upon appeal and acquitted or granted bail to individuals who had spent years in prison on blasphemy charges.'²³⁰

10.4.6 At a meeting of the Pakistan's Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights held on 13 October 2023, the NCHR said that there were 179 people held under trial on blasphemy charges in prisons across the country, and that an additional 17 had been convicted²³¹. However, according to the Prison Department of Punjab, in Punjab alone there were 552 prisoners incarcerated under the offense of blasphemy (Articles 295 A, B and C) as of 13 December 2023, 485 of whom (including 5 juveniles) were 'under trial.'²³² Prisoner data was not broken down by religion.

10.4.7 Christians charged with or convicted of blasphemy who have been acquitted or granted bail in recent years include (this list is not exhaustive):

- June 2021 – Amnesty International reported that a Christian couple were acquitted by the Lahore High Court after being sentenced to death in 2014 for sending blasphemous texts²³³
- September 2021 – USCIRF reported that 2 Catholic nurses were released on bail following their arrest and detention for 'desecrating the Quran' whilst at work in April 2021^{234 235}
- October 2021 – USCIRF reported on the acquittal of Sajjad Masih Gill, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in July 2013, then resented to death in March 2021. He was released in November 2021²³⁶
- January 2022 – USCIRF reported that the Supreme Court granted bail to Nadeem Samson who was arrested and detained in November 2017 for allegedly posting blasphemous content on Facebook²³⁷
- July 2022 – USCIRF noted that Danish Ali, detained for blasphemy on an unspecified date, was acquitted and later released²³⁸

²²⁸ USCIRF, '[What is USCIRF](#)', no date.

²²⁹ USCIRF, '[Issue Update: Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious...](#)', December 2023

²³⁰ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (Executive summary), 15 May 2023

²³¹ Senate of Pakistan, '[Event Title: Senator Walid Iqbal, Chairman Senate...](#)', 13 October 2023

²³² Punjab Prisons, '[Crime Wise Population](#)', 13 December 2023

²³³ Amnesty International, '[Pakistan: Acquittal of couple on death row for sending...](#)', 3 June 2021

²³⁴ USCIRF, '[Mariyum Lal](#)', no date

²³⁵ USCIRF, '[Newsh Arooj](#)', no date

²³⁶ USCIRF, '[Sajjad Masih Gill](#)', no date

²³⁷ USCIRF, '[Nadeem Samson](#)', no date

²³⁸ USCIRF, '[Danish Ali](#)', no date

- August 2022 – USCIRF reported that Patras Masih who was detained for posting a perceived blasphemous image on Facebook in February 2018, was granted bail by the Supreme Court²³⁹
- October 2022 – Sheraz Ahmed Khan, detained since 2013 and under trial since 2014, was acquitted by the trial court in Lahore²⁴⁰
- March 2023 – USCIRF cited the acquittal and release of Humayun Faisal, accused of burning newspapers containing Quranic texts in May 2015²⁴¹
- December 2023 – Christian Solidarity International (CSI) reported that a Christian woman and her Muslim co-worker, who spent 23 days in prison after their arrest in April 2023 for (unintentionally) burning pages of the Quran, were acquitted of blasphemy on 8 December 2023²⁴²

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10.5 Response to the misuse of blasphemy laws

- 10.5.1 According to various sources, including the British High Commission, Islamabad, USCIRF and Pakistan's Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights, false accusations of blasphemy are used against people of all faiths to settle personal disputes, or to try and take land or businesses^{243 244 245}.
- 10.5.2 The GoP stated in its reports on the implementation of the UNCERD and ICCPR that 'The State is fully committed to prevent misuse or abuse of the blasphemy law' and that 'Independent judiciary, free media and vibrant civil society provide additional safeguards against misuse of the blasphemy law.'^{246 247} However, in May 2022 critics accused the government (then under Shehbaz Sharif) of weaponizing the blasphemy law against political rivals after former prime minister, Imran Khan, was charged under the law²⁴⁸.
- 10.5.3 In February 2022, the Express Tribune reported that the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) (a constitutional body that advises the government whether a law is contrary to Islam²⁴⁹), declared that '... violence against a person on allegations of blasphemy was contrary to Shariah, constitution and humanity.'²⁵⁰
- 10.5.4 In its report on the ICCPR, the GoP commented on the measures in place to protect against misuse of the blasphemy law:
- 'Various legislative, policy and administrative measures have been taken to check the misuse of blasphemy law. In pursuance of such aims, the Ministry of Interior has, with the approval of the Federal Cabinet, made amendments

²³⁹ USCIRF, '[Patras Masih](#)', no date

²⁴⁰ CLAAS, '[Blasphemy accused acquitted by the lower court](#)', October 2022

²⁴¹ USCIRF, '[Humayun Faisal](#)', no date

²⁴² CSI, '[Pakistan: Christian widow and Muslim colleague cleared of...](#)', 13 December 2023

²⁴³ APPG FoRB, '[Pakistan Report 2023](#)' (page 12), November 2023

²⁴⁴ USCIRF, '[Issue Update: Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious...](#)', December 2023

²⁴⁵ Senate of Pakistan, '[Event Title: Senator Walid Iqbal, Chairman Senate...](#)', 13 October 2023

²⁴⁶ UNCERD, '[Combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic...](#)' (paragraph 62), 10 February 2022

²⁴⁷ ICCPR, '[Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan...](#)' (paragraph 94), 7 December 2022

²⁴⁸ VoA, '[Pakistan's Former PM Khan Faces Disputed Blasphemy Charges](#)', 1 May 2022

²⁴⁹ CII, '[Council Of Islamic Ideology](#)', no date

²⁵⁰ Express Tribune, '[Violence over blasphemy allegations against Islam: CII](#)', 24 February 2022

in the Federal Investigation [Agency] (FIA) schedule wherein any complaint under section 295-A, 295-C, 298 and 298-A of Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) will fall within the purview of the FIA which will have the powers to check misuse of blasphemy cases parallel to the provincial police departments. Additional safeguards have been put in place to prevent the misuse of blasphemy laws through false accusations.

‘To protect the rights of citizens in Pakistan, the procedure has been amended and the preliminary inquiry in blasphemy cases is now carried out by the District Police Officer. Section 211 of PPC states that a person who intentionally initiates a false criminal case or puts false charges on any other person for an offence without any lawful ground shall be punished with imprisonment of 2 years, or fine or both. And he may also be imprisoned for 7 years and fine, if punishment for such falsely charged crime is death, imprisonment for life, or for 7 years or more.’²⁵¹

10.5.5 The USSD IRF Report 2022 stated that:

‘NGOs and legal observers continued to say that the law requiring a senior police official to investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint may be filed contributed to objective investigations and the dismissal of many blasphemy cases. Some NGOs noted, however, that police did not uniformly follow this procedure. In some cases, the court remanded the accused to police custody for 14 days before he or she had been formally charged so that a senior officer might carry out an investigation. In other cases, lower-ranking police filed blasphemy charges without waiting for the required investigation by a senior police official. NGOs and legal observers again stated police rarely filed charges against individuals who made false blasphemy accusations.’²⁵²

10.5.6 Al Jazeera reported in April 2022 that 6 people were sentenced to death after being convicted of the murder of a Sri Lankan Christian factory manager, killed in December 2021 having been accused by co-workers of blasphemy. The Lahore Anti-Terrorism Court also gave life sentences to 9 people, 5 years to one, and 2-year sentences to 72 others²⁵³.

10.5.7 At an August 2022 hearing of a bail petition, brought by a Christian accused of blasphemy in 2021, the Supreme Court (SC) acknowledged that false allegations of blasphemy were often made to settle personal disputes, adding that ‘Offences relating to religion are very serious offences and a section 295-C offence prescribes only the punishment of death. Therefore, utmost care must be exercised by all concerned that no injustice in the administration of justice takes place.’²⁵⁴

10.5.8 Following a previous visit to Pakistan in 2018, a delegation from the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (APPG FoRB), a group of cross-party parliamentarian members, visited Pakistan in February 2023, meeting various stakeholders, including government officials and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to assess the country’s state

²⁵¹ ICCPR, ‘[Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan...](#)’ (paragraphs 96, 97), 7 December 2022

²⁵² USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (Executive summary), 15 May 2023

²⁵³ Al Jazeera, ‘[Pakistan: Six sentenced to death for lynching Sri Lankan national](#)’, 18 April 2022

²⁵⁴ Supreme Court, ‘[Criminal Petition No. 883-L of 2022](#)’ (paragraph 8), 23 August 2022

of FoRB 4 years on²⁵⁵. The subsequent report (APPG FoRB Pakistan Report 2023) noted that:

‘The Federal Minister for Human Rights acknowledged there were issues with the misuse of the [blasphemy] law. These issues were attributed to a “lack of rule of law by provincial governments” and his department was looking at ways to deter false allegations. This included the introduction of more severe penalties for those who abuse the blasphemy laws. This problem was also identified by the Council of Islamic Ideology who sought to resolve allegations by mediation, noting that this approach had prevented 106 cases going to court.’²⁵⁶

10.5.9 The same report added ‘While there was acceptance from government officials of the misuse of blasphemy allegations there was an unwillingness to look at the factors that contributed to this abuse. Instead, the APPG was told that blasphemy allegations and resulting vigilante violence was caused by a variety of factors including that it was a plot by hostile foreign states, a reaction to visiting delegations, or the impact of terrorism.’²⁵⁷

10.5.10 The HRCP, in partnership with the CSJ and the Women’s Action Forum (WAF), conducted a fact-finding mission to Jaranwala in Faisalabad district on 17 August 2023, the day after an attack against the Christian community following rumours and allegations of blasphemy against 2 brothers in Christian Town (also known as Cinema Basti), which resulted in the destruction of dozens of churches and homes²⁵⁸. The report stated that ‘The use of blasphemy allegations to perpetrate mob violence against religious minorities is a recurring phenomenon that has exposed not only the poor capacity of the state to prevent loss of life and property, but also the absence of a sound policy for preventing religiously motivated crimes.’²⁵⁹ The same source noted that the incident was:

‘... widely condemned throughout the country, including by political parties and their leadership, the Christian religious leadership and community as well as by leaders of all religions, civil society, law enforcement officials and the public at large. As soon as news of the attacks on Christians in Jaranwala spread, reactions began to pour in. The chief secretary and inspector general of police, Punjab, arrived by nightfall the same day and took stock of the situation. Both the caretaker prime minister and caretaker chief minister, Punjab, visited Jaranwala to show solidarity with the victim community and promised justice by holding those responsible accountable for these attacks as well as compensation for the victims commensurate with their losses. They have also promised to repair all the churches that were damaged.’²⁶⁰

10.5.11 The NCHR, which initiated an inquiry into the Jaranwala incident, reported that as of 6 October 2023 all churches had been rebuilt or repaired and refurnished, and approximately 80 families had received 2 million rupees

²⁵⁵ APPG FoRB, ‘[Pakistan Report 2023](#)’ (page 6), November 2023

²⁵⁶ APPG FoRB, ‘[Pakistan Report 2023](#)’ (page 12), November 2023

²⁵⁷ APPG FoRB, ‘[Pakistan Report 2023](#)’ (page 13), November 2023

²⁵⁸ HRCP, ‘[Mob-led destruction of churches in Jaranwala, Punjab](#)’ (pages 1 and 2), 25 August 2023

²⁵⁹ HRCP, ‘[Mob-led destruction of churches in Jaranwala, Punjab](#)’ (page 3), 25 August 2023

²⁶⁰ HRCP, ‘[Mob-led destruction of churches in Jaranwala, Punjab](#)’ (page 5), 25 August 2023

(£5,593²⁶¹) in compensation²⁶².

In October 2023, Pakistan's Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights expressed their concern at the 'frequent misuse of blasphemy laws to settle personal scores...'²⁶³ According to Catholic news agency Fides, Senator Walid Iqbal, chair of the Committee, referred to the blasphemy laws and called for the '... formation of a national coordination committee within the human rights ministry to develop standard operating procedures to address issues that cause suffering and unjust "collective punishment" to minority communities.'²⁶⁴

See also [Security for religious minorities](#) and [Attacks against Christians](#)

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10.6 Security and response to violence

10.6.1 The January 2022 DFAT report noted that 'Police provide security for major Christian churches during Christmas and Easter, reducing but not eliminating the risk of violence.'²⁶⁵

10.6.2 The GoP report on the UNCERD noted that Provincial Home Departments provided security on occasions such as Easter, Good Friday and Sunday prayers²⁶⁶, and cited provinces' efforts to secure religious establishments:

- in Punjab, 'All religious festivals and congregational prayers are given protection by the Punjab Police in addition to the private security of the religious institutions'
- in Sindh 'CCTV cameras have been installed in all sensitive places and worship places of minorities'
- in Balochistan, 'The Home and Tribal Affairs Department provides security to the minorities in Balochistan and their religious places especially on occasions including worship days like every Sunday at the Church premises; religious events like... Easter, Christmas etc.; festivals and functions; and on arrival of respective Religious leaders of minorities.'²⁶⁷

10.6.3 The USSD IRF Report 2022 stated that enhanced security for Christian places of worship and other religious minorities was provided by the authorities '... at various times throughout the year, including around religious holidays or in response to specific threats.'²⁶⁸ and added:

'In February [2022], the Sindh Police announced the creation of a new unit, the Special Protection Force for Minorities, with a mandate to protect churches, temples, and gurdwaras across the province. The unit had an authorized strength of 5,000 officers and began hiring 2,800 officers from Karachi. In June, Shoaib Suddle, the single member of the One-Man

²⁶¹ Xe.com, '[2,000,000 PKR to GBP - Pakistani Rupees to British Pounds](#)', 9 January 2024

²⁶² NCHR, '[Jaranwala: Incident Report](#)' (pages 11 to 12), October 2023

²⁶³ Senate of Pakistan, '[Event Title: Senator Walid Iqbal, Chairman Senate...](#)', 13 October 2023

²⁶⁴ Fides, '[Citizens imprisoned for blasphemy and abuse of rights: the Senate...](#)', 19 October 2023

²⁶⁵ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)' (paragraph 3.47), January 2022

²⁶⁶ UNCERD, '[Combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic...](#)' (paragraph 35), 10 February 2022

²⁶⁷ UNCERD, '[Combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic...](#)' (paragraph 38), 10 February 2022

²⁶⁸ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (section II), 15 May 2023

Commission on Minority Rights (constituted by the Supreme Court of Pakistan), reported that Sindh had recruited 1,200 officers for the unit. He also reported that Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were working to raise similar units, but that Balochistan had not yet complied with Suddle's mandate to create such a unit. In April, the Inspector General of Punjab Police announced increased security for Easter celebrations. Provincial police deployed more than 12,000 personnel and security forces to protect churches and processions. Christian and Hindu representatives in Sindh and Balochistan stated the police generally provided adequate security for minority places of worship, especially at major holidays.²⁶⁹

- 10.6.4 The HRCP FFM report was critical of the time it took for the police to fully respond to the attack against the Christian community in Jaranwala on 16 August 2023, noting that:

'Several hours elapsed between the situation escalating and the arrival of police reinforcements. It seems that it took over ten hours from the requisitioning of the Rangers to their arrival. This operational delay gave the mobs enough time to go on a rampage against churches, houses and one cemetery.

'The mission also heard reports that, in some areas, the police stood by and did not take any action against the attackers. While police numbers were certainly low at the start, it is difficult to understand why police personnel chose to stand aside while a mob indulged freely in arson and looting.

'The mission attributes the police's hesitation in taking definitive and deterrent action against religiously motivated crowds – especially mobs led by certain religious political parties – to the ambiguity in state policies and lack of clarity in general instructions given to law enforcement personnel for dealing with such situations.'²⁷⁰

- 10.6.5 News18, a broadcast network partnered with CNN²⁷¹, in its article dated 18 August regarding the attack against the Christian community in Jaranwala on 16 August 2023, noted 'Punjab police claimed to have arrested at least 140 people and registered five cases on Thursday, a day after the violence broke out. On Friday, two prime suspects were arrested who were involved in the unprecedented attacks on churches and nearly three dozen homes of the minority community.'²⁷²
- 10.6.6 The CSJ Human Rights Observer report published in March 2024, covering events of 2023, noted 23 Churches and around 90 houses belonging to Christians were destroyed during the Jaranwala incident²⁷³.
- 10.6.7 After the Jaranwala incident Dawn reported on 19 August 2023 that according to Punjab Inspector General of Police Dr Usman Anwar '... 3,200 churches were guarded by police across Punjab to provide reassurance to the Christian community...' ²⁷⁴ The NCHR noted that a helpline was set up to

²⁶⁹ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (section II), 15 May 2023

²⁷⁰ HRCP, '[Mob-led destruction of churches in Jaranwala, Punjab](#)' (page 4), 25 August 2023

²⁷¹ News18, '[About News18](#)', no date

²⁷² News18, '[How Has the Pakistani Govt responded...?](#)', 18 August 2024

²⁷³ CSJ, '[Human Rights Observer 2024](#)', March 2024

²⁷⁴ Dawn, '[Justice Isa visits Jaranwala to show solidarity with Christian community...](#)', 19 August 2023

report incidents of concern and complaints facing the community²⁷⁵.

- 10.6.8 In November 2023, Punjab's IGP said that full security was provided to Christian places of worship and educational institutions across the province²⁷⁶.

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Section updated: 01 February 2024

11. Societal treatment

11.1 Proselytising, and possessing or displaying Christian material

- 11.1.1 At an August 2022 hearing of a bail petition, brought by a Christian accused of blasphemy in 2021, the Supreme Court (SC) ruled that 'Preaching of Christianity is not a crime nor can it be made into one because of the Fundamental Right "to profess, practice and propagate his religion."' ²⁷⁷

- 11.1.2 However, the Open Doors WWL 2023 noted, in respect of a Christian discussing their faith beyond their immediate family, that:

'Many Christians avoid talking about their faith with Muslims because it can have dangerous consequences. While this is particularly the case for converts, it is true for other Christians as well, especially in the light of the blasphemy laws. Any such discussion could attract a religiously motivated attack against them, their community and their church. A country expert summed it up like this: "It is safe if the extended family and others are Christians, however, for converts from a Muslim or Hindu background it is not safe at all."' ²⁷⁸

- 11.1.3 In regard to the risk of displaying Christian images or symbols, the Open Doors WWL 2023 report noted that:

'Displaying a Christian symbol is a visible trigger and can be a starting-point for the everyday discrimination Christians experience, which in turn can lead to violence. Even just having a Christian name is enough for this to start, as it may hinder moving to a predominantly Muslim neighborhood or starting a business. A country expert explained: "Even how you say 'goodbye' can now identify you as a non-Muslim as most Christians say 'Khuda Hafiz - God protect you', whereas Muslims insist on saying 'Allah Hafiz'. Therefore converts are forced to say 'Allah Hafiz - Allah protect you' to avoid being targeted." Additionally, Christians often face damage to their personal property where they display Christian symbols, e.g. on cars etc. Reports of Christians wearing a cross being spat at and targeted aggressively in the streets, in traffic or at the workplace, are indicators that the situation is becoming more difficult. In the small Christian majority areas, displaying Christian symbols is possible and comes with less risks.' ²⁷⁹

- 11.1.4 According to the same source:

'While expatriate [foreign] Christians can basically possess any material they

²⁷⁵ NCHR, '[Jaranwala: Incident Report](#)' (pages 12 to 13), October 2023

²⁷⁶ Punjab Police, '[IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar met with delegation of...](#)', 8 November 2023

²⁷⁷ Supreme Court, '[Criminal Petition No. 883-L of 2022](#)' (paragraph 7), 23 August 2022

²⁷⁸ Open Doors, '[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)' (page 36), December 2022

²⁷⁹ Open Doors, '[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)' (page 36), December 2022

want, it is dangerous for Pakistani Christians to keep materials beyond their immediate personal use, as this could be viewed as a tool for advertising and reaching out to Muslims, even if it is only for discussion. Books, especially with an apologetic content, can be declared anti-State and anti-Muslim and owning them can lead to punishment. For converts, it is very risky to openly possess any Christian materials.’²⁸⁰

See also [Christian converts](#)

11.1.5 Regarding foreign Christian missionaries, the USSD IRF Report 2022 stated:

‘The government continued to permit limited, non-Muslim foreign missionary activity and to allow those missionaries to preach, as long as they did not preach against Islam and they acknowledged they were not Muslim.

According to the government’s immigration website, the Ministry of Interior processed visa applications for “Christian missionaries” invited by organizations registered in the country. The sponsoring organization had to certify that the applicant was a bona fide member of their organization and must assume responsibility for the missionary’s financial support. In their visa applications, missionaries had to declare to “respect and abide by the laws of Pakistan” and to “refrain from indulging in internal politics.”

Missionary visas were valid for one year and permitted one reentry per year and a single one-year extension. According to missionary sources, only “replacement” visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries were available for long-term missionaries seeking to enter the country for the first time. According to the Ministry website, “Entry visas are not granted to foreign missionaries desirous of opening new missions or strengthening existing ones engaged in proselytizing activities.” One missionary from a registered church stated that the government did not impede or restrict missionary activity. Civil society contacts stated that missionary activity was permitted by the government but was limited in practice by general social intolerance of proselytizing to Muslims. Civil society contacts reported that visas for foreign missionaries were sometimes refused or delayed for so long that the mission had to be cancelled.’²⁸¹

11.1.6 According to Deutsche Welle (DW), reporting in January 2021, there were 10 Christian cable TV channels operating in Pakistan, though some channel owners told DW that they were careful not to broadcast any material that might be deemed offensive to Islam²⁸².

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11.2 Blasphemy allegations and attacks against Christians

11.2.1 Accusations of blasphemy are used against members of all faiths to settle personal disputes, making people vulnerable to false allegations^{283 284 285}. Some of those accused of blasphemy have been attacked or killed by

²⁸⁰ Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 36), December 2022

²⁸¹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

²⁸² DW, ‘[Why Pakistan’s Christian TV channels keep a low profile](#)’, 28 January 2021

²⁸³ APPG FoRB, ‘[Pakistan Report 2023](#)’ (page 12), November 2023

²⁸⁴ USCIRF, ‘[Issue Update: Assessing Blasphemy and Related Laws on Religious...](#)’, December 2023

²⁸⁵ Senate of Pakistan, ‘[Event Title: Senator Walid Iqbal, Chairman Senate...](#)’, 13 October 2023

vigilante mobs or in targeted killings^{286 287 288}.

- 11.2.2 Whilst acknowledging the targeted attacks against the Christian community in Jaranwala that occurred in August 2023 (post-APPG visit) following allegations of blasphemy, the APPG FoRB Pakistan Report 2023 noted that the situation for Christians had ‘remained relatively stable’ and there had been a ‘reduction in attacks against Christian communities’ [since the APPG’s 2018 visit]²⁸⁹. Open Doors WWL 2023 noted that during the reporting period (1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022) no major attacks against Christians or churches had occurred²⁹⁰.
- 11.2.3 The HRCP FFM report on the Jaranwala incident of 16 August 2023 provided some background information on previous attacks against Christians, noting that ‘According to data compiled by the CSJ, 51 attacks took place against Christian settlements and churches between 1997 and 2016, including 22 terrorist attacks and the remaining attacks by mobs and individuals... As a result of these attacks, 69 churches were desecrated and hundreds of houses damaged. Between 2016 and 2023 [until 16 August], no major attack was reported on Christian churches.’²⁹¹ The report provided a list of mob violence and terrorist attacks against communities and places of worship since 1997²⁹².
- 11.2.4 According to the CSJ report covering events of 2022, 23 Christians were extra-judicially killed between 1987 and 2022 following blasphemy allegations²⁹³. The CSJ 2023 report did not provide any information on numbers of Christians killed in relation to blasphemy allegations in 2023²⁹⁴.
- 11.2.5 In its reports covering 2021 and 2022, the USSD IRF mentioned that societal abuses of religious freedom included violence against Christians^{295 296}. In December 2021 a Christian Sri Lankan factory manager in Sailkot was beaten to death by a mob after being accused of blasphemy^{297 298}. In January 2022, Rev. William Siraj was shot dead and Rev. Patrick Naeem was injured in a targeted shooting at Shaheedan-e-all Saints Church in north-western Peshawar^{299 300}. The USSD IRF Report 2022 stated that, according to civil society organisations and the media, 4 Christians were killed in 2022 on account of their faith³⁰¹.
- 11.2.6 On 16 August 2023, at least 22 churches and more than 80 Christian homes in Jaranwala, Faisalabad district, were burnt and looted in a series of mob-

²⁸⁶ Al Jazeera, [‘Angry mob lynches man accused of blasphemy in Pakistan’](#), 11 February 2023

²⁸⁷ Pakistan Today, [‘124 suspects of grisly murder of Sri Lankan arrested so far’](#), 5 December 2021

²⁸⁸ CSJ, [‘Human Rights Observer 2023’](#) (page 10), March 2023

²⁸⁹ APPG FoRB, [‘Pakistan Report 2023’](#) (pages 4 and 6), November 2023

²⁹⁰ Open Doors, [‘Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier’](#) (pages 11 to 12), December 2022

²⁹¹ HRCP, [‘Mob-led destruction of churches in Jaranwala, Punjab’](#) (page 1), 25 August 2023

²⁹² HRCP, [‘Mob-led destruction of churches in Jaranwala, Punjab’](#) (pages 7 to 12), 25 August 2023

²⁹³ CSJ, [‘Human Rights Observer 2023’](#) (page 10), March 2023

²⁹⁴ CSJ, [‘Human Rights Observer 2024’](#), March 2024

²⁹⁵ USSD, [‘IRF Report 2021’](#) (section III), 2 June 2022

²⁹⁶ USSD, [‘IRF Report 2022’](#) (section III), 15 May 2023

²⁹⁷ USSD, [‘IRF Report 2021’](#) (section III), 2 June 2022

²⁹⁸ Pakistan Today, [‘124 suspects of grisly murder of Sri Lankan arrested so far’](#), 5 December 2021

²⁹⁹ Open Doors, [‘Pastor killed in church shooting in Pakistan’](#), 2 February 2022

³⁰⁰ Reuters, [‘Gunmen kill priest on his way home from church in Pakistan’](#), 30 January 2022

³⁰¹ USSD, [‘IRF Report 2022’](#) (section III), 15 May 2023

led attacks against the local Christian community^{302 303 304}. Following rumours and allegations of blasphemy against 2 Christian brothers, announcements from mosque loudspeakers inciting violence and social media posts containing inflammatory language, thousands of men gathered in the town and proceeded to attack Christian churches and homes^{305 306 307}. Hundreds of Christian families fled their homes to escape the violence³⁰⁸, some seeking refuge with Muslim neighbours³⁰⁹.

11.2.7 As noted in the HRCP FFM report:

‘From the information gathered from locals and conversation with the administration, the mission cannot rule out the suspicion that this was not a spontaneous or random crowd, but part of a larger campaign of hatred against the local Christians. Police officers have confirmed that some Muslim religious groups have raised issues that have created communal tension in the near past, although none culminated in the disastrous attacks that occurred on 16 August. The mission has also learnt that several videos made during the attacks in different localities of Jaranwala are in circulation, showing members of a particular religious political party inciting the crowd to violence. Other factors reported above indicate that there could be larger political and social motives behind the attack.

‘Numerous witnesses stated that many of those who committed the arson were not from the city itself but had come from the adjoining villages. One person attested that a tractor trolley full of people as well as several persons on motorbikes had arrived from a village, transporting men who then burnt down a church and houses, thus giving more credibility to the notion that the attack was premeditated.’³¹⁰

11.2.8 Charles Ramsey, resident scholar at the Baylor University Institute for the Studies of Religion and a senior fellow at the Religious Freedom Institute (RFI), referred to the Jaranwala incident in an October 2023 article published by Real Clear Politics, noting that:

‘There is a broadly held perception today that the attacks were purposefully instigated, and that to become entangled therein was dangerous. Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi, head of the [Punjab] provincial government, similarly viewed the attack as a “planned conspiracy” to “light fire in the country and sabotage its peace.” Naqvi was referring to the involvement of TLP (Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan) in coordinating the Jaranwala arson, as they have done before, to increase their standing in the upcoming elections. The TLP platform is to defend the honor of the Prophet at any cost, and the party has held multiple rallies since the attack and made speeches exonerating the mob as “overwhelmed by their sentiments,” and placing the blame upon international culprits, particularly countries like Denmark and France where

³⁰² HRCP, ‘[Mob-led destruction of churches in Jaranwala, Punjab](#)’ (page 1), 25 August 2023

³⁰³ NCHR, ‘[Jaranwala: Incident Report](#)’ (page 4), October 2023

³⁰⁴ Dawn, ‘[Justice Isa visits Jaranwala to show solidarity with Christian community...](#)’, 19 August 2023

³⁰⁵ Dawn, ‘[5 churches, many homes ransacked in Faisalabad’s Jaranwala](#)’, 17 August 2023

³⁰⁶ HRCP, ‘[Mob-led destruction of churches in Jaranwala, Punjab](#)’ (pages 1 and 2), 25 August 2023

³⁰⁷ NCHR, ‘[Jaranwala: Incident Report](#)’ (page 4), October 2023

³⁰⁸ Al Jazeera, ‘[Pakistan Christians in fear after blasphemy allegations trigger...](#)’, 23 August 2023

³⁰⁹ France24, ‘[Targeted Christians found shelter with Muslims during Pakistan...](#)’, 17 August 2023

³¹⁰ HRCP, ‘[Mob-led destruction of churches in Jaranwala, Punjab](#)’ (page 3), 25 August 2023

legal structures have allowed the desecration of the Qur'an. Groups like the TLP feed upon the sense of injustice against Muslims in the West and also in India and China. TLP numbers continue to swell in Punjab, and many interpret the attack on Christians in Jaranwala as a show of force in preparation for elections in the coming year.'³¹¹

- 11.2.9 An HRCP FFM to Sargodha in September 2023 reported on a series of blasphemy-related FIRs filed against members of the Christian community between July and August 2023, which reportedly escalated to threats of impending mob violence against the community³¹². Despite reports of incitement by the TLP and a local imam, local religious leaders and police were able to diffuse the situation, although the HRCP noted in its conclusion that '... these events have caused serious rifts in the region's social fabric and disrupted its long established interfaith harmony, creating a lasting threat of conflict and faith-based violence.'³¹³

See also [Security and response to violence](#).

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11.3 Christian converts

- 11.3.1 The Open Doors WWL 2023 provided information on the situation for Christians with a Muslim background (Christian converts), noting that 'Registering one's conversion to the Christian faith is not possible. A child will be automatically registered as "Muslim" if his or her father was registered as "Muslim", no matter if in reality the religious affiliation has changed. Once converts are discovered, they face the threat of divorce (if married) and are likely to lose their inheritance rights.'³¹⁴
- 11.3.2 The Open Doors WWL 2023 stated that 'Christians with a Muslim background suffer the brunt of religious freedom violations both from radical Islamic groups (who see them as apostates) and from families, friends and neighbors who see conversion as a shameful act of betrayal to family and community.'³¹⁵
- 11.3.3 The USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that:
- 'Members of civil society continued to report that converts from Islam lived in varying degrees of secrecy for fear of violent retribution from family members or society at large. In April, media reported that the European Court of Human Rights [ECtHR] halted the deportation from Switzerland of a Pakistani convert to Christianity on the grounds that he was likely to face persecution if returned to Pakistan. A lawyer representing the plaintiff, listed only as M.A.M. in court documents and the media report, told the court, "Converts face not only socio-political marginalization and institutionalized discrimination, but also blasphemy charges, arrest, long prison sentences, and vigilante mob violence."³¹⁶

³¹¹ Real Clear Politics, '[Pakistan's Supreme Court Chief Justice Addresses...](#)', 21 October 2023

³¹² HRCP, '[Mob violence and the social ostracisation of the...](#)' (pages 1 to 3), September 2023

³¹³ HRCP, '[Mob violence and the social ostracisation of the...](#)' (page 5), September 2023

³¹⁴ Open Doors, '[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)' (page 38), December 2022

³¹⁵ Open Doors, '[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)' (page 28), December 2022

³¹⁶ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (section III), 15 May 2023

- 11.3.4 A summary of the judgment from the ECtHR in the case of *M.A.M v Switzerland* 26 April 2022 is available [here](#).
- 11.3.5 According to the Open Doors WWL 2023, Christian converts ‘... face either being physically attacked and discriminated against by the surrounding Islamic community and their own family, or they may be placed under a curse through black magic, potions, amulets and other occult practices. From the moment a convert from Islam decides to be baptized, he or she is put under particular pressure since baptism is seen as the ultimate form of rejecting Islam and thus committing apostasy.’³¹⁷
- 11.3.6 The Open Doors WWL 2023 further noted that it was ‘very risky’ for Christian converts to openly possess Christian materials, adding, ‘... converts from Islam always have to be very careful in the way they worship, especially if they are the only Christians in their family. Bibles and other Christian materials may be taken away by family, friends or neighbors, even when it is stored on a mobile phone. While house-arrest by families is another form of punishment for privately conducting worship, a milder form is for Christian converts to be put under surveillance.’³¹⁸
- 11.3.7 In regard to the ability of churches accepting converts to Christianity, the Open Doors WWL 2023 noted that ‘Since conversion from Islam to Christianity is so strongly opposed and fought against by family, society, government and radical groups, it would be highly dangerous if a church would dare to accept converts onto their premises. If a convert does attend a church service, this needs to happen without anyone, including the church, knowing that he or she is a convert.’³¹⁹

See also [Apostasy \(renouncing Islam\)](#)

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11.4 Forced conversions and forced marriage

- 11.4.1 In October 2022, UN Special Rapporteurs expressed concern at the reportedly widespread abduction, forced marriage and conversion to Islam of young women and girls from religious minorities, including Christians, and called on the government to address the issue by strengthening the implementation of protective laws³²⁰. The USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that ‘There were reported cases of government intervention and action by courts, law enforcement, and local authorities in situations of attempted kidnapping and forced conversion. Enforcement action against alleged perpetrators was rare, however.’³²¹
- 11.4.2 According to the CSJ ‘There is no legal definition of the term forced conversion...’³²² Both the CSJ and Jubilee Campaign noted, despite a revision to Section 498B of the [Pakistan Penal Code](#)³²³ in 2017, which criminalised the forced marriage of non-Muslim women, the provision was

³¹⁷ Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 39), December 2022

³¹⁸ Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (pages 36 to 37), December 2022

³¹⁹ Open Doors, ‘[Pakistan – WWL 2023 – Full Country Dossier](#)’ (page 43), December 2022

³²⁰ OHCHR, ‘[Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on minority...](#)’ (pages 1 and 16), 26 October 2022

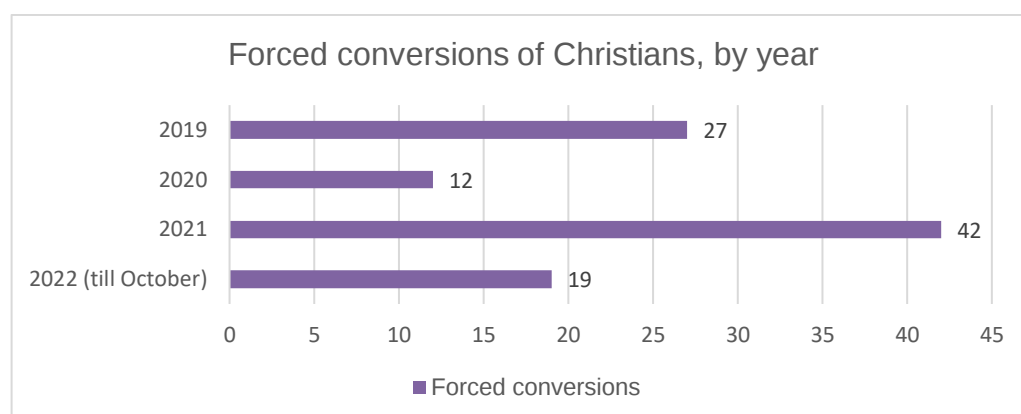
³²¹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2022](#)’ (section II), 15 May 2023

³²² CSJ, ‘[Human Rights Observer 2023](#)’ (page 3), March 2023

³²³ [Pakistan Penal Code](#) (Article 498B, page 170), as amended on 16 February 2017

not applied by police when investigating complaints of forced conversion³²⁴
³²⁵. In October 2021, a parliamentary committee rejected a draft bill on forced conversion after religious scholars deemed it contrary to Sharia^{326 327}.

- 11.4.3 According to the Jubilee Campaign's analysis of cases identified in the media and verified from first information reports (FIRs), identity documents and available court data, 'A total of 100 cases related to abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriages of Christian girls were reported across the country between January 2019 and October 2022. The year 2021 recorded 42 cases (42%) and exhibited an increase in the number of cases formally reported in 2019 (27 cases; 27%), 2020 (12 cases; 12%), and between January and October 2022 (19 cases; 19%).' ³²⁸



Source data: Jubilee Campaign³²⁹

- 11.4.4 CSJ, based on cases reported on mainstream and social media, court orders, and police reports, claimed there were 72 forced conversions of Christians between 2013 and 2020³³⁰, 38 in 2021, 42 in 2022³³¹ and 26 in 2023³³².
- 11.4.5 The Jubilee Campaign indicated that the number of forced conversions may be much higher than reported as not all affected families had access to, or could report cases to the police due to, for example, stigma, financial constraints, threats and intimidation, or police bias³³³.
- 11.4.6 The Jubilee Campaign noted that 'The province-wide frequency of formally reported cases [involving accusations of abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriages of Christian girls in Pakistan] shows that 86% of cases were reported in Punjab province alone, followed by 11% in Sindh, 2% in Islamabad, and 1% in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the period from January

³²⁴ CSJ, '[Human Rights Observer 2023](#)' (page 3), March 2023

³²⁵ Jubilee Campaign, '[Conversion without Consent...](#)' (page 18), November 2022

³²⁶ Dawn, '[Panel chief rejects draft bill on forced conversion](#)', 14 October 2021

³²⁷ APPG FoRB, '[Pakistan Report 2023](#)' (page 18), November 2023

³²⁸ Jubilee Campaign, '[Conversion without Consent...](#)' (page 4), November 2022

³²⁹ Jubilee Campaign, '[Conversion without Consent...](#)' (page 4), November 2022

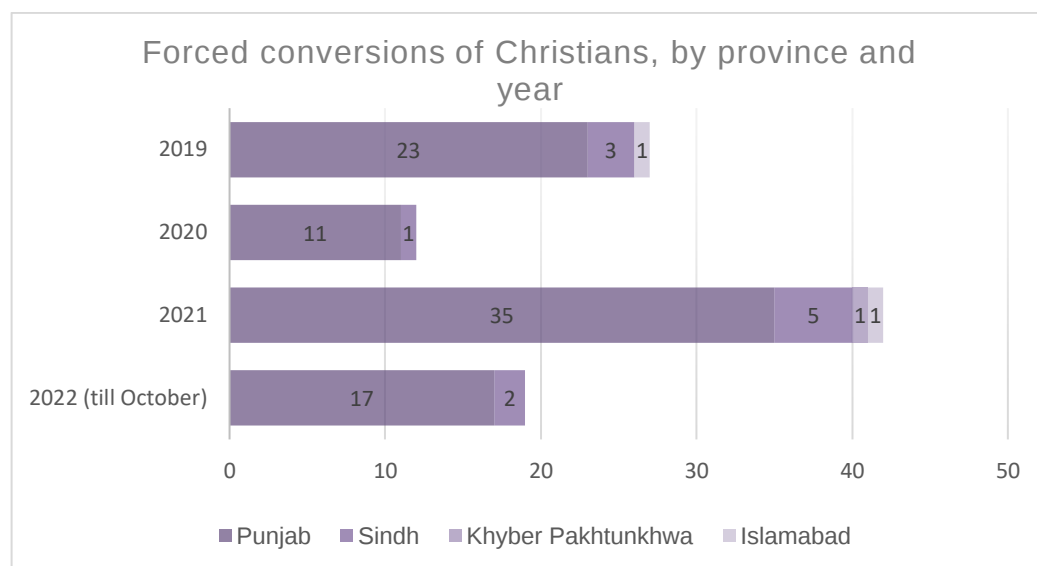
³³⁰ CSJ, '[Silence of the Lamb III](#)' (page 6), 2020

³³¹ CSJ, '[Human Rights Observer 2023](#)' (page 4), March 2023

³³² CSJ, '[Human Rights Observer 2024](#)' (page 11) March 2024

³³³ Jubilee Campaign, '[Conversion without Consent...](#)' (pages 3, 16 to 17), November 2022

2019 to October 2022.³³⁴ No cases were recorded in Balochistan³³⁵.



Source data: Jubilee Campaign³³⁶

- 11.4.7 According to the data, ‘... Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, and Sheikhupura from Punjab Province, and Karachi from Sindh Province are the major districts which exhibit a high rate of cases of abductions, religious conversions, and forced marriages of underage minority girls.’³³⁷
- 11.4.8 Of the 100 cases that the Jubilee Campaign analysed, 79 victims of were aged under 18, 61 of whom were under 16 years old, though some girls’ ages were fabricated to over 18 by the perpetrator to avoid prosecution under the Child Marriage Restraint Act³³⁸. The average age difference between the victim and the perpetrator was nearly 30 years³³⁹.
- 11.4.9 In regard to access to justice, UN Special Rapporteurs, the Jubilee Campaign and NCRC all indicated that the police sometimes failed to take complaints of forced conversion seriously^{340 341 342}. The Jubilee Campaign reported that ‘Both the lower courts and the higher courts of Pakistan have displayed bias and a lack of adherence to proper procedures in cases that involve accusations of forced marriage and forced conversions. The courts continue to issue conflicting verdicts, most of which are in favour of perpetrators and cite reasoning inspired by Islamic creed and jurisprudence...’³⁴³ The USSD IRF Report 2022 noted that ‘Religious minorities and several organizations continued to protest the government’s weak response to alleged cases of forced marriage and forced conversion,

³³⁴ Jubilee Campaign, ‘[Conversion without Consent...](#)’ (page 5), November 2022

³³⁵ Jubilee Campaign, ‘[Conversion without Consent...](#)’ (page 5), November 2022

³³⁶ Jubilee Campaign, ‘[Conversion without Consent...](#)’ (page 4), November 2022

³³⁷ Jubilee Campaign, ‘[Conversion without Consent...](#)’ (page 8), November 2022

³³⁸ Jubilee Campaign, ‘[Conversion without Consent...](#)’ (pages 6 and 12), November 2022

³³⁹ Jubilee Campaign, ‘[Conversion without Consent...](#)’ (page 10), November 2022

³⁴⁰ OHCHR, ‘[Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on minority...](#)’ (page 2), 26 October 2022

³⁴¹ Jubilee Campaign, ‘[Conversion without Consent...](#)’ (page 17), November 2022

³⁴² NCRC, ‘[Policy Brief on forced conversion with recommendations...](#)’ (page 11), December 2021

³⁴³ Jubilee Campaign, ‘[Conversion without Consent...](#)’ (page 15), November 2022

noting such incidents continue to happen regularly in all provinces.³⁴⁴

11.4.10 In December 2022, the UK Government sanctioned Muslim cleric, Mian Abdul Haq, due to his involvement in forced conversions and marriages of girls and women from religious minorities³⁴⁵.

11.4.11 The British High Commission in Islamabad noted in February 2024 'There is a reported rise in cases of forced marriage and forced conversion of Christian women and girls. Such conversions and marriages often take place under the threat of violence to victims and their families.'³⁴⁶

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³⁴⁴ USSD, '[IRF Report 2022](#)' (section II), 15 May 2023

³⁴⁵ UK Government, FCDO, '[UK sanctions target 30 corrupt political figures...](#)', 9 December 2022

³⁴⁶ (Annex A), 21 February 2024

Annex A

Letter to CPIT from the British High Commission (BHC), Islamabad

Drafted: 16 December 2013

Updated: 21 February 2024

Country of Origin Information Report – Christians in Pakistan

Information on living conditions in Pakistan for Christians from locally engaged staff working at the British High Commission Islamabad

Locally engaged staff working at the Consular Section at the British High Commission, Islamabad, who are in touch with the Christian community in Pakistan have spoken to us about the questions sent by the Home Office regarding the situation of Christians in Pakistan. We have been told that the data requested in the majority of questions does not exist. Census and population data for Pakistan is not readily available or regularly updated. However, our colleagues are able to give an outline of the conditions in which Christians in Pakistan live, recorded below. Other information is available from open sources including the Pakistani media and human rights organisations.

Demographics

The official estimates for the minority religious populations within Pakistan are as follows:

- 96.4% Muslim
- 1.27% Christian
- 1.5% Hindu
- 0.6% other

On this basis, there would be around 2.6m Christians in Pakistan. However, some in the Christian community believe this number is too low and that there are higher numbers of Christians in Pakistan, around 5-10% of the population. It is likely to be at the lower end of that range if they are right.

The majority of Christians are based in the Punjab, where Christians are the largest religious minority. A significant number of them live in and around Lahore, Sialkot, Gujranwala and Faisalabad – estimated at 2m in Lahore, and 0.5m in the rest of Punjab. The other large centre of Christians in Pakistan is in Karachi, which includes a Goan Catholic community.

The majority of Christians in Pakistan belong to either the Roman Catholic Church or, slightly fewer, the Church of Pakistan (Anglican) with increasing numbers belonging to other protestant and non-conformist churches.

The Constitutional position of non-Muslims in Pakistan

The Pakistan constitution states that both the President (article 41) and Prime Minister shall be a Muslim (article 91). Article 33 discourages prejudice, Article 36 entrusts the state with protection of minorities. Article 20 provides for freedom of

religion. (Pakistan Constitution)

The FCO's Annual Human Rights Report 2019 noted that intolerance towards Pakistan's religious minorities, including Christians, remains a significant concern. Discrimination and violence against Christians is widespread and Pakistan was ranked 7th on the Christian support group Open Doors World Watch List 2024 of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. Christians are among some of the most economically disadvantaged groups in Pakistan, and are often targets for murder, bombings, abduction of women and girls, rape, forced conversions and eviction from their home.

Blasphemy law

Abuse and misuse of Pakistan's blasphemy laws to settle personal disputes is common, and religious minorities, including Christians are disproportionately targeted. The majority of blasphemy cases come from the Punjab, which has a high Christian population.

On 16 August 2023, nearly 20 Christian churches in the Punjab town of Jaranwala were destroyed by mob violence. This followed allegations of blasphemy linked to members of the local Christian community accused of desecrating the Holy Quran. This was the most severe attack against Pakistan's Christian community in recent years.

We have seen a continuation of the high number of blasphemy cases brought against Christians, including a nurse in Karachi in January 2021 who was attacked by hospital personnel after being accused at work. In August 2017, a 17-year old boy was murdered after being accused of blasphemy by his Muslim classmates. The case of Shagufta Kausar and her husband Shafgat Emmanuel, convicted in 2014, continues as they remain in prison awaiting their appeal hearing. However, there was some progress in December 2020 when the Lahore High Court acquitted Imran Ghafur Mashi who was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2010. There is a growing trend of Pakistani Christians leaving the country, in particular to live in countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Thailand. According to some media reports (Pakistani and Indian) families of Hindus/Sikhs living in southern Punjab/Sindh have migrated to India. Others (including Christians) have migrated to Canada and other western countries where there are small communities and some have come as asylum seekers.

Violence

The scale of violent attacks is difficult to assess as not all are reported. However, Christians in Pakistan continue to be vulnerable to violent attacks. In March 2013, the Joseph Colony in Lahore (a major Christian colony) was attacked by a mob following allegations of blasphemy against a resident. In September 2013, more than 85 people were killed and over 100 injured during a double suicide bombing at a church in Peshawar. In March 2015, the Pakistan Taliban claimed responsibility for two suicide bomb attacks at Christian churches in the Youhanabad area of Lahore which killed 15 persons. And on Easter Sunday 2016, bombs killed 75 persons in a park in Lahore. (Although the attack targeted Christians, the majority killed were Muslim). In December 2017 a church in Quetta, Balochistan province was bombed, killing nine worshippers and injuring about 60 people.

Institutions

There are many churches in Pakistan, which are mostly safe but as mentioned above they can be targets for extremist actions. Christian schools, colleges and hospitals also exist – some of these were nationalised in the 1970's by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto although some have more recently been de-nationalised and returned to their former owners.

There is limited protection of religious minorities from the Government. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (MoRH) primarily deals with Hajj participation and has been ineffective in protecting the rights of religious minorities. In May 2015, a National Commission for Human Rights was established. The current Commissioner was appointed in 2021 (Ms. Rabiya Javeri Agha). In May 2020, the National Commission on Minorities (NCM) was established, however there are concerns regarding the NCM's effectiveness and independence – it currently sits under the remit of the MoRH. A Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Interfaith Harmony was appointed in September 2020. This ceased to exist in 2023 when the caretaker Government took over. It is unclear whether this role will be re-appointed as the new Government forms (at the time of writing we are still waiting for appointments post February 2024 elections).

Religion must be registered with the state and included in one's passport.

There is no specific statutory law that criminalizes apostasy in Pakistan. In 2007, a bill to impose the death penalty for apostasy for males and life imprisonment for females was proposed in Parliament but failed to pass. Nevertheless, some scholars believe that the principle that “a lacuna in the statute law was to be filled with reference to Islamic law” could potentially apply to the crime of apostasy.

Although no examples of anyone actually being criminally prosecuted for apostasy were found, conversion is not without consequence. It has been reported that if a married Muslim couple converts to another religion, the couple's children become illegitimate and may become wards of the State. In addition, according to one report, though it is theoretically possible to change one's religion from Islam, in practice, the state attempts to hinder the process. Converts from Islam and atheists may also be vulnerable to Pakistan's blasphemy law, which prescribes life imprisonment for desecrating or defiling the Quran and the death sentence to anyone for using derogatory remarks towards the Prophet Mohamed.

There is a reported rise in cases of forced marriage and forced conversion of Christian women and girls. Such conversions and marriages often take place under the threat of violence to victims and their families.

Marriage

A Christian woman or man marrying a Muslim is permissible, on the basis that they will convert to Islam.

A child's religion is held to be the same of that of its mother.

Marriages are registered with the state according to which faith those getting married follow. As such, two Christians getting married do not have to register according to Muslim family laws. In church weddings, Christians are usually married under the Indian Christian Marriage Act of 1872. In February 2016, the Sindh Assembly passed legislation recognising, for the first time in the country's history, Hindu marriages in the Sindh province as valid. Hindu marriages elsewhere in Pakistan are not recognised by the authorities.

This letter has been compiled by staff of the British High Commission in Islamabad and Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London entirely from information obtained from the sources indicated. The letter does not reflect the opinions of the author(s) nor any policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The author(s) have compiled this letter in response to a request from the Home Office and any further enquiries regarding its contents should be directed to the Home Office.

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Annex B

Letter to CPIT from the British High Commission (BHC), Islamabad

Dated: 15 February 2021

Re-issued: 21 February 2024

Can converts to Christianity live freely and openly in Pakistan? Are they at risk of an “honour” killing owing to their conversion? Is internal relocation an option, i.e. would any areas be deemed “safer” for Christians than others?

We consulted internally with our Political Section, who deal with humanitarian and human rights issues. In short, it is difficult to corroborate the real situation, as this is a frequently hidden problem; our view is that converts would probably not want to draw additional attention to themselves. However, we have ascertained the following anecdotal evidence from our dealings with external contacts in Pakistan:-

- Firstly, in our opinion it would be difficult for Christian converts to live freely and openly in Pakistan, as converts over and above being Christian. It is our view that people who are known to have converted to Christianity suffer serious discrimination, for example in the workplace or by the authorities. It is far more difficult for people in Pakistan who are known to have converted to Christianity, than it is for people who were born Christian.
- We understand that it would be rare for someone to convert to Christianity, or at least to do so openly, in Pakistan. It is therefore something of note for the community, with potential repercussions.
- Our Political Section considered that internal relocation may be possible, in theory, as there were Christian communities in many urban areas such as Rawalpindi, and across Punjab and Sindh provinces. Due to the anonymity afforded by moving to an urban area, it may be feasible to relocate and not reveal the fact of the conversion. However, our view was also that the Christian communities were themselves becoming increasingly isolated from other communities. Therefore whilst it may be more difficult to socially exclude and harass a Christian who lives in a larger Christian community, it does not necessary preclude that harassment.
- Finally, it was our view that Christian converts were not at risk of an honour killing, despite these difficulties, as these are normally related to property disputes or perceived dishonourable behaviour rather than matters of faith or principle.

This letter has been compiled by staff of the British High Commission in Islamabad entirely from information obtained from the sources indicated. The letter does not reflect the opinions of the author(s), or any policy of the British High Commission. The author(s) have compiled this letter in response to a request from the Home Office and any further enquiries regarding its contents should be directed to the Home Office.

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 the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the [country information](#).

The Home Office uses some standardised ToR, 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:

- History - origins of Christian communities in Pakistan
 - Demography
 - Population, location of communities
 - Churches, how many, accessibility
- Legal framework
 - Legal rights for minority religious groups
 - Personal laws
 - Apostasy and blasphemy laws
- State treatment and attitudes
 - Protection and security
 - Political representation
 - Christian festivals
 - Blasphemy – application, convictions, response to misuse
- Societal treatment and attitudes
 - Blasphemy allegations
 - Attacks against community
 - Women and girls, including forced conversions to Islam
 - Consequences of converting to Christianity
- Access to education and employment

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Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **5.0**
- valid from **30 April 2024**

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use only.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

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Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment

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Feedback to the Home Office

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the Country Policy and Information Team.

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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 support them 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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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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