



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Shia Muslims

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Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in [the basis of claim](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment on whether, **in general**:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- Claims are likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

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

Country of origin information

The country information 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 \(COI\)](#), dated 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.

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

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

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. 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, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

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

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

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

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

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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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Assessment

Updated: 23 January 2019

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by state or non-state actors because the person is a Shia Muslim.

1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 This note focusses primarily on the Shia population generally, not specifically Shia Hazaras. For further analysis and information on Hazaras, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Hazaras](#).

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).

2.1.1 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.

2.2.2 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instruction on Exclusion: Article 1F of the Refugee Convention](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Refugee convention reason

2.3.1 A person's actual or imputed religion.

2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason alone is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed in each case is whether the particular person will face a real risk of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.

2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Risk

a) State treatment

- 2.4.1 The Shia population is estimated to be between 20 and 50 million (in a total population of just over 200 million). The state religion is Islam and Shia Muslims are freely permitted to practice their faith. Shias are well represented in government and other public service sectors (see [Public representation](#) and [Employment](#)).
- 2.4.2 Whilst there is no reported systematic discrimination against Shia Muslims by the state, there are reports of arbitrary arrests during Muharram (Islamic religious celebration), related to public order offences (see [Discrimination and harassment](#)). There are also reports of unlawful detentions and 'enforced disappearances' over the past 2 years, by the Pakistani security services of Shia men suspected of links to Shia militia groups fighting alongside the Assad regime in Syria (see [Enforced disappearances](#)).
- 2.4.3 In general, a Shia Muslim is not likely to face a real risk of persecution and/or serious harm from state actors. If discrimination does occur, it is not likely to be sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition to amount to a real risk of persecution and/or serious harm.
- 2.4.4 Decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors specific to the person which would place them at real risk. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they would be at real risk from the state authorities on return.
- 2.4.5 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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b) Societal treatment

- 2.4.6 Shia Muslims are regarded as apostates or heretics by some extremist Sunni groups and individuals. As a result, some face hostility and security threats from extremist groups, including the Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and LeJ's al-Alami faction (for more general information on militant groups, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#)).
- 2.4.7 The majority of targeted attacks, which usually take the form of bomb attacks at Shia dominated events and venues, occurred in the tribal regions (Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Quetta, Balochistan. Reported numbers of those killed by armed groups in 2017 varied enormously, ranging from 68 to 166. This is in the context of a Shia population of between 20 and 50 million (see [Societal treatment and attitudes](#)).
- 2.4.8 Targeted attacks by armed groups continue and Shia traditionally represent a higher proportion of casualties from sectarian violence. However, overall sectarian violence against Shias has declined since 2013 (see [Sectarian violence](#)).
- 2.4.9 In general, a Shia Muslim is not likely to face a real risk of persecution and/or serious harm from non-state actors, though the risk may vary depending on

location. Although there continued to be targeted attacks in Shia dominated areas, these are infrequent and do not generally amount to substantial grounds for considering there is a real risk of persecution and/or serious harm. However, decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors relevant to the person which might increase the likelihood of them facing a real risk of persecution or serious harm. Each case must be considered on its facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they face a particular risk.

- 2.4.10 For further specific analysis and information on Hazaras, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Hazaras](#), and for information on the security situation in general and on militant groups, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).
- 2.4.11 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by the state, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.5.2 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by non-state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.5.3 The government has taken steps to limit the capability of terrorist groups that target the general public as well as Shia Muslims specifically. Federal and provincial governments have provided security during Shia religious commemorations and for Shia pilgrims travelling to and from Iran although Shia organisations reported that security was inadequate and that there are sometimes significant gaps between military escorts (see [State support and security operations](#)).
- 2.5.4 For further information on security operations undertaken by the Pakistan government aimed at curbing militant violence, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).
- 2.5.5 The reported case of [AW \(sufficiency of protection\) Pakistan \[2011\] UKUT 31 \(IAC\) \(26 January 2011\)](#), heard on 11 November 2010, found that 'Notwithstanding systemic sufficiency of state protection, a claimant may still have a well founded fear of persecution if authorities know or ought to know of circumstances particular to his/her case giving rise to the fear, but are unlikely to provide the additional protection the particular circumstances reasonably require (per Auld LJ at paragraph 55(vi))' (headnote 2).
- 2.5.6 Therefore, decision makers must also take particular account of past persecution (if any) and consider whether there are good reasons to consider that such persecution (and past lack of sufficient protection) is likely to be repeated.
- 2.5.7 In general, the state appears both willing and able to offer effective protection to Shia Muslims, but it should be noted that state protection does not need to eliminate the risk of discrimination and violence. A person's

reluctance to seek protection does not necessarily mean that effective protection is not available. Decision makers must consider each case on its facts. The onus is on the person to demonstrate why they would not be able to seek and obtain state protection.

2.5.8 For general information on actors of protection see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Background information, including actors of protection, and internal relocation](#).

2.5.9 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Internal relocation

2.6.1 The Shia population is spread across Pakistan and there are large Shia communities in major urban centres (see [Demography](#)).

2.6.2 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by the state, they will not be able to relocate to escape that risk.

2.6.3 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm at the hands of non-state actors, in general they will be able to relocate to escape that risk. Decision makers must determine whether the person could relocate internally to a place where they would not face a real risk of persecution or serious harm and where they can reasonably be expected to stay. Each case must be considered on its individual merits

2.6.4 For general information and analysis on internal relocation within Pakistan, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Background information, including actors of protection, and internal relocation](#).

2.6.5 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.7 Certification

2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

2.7.2 This is because, in general, the risk of persecution or serious harm is low; effective state protection is likely to be available; and internal relocation is likely to be reasonable.

2.7.3 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

Section 3 updated: 2 January 2019

3. Demography

3.1 Population

3.1.1 Over 95% of Pakistan's population of 207.8m¹ are Muslim; estimates of the Shia Muslim population varied between 10% and 25%^{2 3 4}. Most of Pakistan's Shia community adhere to the Twelver (athna ashariya) school of thought; other sub-sects include Nizari Ismailis, Daudi Bohras and Sulemani Bohras. Shia are represented across most of Pakistan's ethnic, linguistic and tribal groups⁵.

3.1.2 The Australia Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) report on Pakistan, based on DFAT's on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Pakistan, alongside relevant and credible open source reports, dated September 2017, noted:

'The Shi'a population is spread throughout Pakistan. While Shi'a do not constitute a majority in any of Pakistan's four provinces, Shi'a do form a majority in the Pakistani-controlled autonomous region of Gilgit Baltistan. Significant numbers of Shi'a live in Peshawar, Kohat, Hangu and Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; in Kurram and Orakzai Agencies in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA); in and around Quetta and the Makran coastline in Balochistan; in parts of southern and central Punjab; and throughout Sindh. Large Shi'a communities live in urban centres throughout Pakistan, including Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Peshawar, Multan, Jhang and Sargodha. Although some Shi'a live in enclaves in these cities, the Shi'a and Sunni communities are generally well integrated.'⁶

3.1.3 The DFAT report noted in regard to Shias living in Karachi (a city with an estimated population of more than 20 million people), 'While Sunnis and Shi'a are dispersed throughout the city, some Shi'a-dominated enclaves (particularly Hazara Shi'a) can be found in Abbas Town, Hussain Hazara Goth, Mughal Hazara Goth, Rizvia, Ancholi, DHA Gizri, Pak Colony and Manghopir.'⁷

3.1.4 DFAT also noted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, '... the Shi'a population is largely concentrated in Hangu, Kohat, Peshawar and Dera Ismail Khan. Most Shi'a in Peshawar are long-term residents of the Old City, while many Shi'a in Hangu, Kohat and Dera Ismail Khan are Turi or Bangash Shi'a from Kurram and Orakzai agencies.'⁸ There is a large population of Shia Hazara in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan⁹.

¹ CIA, 'World Factbook – Pakistan', (People and society), 6 November 2018, [url](#).

² CIA, 'World Factbook – Pakistan', (People and society), 6 November 2018, [url](#).

³ DFAT, 'Country Information Report Pakistan', (paragraph 3.27), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

⁴ USSD, 'IRF Report for 2017', (Section I), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

⁵ DFAT, 'Country Information Report Pakistan', (paragraph 3.29), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

⁶ DFAT, 'Country Information Report Pakistan', (paragraph 3.33), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

⁷ DFAT, 'Country Information Report Pakistan', (paragraph 3.47), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

⁸ DFAT, 'Country Information Report Pakistan', (paragraph 3.58), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

⁹ DFAT, 'Country Information Report Pakistan', (paragraph 3.54), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

3.2 Identifying characteristics

3.2.1 With the exception of the ethnic Hazara (who are predominantly Shia), most Pakistani Shia Muslims are not physically or linguistically different from Pakistani Sunni Muslims^{10 11 12}. The exclusively Shia Pashtun ‘Turi’ tribe are not easily visually distinguishable but can be identified by their distinctive names and accents, and because they largely live within a small, well-defined area in and around the town of Parachinar in Kurram Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)¹³.

3.2.2 Sources, consulted by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada’s Research Directorate in 2013, noted that Sunni and Shia were generally not distinguishable by their dress, although during the month of Muharram many Shia wear black clothes and “display signs of the grave, horse and blood of Hussein”. Similarly, Shia religious clerics often wore black, opposed to the Sunni clerics green or white. Shia scholars were reported to be distinguishable from Sunni scholars, wearing different dress, cloaks and turbans¹⁴. Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs) do not name the person’s religion (although this data is held by the National Database and Registration Authority – NADRA). Whilst passports identify the holder as Muslim, they do not identify the person’s sect¹⁵.

3.2.3 For further information on Hazaras in Pakistan, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Hazaras](#).

3.2.4 Sources reported that common Shia names include Abbas, Ali, Hasan, Hussain, Jafery, Jaffer, Jafri, Naqvi, Raza, Rizvi, Sayyed, Syed and Zaidi¹⁶
¹⁷.

3.2.5 The DFAT report added:

‘Similarly, ethnic and tribal names can reveal a person’s ethnicity or tribal affiliation; Hazaras and Turis are almost exclusively Shi’a, while the Bangash have a significant Shi’a population. A person’s address can identify them as Shi’a if they reside in a predominantly Shi’a area. Shi’a in Pakistan are most prominent during Shi’a religious events and pilgrimages to Iraq and Iran. Shi’a participating in Ashura processions during Moharram often administer forms of self-harm such as flagellation, which can leave permanent marks.’¹⁸

3.2.6 The DFAT report also noted:

‘Shi’a and Sunni mosques are clearly distinguishable, as they have visibly different exteriors and are identifiable by name. Shi’a mosques and places of worship, or imambargahs, feature different Muslim iconography, including the Shi’a sword, horses, images of Ali and Hussain, and “U-shaped”

¹⁰ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraphs 3.34 and 3.7), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

¹¹ IRB, ‘Pakistan: How Shia Muslims differ from Sunnis’, 9 January 2014, [url](#).

¹² USCIRF, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (Conditions for Shi’a Muslims), 28 April 2018, [url](#).

¹³ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.18), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

¹⁴ IRB, ‘Pakistan: How Shia Muslims differ from Sunnis’, 9 January 2014, [url](#).

¹⁵ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraphs 3.34 and 3.7), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

¹⁶ IRB, ‘Pakistan: How Shia Muslims differ from Sunnis’, 9 January 2014, [url](#).

¹⁷ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.35), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

¹⁸ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.35), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

crescent moons. Shi'a and Sunni mosques have different prayer times, and worshippers use different hand positions while praying. Shi'a mosques are located throughout Pakistan, including in major cities and towns. Shi'a can (although rarely do) pray in Sunni mosques and vice versa. Both sects share a number of famous religious sites, including Sufi shrines.¹⁹

- 3.2.7 The [BBC](#)²⁰ and [Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada](#)²¹ described the ideological differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims.

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Section 4 updated: 2 January 2019

4. Legal context

4.1 Constitution

- 4.1.1 The Constitution of Pakistan establishes Islam as the state religion (Article 2). Article 20 provides that 'subject to law, public order, and morality, (a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practise and propagate his religion; and (b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions'. Article 36 guarantees 'the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the Federal and Provincial services'.²²

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4.2 Blasphemy laws

- 4.2.1 The so-called blasphemy laws, (sections 295A, B and C of the Pakistan Penal Code), make it a criminal offense to insult another's religion. These laws are misused to settle personal scores and target religious minorities, including Shia Muslims. In June 2017, a Shia Muslim was sentenced to death after allegedly making blasphemous remarks on social media, the first time that the death penalty has been imposed for blasphemy on the internet^{23 24}.
- 4.2.2 For further information on the blasphemy laws and the penalties for misuse, see the [Country and Policy Information Note on Pakistan: Christians and Christian converts](#).

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¹⁹ DFAT, 'Country Information Report Pakistan', (paragraph 3.35), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

²⁰ BBC, 'Religions: Sunni and Shi'a', 29 August 2009, [url](#).

²¹ IRB, 'Pakistan: How Shia Muslims differ from Sunnis', 9 January 2014, [url](#).

²² Constitution, [url](#).

²³ FCO, 'Human rights and democracy report 2017', (Chapter 5), 5 October 2018, [url](#).

²⁴ CSW, 'Pakistan: Freedom of religion or belief,' September 2018, [url](#).

5. State treatment and attitudes

5.1 Public representation

5.1.1 The DFAT report stated:

‘Shi’a are well represented in parliament and regularly contest elections for mainstream political parties. The Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) has had several high-profile Shi’a leaders, including Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, his daughter Benazir Bhutto, and Benazir Bhutto’s husband Asif Ali Zardari, all of whom served as Pakistan’s president and/or prime minister. Zardari and Benazir’s son, Bilawal, is the current leader of the PPP. Other major parties, including Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), also have significant Shi’a following. Sectarian-based political parties, such as the Sunni Deobandi Jamiat Ulema-e-Islami (F) party and the exclusively Shi’a Majlis-e-Wahdutul Muslimeen (MWM) party, have less support.’²⁵

5.1.2 Minority Rights Group International (MRGI) noted in its June 2018 report ‘Pakistani Shi’a are represented in all walks of life, but in many cases have succeeded in playing prominent roles in Pakistan’s cultural sphere and attaining influential, high-profile positions.’²⁶

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5.2 Discrimination and harassment

5.2.1 There were reports that police issued First Information Reports (FIRs) against Shia Muslims during Muharram for undertaking mourning processions without police permission or for violating time restrictions on the processions^{27 28} (see also [Enforced disappearances](#)).

5.2.2 For information on FIRs, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Background information, including actors of protection and internal relocation](#).

5.2.3 According to the DFAT report, ‘There is no credible evidence of systemic discrimination against Shi’a in gaining admission to the public service, police [or] military. However, there are perceptions of discrimination against Shi’a at higher levels of some organisations.’²⁹ (see also [Employment](#)).

5.2.4 CPIT was unable to find additional information on state discrimination against Shia Muslims in the sources consulted in compiling this note – see [Bibliography](#) for full list of sources.

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5.3 Enforced disappearances

5.3.1 The US Department of State’s International Religious Freedom (USSD IRF) Report for 2017 noted:

²⁵ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.41), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

²⁶ MRGI, ‘World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Pakistan’, June 2018, [url](#).

²⁷ Express Tribune, ‘Shia elders, authorities join heads on Muharram security’, 1 September 2018, [url](#).

²⁸ Pakistan Times, ‘Shia community stages sit-in at The Mall’, 23 October 2018, [url](#).

²⁹ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.39), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

'According to press reports, in October [2017] Majlis Wahdat-ul-Muslimeen, a Shia political organization, launched a protest campaign in Karachi to highlight the issue of Shia activists who had been unlawfully detained or "disappeared" by authorities in recent years. Shia representatives had previously reported the government targeted Shia activists under the pretense of law enforcement actions. The Sindh chief minister denied the allegations.'³⁰

- 5.3.2 In May 2018, BBC News stated that community activists reported that 140 Pakistani Shias had 'disappeared' over the last 2 years. They were allegedly taken by the Pakistani security forces. Over 25 of the missing disappeared from Karachi. Their families stated they were taken from their homes at night and taken into custody by the intelligence services. Community leaders reported that the men were suspected of links to the Zainabiyoun Brigade, a Shia militia fighting alongside the Assad regime in Syria³¹. In June 2018, the Daily Times reported that the Shia Missing Persons Release Committee (SMPRC) and concerned family members held a protest in Karachi demanding the recovery of missing Shia Muslims from across the country³².

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5.4 State support and security operations

- 5.4.1 The US Department of State Country Reports on Terrorism 2017 noted 'The Pakistani government and military continued high-profile efforts to disrupt terrorist attacks and eliminate anti-state militants.'³³
- 5.4.2 The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted in its annual report, covering 2017 events '[...] there have been some positive developments in recent years, especially the decrease in targeted killings of Shi'a Muslims in Karachi in the aftermath of the law and order operation launched by the Army Rangers and city police in 2011. Further, the government has encouraged and facilitated intrareligious conferences that seek to bridge the growing sectarian divide in the country.'³⁴
- 5.4.3 Federal and provincial governments undertook extensive security planning during Ashura commemorations in 2017 and 2018 and implemented a strong security presence to protect Shias during this period^{35 36 37 38}. Security was provided in Karachi during a protest demanding the recovery of disappeared Shia Muslims³⁹ (see [Enforced disappearances](#)). Strict security measures were also put in place for the Shia Muslim observance of Chelhum^{40 41}.

³⁰ USSD, 'IRF Report for 2017', (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

³¹ BBC News, 'The story of Pakistan's "disappeared" Shias', 31 May 2018, [url](#).

³² Daily Times, 'Mourners seek return of missing Shia Muslims', 7 June 2018, [url](#).

³³ USSD 'Country Reports on Terrorism 2017', (Pakistan), 19 September 2018, [url](#).

³⁴ USCIRF, 'Annual Report 2018', (Conditions for Shi'a Muslims), 28 April 2018, [url](#).

³⁵ The News International, 'Muslims mark Ashura across Pakistan', 22 September 2018, [url](#).

³⁶ Dawn, 'Ashura observed peacefully amid tight security in KP', 23 September 2018, [url](#).

³⁷ Express Tribune, 'Ashura processions culminate peacefully', 3 October 2017, [url](#).

³⁸ Dawn, 'Ashura processions culminate peacefully across country', 1 October 2017, [url](#).

³⁹ Daily Times, 'Mourners seek return of missing Shia Muslims', 7 June 2018, [url](#).

⁴⁰ Dawn, 'Province-wide ban on pillion riding for chehlum security', 29 October 2018, [url](#).

⁴¹ Express Tribune, 'Chehlum security', 29 October 2018, [url](#).

- 5.4.4 The DFAT report noted ‘DFAT understands that the Pakistani military provides escort services for Shi’a pilgrims to protect them from attacks. However, these sources also told DFAT that there can be significant gaps between military escorts (sometimes up to three months), and people travelling outside of these times either have to wait or face a significant risk of targeting by militant groups.’⁴² The US Department of State’s Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2017 (USSD HR Report 2017) noted ‘Shia organizations complained that the government failed to provide adequate security to pilgrims traveling through Sindh and Balochistan en route to Iran.’⁴³
- 5.4.5 Speaking at a press conference on 25 October 2018, Special Assistant on Overseas Pakistanis, Zulfiqar Bukhari, said that the federal government had provided ‘all facilities to pilgrims going to Iran and Iraq’. Bukhari was quoted as saying “‘During the last one week 45,000 Shia pilgrims travelled to Iran and Iraq from Pakistan and they were provided complete assistance and facilities by the government.’”⁴⁴ Federal and provincial government officials pledged security for pilgrims^{45 46}. On 13 November 2018, The Express Tribune reported that Pakistan’s Counter Terrorism Department arrested a man suspected of being involved in the 2014 Taftan suicide attack, which targeted Shia pilgrims, and killings of Shia Hazara community in Balochistan⁴⁷.
- 5.4.6 For further information on security operations undertaken by the Pakistan government aimed at curbing militant violence, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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Section 6 updated: 2 January 2019

6. Societal treatment and attitudes

6.1 Discrimination

- 6.1.1 The DFAT report noted ‘Societal discrimination in Pakistan tends to manifest in the form of positive discrimination (nepotism, patronage, etc.) in favour of one’s own family, tribal or social group (though some minorities do suffer ongoing discrimination). However, some (typically low-level) anti-Shi’a discrimination does occur.’⁴⁸
- 6.1.2 MRGI noted ‘Though as Muslims they are free from certain restrictions affecting other religious groups, Shi’a are still regarded as apostates by some extremist Sunni groups and individuals. As a result, many face regular hostility from extremists and public calls for members to be killed.’⁴⁹ The report added ‘Shi’a have also been subjected to various forms of hate

⁴² DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.73), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

⁴³ USSD, ‘Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2017’, (Section 1d), 20 April 2018, [url](#).

⁴⁴ Dawn, ‘Minister criticises attack on convoy of FC inspector general’, 26 October 2018, [url](#).

⁴⁵ Express Tribune, ‘CM Kamal assures security for pilgrims to Iran’, 9 September 2017, [url](#).

⁴⁶ Dawn, ‘Minister criticises attack on convoy of FC inspector general’, 26 October 2018, [url](#).

⁴⁷ Express Tribune, ‘“Terrorist” involved in 2014 Taftan attack held’, 13 November 2018, [url](#).

⁴⁸ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.38), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

⁴⁹ MRGI, ‘World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Pakistan’, June 2018, [url](#).

speech, most commonly as campaigns in mosques, schools, public spaces and increasingly on social media. Shi'a are vilified as a community for their religious beliefs and individuals are also picked out for criticism.⁵⁰

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6.2 Sectarian violence

6.2.1 According to the DFAT report:

'Shi'a continue to face a threat from anti-Shi'a militant groups, including Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP, also known as Ahl-e-Sunnat-Wal-Jamaat or ASWJ), and various factions of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (the Pakistani Taliban, or TTP). Sectarian violence has reduced significantly in recent years, particularly since Operation Zarb-e-Azb (and its successor, Operation Radd ul Fasaad) and the NAP [[National Action Plan](#) – a counter terrorism and extremism operative] were implemented.'⁵¹

6.2.2 The DFAT report added:

'LeJ and its sub-groups such as LeJ al-Alami tend to be the main perpetrators of violence against Shi'a in Pakistan. The LeJ is a collection of loosely coordinated cells linked to other militant groups such as the TTP and, more recently, Islamic State. Originally based in Punjab province as an offshoot of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), the LeJ's reported objective is to establish an Islamist Sunni state in Pakistan. It also seeks to have Shi'a declared "non-believers" or apostates, and to eliminate other religious groups such as Jews, Christians and Hindus. The LeJ has claimed a number of attacks on the Shi'a community in recent years, particularly Hazaras in Quetta and other Shi'a groups in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Karachi.'⁵²

6.2.3 The USCIRF report noted in its annual report, covering 2017 events:

'During the past year, the Shi'a Muslim population continued to face security threats from extremist groups and increased social discrimination from the public. [...] Despite government efforts, Shi'a Muslims continued to be targeted in parts of the country, especially in the restive border region. The LeJ [Lashkar-e-Jhangvi] and the Pakistani Taliban, who openly admit to the sectarian motives behind their missions, launched several attacks during the year. For example, in the aftermath of a January 2017 twin terrorist attack at a busy market in Parachinar and Quetta that left more than 80 people dead, the Pakistani Taliban claimed credit for the attack and explained it was meant to "teach a lesson to Shi'as".⁵³

6.2.4 On 26 January 2017, Dawn reported that the Shia community in Karachi protested against what they called a 'renewed wave' of sectarian killings after the murders of 2 prominent members of the community, which followed a series of attacks in the preceding few months in Karachi⁵⁴. The USCIRF noted that following security operations, which launched in 2011, there had

⁵⁰ MRGI, 'World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Pakistan', June 2018, [url](#).

⁵¹ DFAT, 'Country Information Report Pakistan', (paragraph 3.42), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

⁵² DFAT, 'Country Information Report Pakistan', (paragraph 3.44), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

⁵³ USCIRF, 'Annual Report 2018', (Conditions for Shi'a Muslims), 28 April 2018, [url](#).

⁵⁴ Dawn, 'Protest against renewed series of "sectarian" killings in Karachi', 26 January 2017, [url](#).

been a decline in the number of targeted killings of Shia Muslims in Karachi in recent years⁵⁵.

- 6.2.5 The Escola de Cultura de Pau (School for a Culture of Peace – ECP), an academic peace research institution located at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Autonomous University of Barcelona), noted in its report ‘Alert 18!’, covering 2017 events:

‘The Taliban insurgency was [...] responsible for several attacks, some of them conducted by the Taliban Jamaat-ul-Ahrar faction. Parachinar, the predominantly Shia capital of Kurram Agency, was hit particularly hard by the violence and suffered several attacks. One took place near a Shia mosque in March, claiming 23 lives and wounded 73. In collaboration with the Taliban faction led by Shahryar Mahsud, the Sunni armed group Lashkar-e-Jhan[g]vi carried out another attack on a market in Parachinar that killed 22 people in January. Around 90 people were injured by the explosion, which took place in a mainly Shia area. One of the most serious attacks of the year took place in Parachinar in June, when 72 people were killed and more than 200 were wounded. Lashkari-Jhangvi’s [LeJ’s] al-Alami faction claimed responsibility.’⁵⁶

- 6.2.6 The MRGI report of June 2018 stated:

‘The targeting of Shi’a professionals by militant groups have continued to the present day, and in recent years these attacks have been especially bloody. Bombings carried out by militants and terrorist organizations have targeted social gatherings and crowded Shi’a areas with near impunity. Shrines have also been attacked on a regular basis, including an October 2017 attack in Baluchistan that killed at least 20 worshippers. There have been no meaningful crackdowns or investigations into the perpetrators of this violence, and police have generally been unable to stop attacks when they occurred. Though the escalation of violent attacks against Shi’a in the last decade has occurred alongside a general deterioration in the country’s security context, the specific attacks against Shi’a are distinct in character and intent to most political killings, armed conflict deaths and indiscriminate violence against civilians. There have been a number of attacks on Shi’a pilgrims travelling to and from Iran to attend holy sites and festivals: the 700-km highway connecting Pakistan to Iran runs through Baluchistan and is vulnerable to militant attacks. The Shi’a community is not only affected by the wave of killings and suicide bombings.’⁵⁷

- 6.2.7 Figures on the number of civilian casualties vary according to the different sources, likely due to different methodologies on collecting data.

- 6.2.8 The DFAT report noted ‘While sectarian violence affects people of all religions and sects, Shi’a have traditionally represented a higher proportion of the casualties.[...] Around 820 Shi’a have been killed in sectarian violence since the beginning of 2013 [as of September 2017], out of a total Pakistani Shi’a population of about 30 million people.’⁵⁸ According to the South Asia

⁵⁵ USCIRF, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (Conditions for Shi’a Muslims), 28 April 2018, [url](#).

⁵⁶ ECP, ‘Alert 2018!’, (page 52), 2018, [url](#).

⁵⁷ MRGI, ‘World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples – Pakistan’, June 2018, [url](#).

⁵⁸ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.43), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

Terrorism Portal (SATP), over 1,000 Shia were killed from 2013 up to 17 June 2018⁵⁹.

- 6.2.9 The Global Extremism Monitor (GEM) 2017, which draws on information from multiple news sources and other corroborating information, documented the deaths of 136 Shias killed in sectarian attacks in Pakistan in 2017. According to the GEM, more than 36% of those attacks took place in Balochistan province, where Shias constitute 20% of the population⁶⁰.
- 6.2.10 According to the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), which compiles data from the media, field sources and official records, in 2017 there were 16 reported targeted attacks against members of Shia community resulting in 68 fatalities and 96 injured⁶¹. The majority of attacks were concentrated in Kurram Agency in FATA, Quetta in Balochistan and Dera Ismail (DI) Khan in KP (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)⁶².
- 6.2.11 The South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) compiled data from news reports and recorded that 114 Shias were killed in Pakistan in 2017 and 308 injured. According to the data, 18 of the fatalities were Shia Hazara⁶³. Up to 17 June 2018, 7 Shia Muslims had been killed and 4 injured in targeted attacks in 2018 (including Shia Hazara)⁶⁴.
- 6.2.12 In its Annual Security Report 2017, the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), a think-tank conducting independent research, reported a rise in victims of sectarian violence against Shia Muslims, recording 166 deaths in 2017 compared to 25 in 2016. The deaths of Shia Hazara were recorded separately; 8 in 2016 compared to 12 in 2017⁶⁵.
- 6.2.13 The CRSS noted that in the first three quarters of 2018, Shia and Shia Hazaras were the religious communities most affected by sectarian violence in Pakistan. According to the CRSS quarterly reports, in the first 9 months of 2018, there were a total of 22 civilian fatalities due to sectarian violence in the Shia community (of a total of 47 across all religions), 8 of whom were Shia Hazara. CRSS recorded 3 Shia fatalities in the third quarter of 2018, a decline of 75% compared to the first quarter, when 12 fatalities were recorded, including 2 Shia Hazara^{66 67}.
- 6.2.14 On 23 November 2018, a bomb explosion at a market in the Shia-dominated Kalaya area of Orakzai district, KP, killed up to 31 people, including at least 22 Shias⁶⁸. Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty reported at least 35 people were killed and more than 50 wounded, the majority of whom were Shias⁶⁹. The attack occurred despite high security at and around Imambargahs (Shia congregation hall) and mosques following intelligence reports that terrorists

⁵⁹ SATP, 'Shias killed in Pakistan since 2001', up to 17 June 2018, [url](#).

⁶⁰ Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 'GEM 2017', (Pakistan), 13 September 2018, [url](#).

⁶¹ PIPS, 'Pakistan Security Report 2017', (page 18), 7 January 2018, [url](#).

⁶² PIPS, 'Pakistan Security Report 2017', (page 23), 7 January 2018, [url](#).

⁶³ SATP, 'Shias killed in Pakistan since 2001', up to 17 June 2018, [url](#).

⁶⁴ SATP, 'Shias killed in Pakistan since 2001', up to 17 June 2018, [url](#).

⁶⁵ CRSS, 'Annual Security Report 2017', (page 61), February 2018, [url](#).

⁶⁶ CRSS, 'Quarterly Security Report Q2, 2018', 11 July 2018, [url](#).

⁶⁷ CRSS, 'Quarterly Security Report 2018 Third Quarter, 2018', 18 October 2018, [url](#).

⁶⁸ Express Tribune, '31 dead as bomb rips through busy market in Orakzai', 23 November 2018, [url](#).

⁶⁹ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, 'Pakistan Foils Suicide Attack', 23 November 2018, [url](#)

might attack Friday congregations in the area⁷⁰. According to the India news site This Week, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack⁷¹.

6.2.15 The 2018 and 2017 [Ashura](#) commemorations passed without incident^{72 73 74 75}.

6.2.16 For further information on Hazaras see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Hazaras](#), and for information on the security situation in general and on militant groups, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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6.3 Fatwas

6.3.1 According to the Encyclopedia of Islam, a fatwa is an ‘opinion on a point of law, the term “law” applying, in Islam, to all civil or religious matters.’⁷⁶ The Islamic Supreme Council of America noted ‘Most importantly, a fatwā is not by definition a pronouncement of death or a declaration of war. A fatwā is an Islamic legal pronouncement, issued by an expert in religious law (mufti), pertaining to a specific issue, usually at the request of an individual or judge to resolve an issue where Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), is unclear.’⁷⁷

6.3.2 The following information was provided to the IRB of Canada’s Research Directorate in December 2007 from the Chairman of the Government of Pakistan’s [Council of Islamic Ideology](#) (CII), a constitutional body which advises the government on Islamic legislation:

‘[I]n Pakistan, [the] issuance of fatwa is not organized by the state. It is privately managed by different institutions. As far as religious official institutions are concerned, there are ministries of Religious Affairs in the centre and also in provinces but they are not fatwa organizations. The Council of Islamic Ideology is a constitutional body which advises the government on Islamic legislation but it also does not issue fatwa.

‘There is no official organization for [the] issuance of fatwa in Pakistan nor is there any official format of fatwa. The government does not publicize any fatwa because there is no official fatwa institution or an official Mufti.

‘Fatwas are issued privately by various scholars in whom the people have trust. The common practice is that a number of religious teaching institutions (Madrasas) have organizations of fatwa under their supervision. There are also individual scholars who issue these fatwas. However, there is no process of official recognition of any mufti or fatwa. The people consult these institutions and individuals on the basis of their knowledge and reputation.

‘It is difficult to define the reach of a fatwa because the acceptability of [a] fatwa does not depend on official recognition or organization. The reach of

⁷⁰ Express Tribune, ‘31 dead as bomb rips through busy market in Orakzai’, 23 November 2018, [url](#).

⁷¹ This Week, ‘ISIS claims northwestern Pak attack’, 24 November 2018, [url](#).

⁷² The News International, ‘Muslims mark Ashura across Pakistan’, 22 September 2018, [url](#).

⁷³ Dawn, ‘Ashura observed peacefully amid tight security in KP’, 23 September 2018, [url](#).

⁷⁴ Express Tribune, ‘Ashura processions culminate peacefully’, 3 October 2017, [url](#).

⁷⁵ Dawn, ‘Ashura processions culminate peacefully across country’, 1 October 2017, [url](#).

⁷⁶ Encyclopaedia of Islam, ‘Fatwa’, 2012, [url](#).

⁷⁷ The Islamic Supreme Council of America, ‘What is a Fatwa?’, n.d., [url](#).

[a] fatwa depends on personal recognition. It also depends on [the] religious group to which the inquirer of the fatwa belongs.

'The Government of Pakistan [has] no control over the issuance of fatwa. There [is] no legislation for organizing or controlling the fatwa.

'According to the theory of fatwa, a fatwa is not binding. It is not synonymous with legal judgment. A person may ask fatwa on the same question from several scholars. A mufti is allowed to revoke his fatwa under several circumstances, including new information, on realizing his mistake in the interpretation of the sources or finding new evidences. The corrected fatwa is issued with a note explaining the circumstances.'⁷⁸

- 6.3.3 Reuters reported on 16 January 2018 that 'More than 1,800 Pakistani Muslim clerics have issued an Islamic directive, or fatwa, forbidding suicide bombings, in a book unveiled by the government [...] the clerics declared suicide bombings to be forbidden, or "haraam".'⁷⁹
- 6.3.4 On 28 November 2018, Dawn reported 'The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) demanded [...] that the government enhance punishments for those misusing their powers to issue religious decrees (fatwas).' Chairman of the CII, Dr Qibla Ayaz, stated "The responsibility to implement recommendations of the CII is with the government and we want severe punishments for those clerics who misuse their powers and issue fatwas declaring Muslims non-believer or non-Muslim and pronounce them liable to be killed as per Sharia law," [...] adding: "All such decrees have been rejected by the council".⁸⁰
- 6.3.5 The CII published a notice (undated), on its website, declaring the issuance of a fatwa, using the Council's emblem, was fraudulent. The CII said that the fatwa, issued by Mufti Asad Shah Bukhari, had nothing to do with the Council and the said Mufti was not a member of the Council in any capacity. According to the notice, the Council was considering legal action⁸¹.

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6.4 Intersect marriage

- 6.4.1 For information on marriage between Sunni and Shia Muslims, see the country policy and information on [Pakistan: Interfaith marriage](#). CPIT was unable to find any additional information on intersect marriages at the time of writing in the sources consulted in compiling this note – see [Bibliography](#) for a full list of sources. For information on 'love' marriages, see the country policy and information on [Pakistan: Women fearing gender based harm/violence](#).

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⁷⁸ IRB, 'Pakistan: Response by the Chairman', 11 January 2008, [url](#).

⁷⁹ Reuters, 'Pakistan clerics issue fatwa against suicide bombings', 16 January 2018, [url](#).

⁸⁰ Dawn, 'CII seeks enhanced punishment for misuse of fatwas', 28 November 2018, [url](#).

⁸¹ CII, 'Fraudulent use of Council's emblem for fatwa', n.d., [url](#).

7. Education and employment

7.1 Education

7.1.1 As noted in the DFAT report:

‘Sunni and Shi’a students attend the same public and private education institutions. Although the Constitution prohibits discrimination in granting admission to government schools, students must declare their religious affiliation when applying for entry into both public and private institutions, including universities. Islamic studies are compulsory for all Muslim students in state-run schools. Credible sources told DFAT that there are issues of religious bias in public education institutions in Pakistan. While this predominantly affects non-Muslim religious minorities, Shi’a groups also raised concerns over religious bias in the public school syllabus and proscribed textbooks. School textbooks contain depictions of Sunni prayer rituals, and omit prominent Shi’a figures from historical texts. Access to high-quality education is limited for some Pakistanis, regardless of religious affiliation, and depends primarily on an individual’s geographic location and financial resources.’⁸²

7.1.2 In September 2018 Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reported ‘Some textbooks include biased and derogatory language towards [...] Shi’as.’⁸³

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7.2 Employment

7.2.1 The DFAT report noted ‘Shi’a are represented in the professional community in Pakistan, including the medical and legal professions. There is no credible evidence of systemic discrimination against Shi’a in gaining admission to the public service, police, military or the private sector. However, there are perceptions of discrimination against Shi’a at higher levels of some organisations.’⁸⁴

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⁸² DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.40), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

⁸³ CSW, ‘Pakistan: Freedom of religion or belief,’ September 2018, [url](#).

⁸⁴ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.39), 1 September 2017, [url](#).

Terms of reference

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

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

- Demography
 - Population
 - Characteristics
- Legal rights
- State treatment and attitudes
 - Discrimination
 - State support/Security operations
 - Police and judiciary
- Societal treatment and attitudes
 - Discrimination
 - Sectarian/militant violence
- Employment and education

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Version control

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Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- valid from **23 January 2019**

Changes from last version of this note

Updated assessment and country information.

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ARCHIVE