



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Pakistan: Christians and Christian converts

Version 4.0

February 2021

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 [Introduction](#) 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 of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- The general humanitarian situation is so severe as to breach Article 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC (the Qualification Directive) / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules
- The security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that it would breach Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- A claim is 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: 15 February 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution and/or serious harm by state or non-state actors because the person is a Christian.

1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 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 denominations including Evangelists and Renewalists (see [Christian denominations and population](#)).

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

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

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

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

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2.2 Exclusion

2.2.1 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.

2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.

2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Convention reason(s)

2.3.1 Actual or imputed religion.

2.3.2 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.

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

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2.4 Overview

2.4.1 As at July 2020, the population of Pakistan was estimated to be over 233 million, with a majority Muslim population (96.4%). According to the 2017 provisional census results, Christians represented 1.59% (approximately 3.7 million of the current population estimate). Other estimates put the Christian population at over 4 million. The Christian population is reported to be split almost equally between Catholics and Protestants. Punjab province has the largest Christian population, the majority of whom are based in and around Lahore (see [Demography](#)).

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2.5 Risk

a. State treatment of born Christians

2.5.1 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 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).

2.5.2 The Constitution states minorities are equal citizens of Pakistan and are free to profess their religion and visit their places of worship. There are no laws that discriminate against Christians, although comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation is lacking. Christians have their own personal laws regarding marriage and divorce. A draft bill, aimed at combining and improving the current personal laws, was under consultation at the time of writing of this note (see [Legal context](#)).

2.5.3 Whilst focussing on mainly Muslim affairs, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony provides monetary support to minority religious groups. The National Commission on Minorities (NCM) was established in May 2020 though there are concerns about its effectiveness and independence. In September 2020, a Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Interfaith Harmony was appointed, but their role and focus was unclear. In October 2020 the government announced a plan to establish interfaith harmony councils across the country to promote religious tolerance (see [State support, security and outreach](#)).

2.5.4 Since 2009, 5% of all Federal and Provincial Government posts should be filled by religious minority workers, although government statistics for 2017-2018 indicate only 2.8% (16,711) of government workers were non-Muslims. The majority (15,069) were Christians, many of whom were employed in low paid menial jobs such as sanitation work (see [Access to employment](#)).

2.5.5 The government has taken steps to remove content deemed offensive or discriminatory to religious minorities in educational textbooks and curricula. Although by law religious minority students are not required to study Islam,

some state schools do not offer the alternative subject 'Ethics', or teachers and textbooks are not always available in this topic (see [Religious education and schools](#) and [Discrimination in schools, textbooks and curricula](#)).

- 2.5.6 Christian festivals are officially recognised and celebrated. Christians are, in general, able to access their places of worship. Religious symbols and decorations are openly displayed and Bibles and other Christian literature are sold in Christian book stores (see [Christian festivals](#) and [Churches, religious symbols and publications](#)).
- 2.5.7 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).
- 2.5.8 In 2017 there was reported to be over 1 million evangelical Christians and, according to one source, there were thousands of evangelical churches across Pakistan. Evangelical Christians appear to be active across the country although not all may seek to evangelise, that is, to convert or seek to convert another person to Christianity. Although legal, propagating the bible may not always be well received (see [Legal rights for religious minorities](#) and [Christian denominations and population](#)).
- 2.5.9 The Upper Tribunal also 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).
- 2.5.10 The blasphemy laws, which carry severe penalties, apply to, and have been used against, all religious groups, including Muslims, though they are disproportionately used against religious minorities, including Christians. There are reports of Christians being arrested and charged under the blasphemy laws. Between 2001 and 2019 there were 16 convictions of Christians for blasphemy. Whilst convictions continued in 2020, in 2015 it was reported that over 80% of blasphemy cases were overturned on appeal. Acquittals occur though often after the accused has spent years in prison (see Legal context – [Blasphemy, Justice system](#) and [Arrests, convictions and imprisonment under blasphemy laws](#)).
- 2.5.11 As at January 2021, of 53 persons imprisoned for their faith (but not necessarily for blasphemy), 31 were Christians and at least 11 had been sentenced to death, whilst a further 9 were awaiting trial or sentence (see [Arrests, convictions and imprisonment under blasphemy laws](#)).
- 2.5.12 In [AK & SK](#) the Upper Tribunal 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).

- 2.5.13 There are not very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to suggest a change in the situation for Christians in Pakistan since the promulgation of [AK & SK](#). In general, Christians are unlikely to be subject to treatment or discrimination by the state that is sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to amount to persecution.
- 2.5.14 However, evangelising Christians who seek to proselytise may find themselves facing a charge of blasphemy and may be able to demonstrate that use of the blasphemy laws against them while practising their religion could amount to persecution.
- 2.5.15 Decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors specific to the person which would place them at risk. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that they would be at risk of serious harm or persecution on account of their actual or perceived religion.
- 2.5.16 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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b. Societal treatment of born Christians

- 2.5.17 Christians experience societal discrimination in various forms, for example, by being called derogatory names, ridiculing of their Christian faith and in the form of micro aggressions such as people refusing to use the same crockery or utensils, touch items touched by Christians, eat food cooked by them or to cut their hair (see [Discrimination and harassment](#)).
- 2.5.18 Christian activists report widespread discrimination against Christians in private employment, including difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labour, which are often advertised as being open only to Christian applicants (see [Access to employment](#)). Christian students report discrimination in schools, including segregation, as well as physical and psychological abuse by other students and teachers (see [Discrimination in schools, textbooks and curricula](#)).
- 2.5.19 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).

- 2.5.20 Accusations of blasphemy are used against all faiths, and the blasphemy laws are often misapplied to settle personal scores or for personal gain. According to Christian and minority rights groups, at least 241 Christians were accused of blasphemy between 1987 and 2018 (approximately 8 accusations per year). However, in the context of the size of the Christian population, only a very small proportion of the community face blasphemy charges. Whether or not an allegation of blasphemy is found to be true, the accused, their family and the whole community sometimes face vigilante violence, including murder, though attacks on minority neighbourhoods in general have reportedly decreased (see [Accusations of blasphemy](#) and [Communal violence](#)).
- 2.5.21 Regarding women, the Upper Tribunal, 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).
- 2.5.22 Christian women and girls faced multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination due to their minority status, gender and class. They may be identified by their attire, for example, not wearing a head covering, and face harassment as a result (see [Women and girls](#)).
- 2.5.23 For the general situation of women in Pakistan see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Women fearing gender-based violence](#).
- 2.5.24 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).
- 2.5.25 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).
- 2.5.26 Instances of abduction and forced conversion to Islam of Christian women and girls continue to be reported although accurate data on the number of conversions that occur each year is not available, with one source suggesting that some reports have inflated the actual numbers of cases. Voluntary conversions occur for a variety of reasons, including for social mobility and economic prosperity, as well as for marriage, which may not always be accepted by families. Whilst the government have spoken against the forced conversions of religious minorities, action to prevent such cases is reported to be inadequate (see [Forced conversions to Islam](#)).

- 2.5.27 Terrorist attacks against Christians by Islamic militants have been reported over the years. The last major attack occurred in 2016 when at least 75 persons were killed on Easter Sunday after a suicide bomber targeted Christians celebrating Easter in a public park in Lahore. In 2019 it was reported that, unlike in previous years, there were no targeted attacks against Christians by militant groups and the incidence of violence against religious minorities in general had dropped over the past 5 years. There were no reported terrorist-related attacks in 2020 (see [Militant violence](#)).
- 2.5.28 In [AK & SK](#) the Upper Tribunal 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).
- 2.5.29 There are not very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to suggest a change in the situation for Christians in Pakistan generally, including women and those fearing forced conversion to Islam, since the promulgation of [AK & SK](#). In general, Christians are unlikely to be subject to treatment or discrimination by non-state actors that is sufficiently serious by its nature or repetition to amount to persecution.
- 2.5.30 Decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors specific to the person which would place them at risk, taking into account factors such as the person’s age, gender, education, socio-economic background and place of residence. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that they would be at real risk of serious harm or persecution on account of their actual or perceived religion.
- 2.5.31 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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c. State treatment of Christian converts

- 2.5.32 There is no law against religious conversion but renouncing Islam (apostasy) is widely considered to be a form of blasphemy (see Legal context – [Apostasy](#) and [Blasphemy](#)).
- 2.5.33 The situation is far more difficult for a person who is known to have converted from Islam to Christianity than for a person who was born Christian. It is rare, in Pakistan, for a person to openly convert to Christianity as it is likely that a person’s conversion will become well-known within their community, with potential repercussions (see [Consequences of converting from Islam to Christianity](#)).
- 2.5.34 In general, society is extremely hostile towards converts to Christianity. A Mullah may issue a fatwa calling for a death sentence against a convert who has been deemed an apostate. People who are known to have converted to Christianity suffer acts of violence, intimidation and serious discrimination from non-state actors, which can, in individual cases, amount to persecution and/or serious harm. Such treatment is prevalent throughout Pakistan (see [Consequences of converting from Islam to Christianity](#)).
- 2.5.35 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.

- 2.5.36 In general, a person who is known or is likely to be known to have converted from Islam to Christianity and is open about their faith and conversion is likely to face societal discrimination and harassment that by its nature and repetition amounts to persecution. However, each case needs to be considered on its facts.
- 2.5.37 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.
- 2.5.38 In cases where the person will be discreet about their religion on return, the reasons for such discretion need to be considered in the light of [HJ \(Iran\)](#). A person should not be expected to conceal their religion, their conversion or their activities relating to the conversion of others, if they are not willing to do so. However, if the person would conceal his or her religion or religious activities for reasons other than for a fear of persecution, then the person would have no basis for their claim for international protection. Each case must be considered on its facts.

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2.6 Protection

- 2.6.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they will not, in general, be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.6.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, including 'rogue' state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.6.3 The state has established an effective criminal justice system that is 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](#)).
- 2.6.4 Specifically in regard to Christians, police security is provided at churches, reducing, though not eliminating the risk of attack, and sometimes complementing the communities' own security arrangements (see [Churches, religious symbols and publications](#) and [State support, security and outreach](#)). The government has also taken steps to counter terrorism and limit the capability of terrorist groups that target the general public as well as religious minorities specifically (see [State support, security and outreach](#)). Police have intervened on numerous occasions to suppress mob violence directed at persons accused of blasphemy, including Christians. However,

the correct procedures are not consistently applied by police when investigating blasphemy cases, lower courts do not always apply the correct evidential standards and judges are often reluctant to decide blasphemy cases due to fear of violent retribution (see [Accusations of blasphemy and Justice system](#)). The government has also sometimes intervened and provided assistance through the courts and law enforcement in situations of attempted kidnapping and forced conversion (see [Forced conversions to Islam](#)).

- 2.6.5 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. 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.
- 2.6.6 For general information on protection, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Actors of protection](#).
- 2.6.7 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.7 Internal relocation

- 2.7.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.7.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from a non-state actor or 'rogue' state actor, decision makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person.
- 2.7.3 The Court of Appeal in [SC \(Jamaica\) v Home Secretary \[2017\] EWCA Civ 2112](#) held that, 'the evaluative exercise is intended to be holistic and ... no burden or standard of proof arises in relation to the overall issue of whether it is reasonable to internally relocate' (paragraph 36).
- 2.7.4 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).
- 2.7.5 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).
- 2.7.6 There are not very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to suggest a change in the situation for Christians in Pakistan generally, including in regard to the numbers of blasphemy charges, deaths and attacks, since the promulgation of [AK & SK](#). In general, Christians are unlikely to be subject to

treatment or discrimination by non-state actors that is sufficiently serious by its nature or repetition to amount to persecution.

- 2.7.7 In general, a person who is a born Christian and has a fear of persecution from a non-state actor is likely to be able to relocate, depending on their circumstances and the nature, capability and intent of their persecutor. However, given that ill-treatment towards Christian converts is prevalent throughout Pakistan, internal relocation to escape such treatment is unlikely to be a reasonable option, particularly where the person is known to have converted to Christianity.
- 2.7.8 Women without support of family or a male guardian may be less able to relocate. For further information on internal relocation for women, see the the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Women fearing gender-based violence](#).
- 2.7.9 For general information on internal relocation, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Background information, including internal relocation](#).
- 2.7.10 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.8 Certification

- 2.8.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.8.2 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

Section 3 updated: 11 January 2021

3. History and origins

3.1 Christians in Pakistan

3.1.1 Whilst Christianity has a centuries-long history in South Asia¹, most Christians in Pakistan are descendants of low-caste Hindus who converted during the British colonial rule, to escape caste discrimination^{2 3}.

3.1.2 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 Dalits⁴ 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 Chuhras 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 Chuhras 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.’⁵

3.1.3 Minority Rights Group International (MRGI) noted in its profile of Pakistan Christians, dated June 2018, ‘Christians provided labour to British garrisons, and Pakistani cantonment towns still have Christian settlements. There were also Christian traders from Goa [India] and elsewhere who settled in Karachi.’⁶ Dawn, a Pakistani English-language news site, noted a small percentage of Pakistani Christians were of Anglo-Indian and Goan origin⁷.

3.1.4 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, westerns [sic], converts from Hindu, Sikh and Muslims but Punjabi Christians dominate in number. During the British rule over India, thousands of Christian missionaries tried to convert Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims but they

¹ Encyclopedia.com, ‘[Pakistan, The Catholic church in](#)’, 24 November 2020

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

³ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.136), 20 February 2019

⁴ ‘The word ‘Dalit’ is a self-conscious name for untouchables in India that is rooted in marginalization and caste discrimination. ‘Dalit’ is from the Sanskrit root, dal that means to crack, split, be broken, torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed, and destroyed.’ Singha, S., ‘[Dalit Christians and Caste Consciousness in Pakistan](#)’ (page 18), 23 April 2015

⁵ Singha, S., ‘[Dalit Christians and Caste Consciousness in Pakistan](#)’ (page iii), 23 April 2015

⁶ MRGI, ‘[Pakistan Christians](#)’, June 2018

⁷ Dawn, ‘[Under PTI, a better law for Pakistan's Christians](#)’, 13 September 2019

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, Sheikhpura and Kasur from 1870s to 1920.’⁸

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Section 4 updated: 15 February 2021

4. Demography

4.1 Christian denominations and population

- 4.1.1 The population of Pakistan was estimated to be over 233 million as at July 2020, with a majority Muslim population (96.4%)⁹. The US Department of State Report on International Religious Freedom for 2019 (USSD IRF Report 2019), noted that, according to the 2017 provisional census results, Christians represented 1.59% of the population¹⁰ [approximately 3.7 million of the July 2020 estimated population]. According to the Christian support group, Open Doors, there were just over 4 million Christians in Pakistan¹¹. Some members of the Christian community estimated the Christian population was much higher^{12 13}.
- 4.1.2 The Christian population was reported to be split almost equally between Catholics and Protestants^{14 15}.
- 4.1.3 According to Open Doors in May 2017, ‘The largest group of Christians belongs to the Church of Pakistan, an umbrella Protestant group consisting of four major Protestant denominations (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Lutheran) and is a member of the Anglican Communion. Other Protestant churches are various brands of Presbyterianism as well as many smaller denominations.’¹⁶
- 4.1.4 Open Doors Norway cited the church networks operating in Pakistan and the number of adherents (in brackets, totalling around 6 million), sourced by the World Christian Database (WCD) as of May 2017: Catholic (1,072,000); Protestant (2,412,000); Independent (686,000); Unaffiliated (20,500); Doubly-affiliated (253,000); Evangelical (1,050,000); and Renewalist (778,000)¹⁷. According to the 2018 Catholic Directory of Pakistan, the country has 1,333,450 Catholics¹⁸.
- 4.1.5 Encyclopedia.com, a collection of online encyclopaedias, providing references from published sources including Oxford University Press and

⁸ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 43), 2020

⁹ CIA World Factbook, ‘[Pakistan](#)’ (people and society), 18 November 2020

¹⁰ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section I), 10 June 2020

¹¹ Open Doors, ‘[World Watch List 2020 – Pakistan](#)’, 2020

¹² BHC, ‘[Letter to CPIT](#)’, 15 February 2021

¹³ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.136), 20 February 2019

¹⁴ Writenet, ‘[Pakistan: The Situation of Religious Minorities](#)’ (page 17), May 2009

¹⁵ BHC, ‘[Letter to CPIT](#)’, 15 February 2021

¹⁶ Open Doors Norway, ‘[Church history and facts – Pakistan](#)’, no date

¹⁷ Open Doors Norway, ‘[Church history and facts – Pakistan](#)’, May 2017

¹⁸ UCA News, ‘[Church in Pakistan](#)’, no date

Columbia Encyclopedia, noted ‘Roughly half the Christian population belongs to different Protestant churches. The Church of Pakistan, inaugurated in 1970 through a union of Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans and Presbyterians, claims the largest number of adherents. Other groups include the Salvation Army, Adventist, Baptist, Full Gospel and many smaller pentecostal and evangelical bodies.’¹⁹

- 4.1.6 According to the World Council of Churches (WCC), there were 500,000 members of the Church of Pakistan, with 600 pastors²⁰, and 400,000 members of the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, with 330 pastors²¹.
- 4.1.7 The 2020 CLJ report noted ‘Thousands of evangelical household churches have emerged across Pakistan, which has dramatically decreased attendance in Catholic and other “mainline” churches.’²²
- 4.1.8 Independent Evangelical Ministries (IEM), based in Lahore but also serving in other cities and provinces, noted on its website that it ‘held Prayer, healing and evangelistic crusades monthly and three big crusades annually...’ and its evangelistic team were ‘serving day and night and going door-to-door & city-to-city and get involved in people’s personal life to bring them to the light...’²³
- 4.1.9 TEAM, A Global Alliance of Churches and Missionaries, noted ‘The Association of Evangelical Churches (AEC) of Pakistan is a fellowship of churches that were established through the partnership of TEAM with Christian leaders in what are now 14 locations’, one of its objectives of which was to ‘encourage churches in practical evangelistic work.’²⁴
- 4.1.10 The WCC noted ‘There is no legal bar to evangelistic work, but the propagation of the gospel is not always welcomed.’²⁵

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4.2 Locations and populations of communities

- 4.2.1 The WCC noted there were 8 dioceses in the Church of Pakistan: Faisalabad, Hyderabad, Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar, Raiwind and Sialkot²⁶. The Union of Catholic Asian (UCA) News indicated the Catholic Church had 7 dioceses, including 2 Archdioceses: Faisalabad, Hyderabad, Islamabad-Rawalpindi, Karachi, Lahore, Multan and Quetta²⁷.
- 4.2.2 A 2019 report by the CLJ indicated the population of Lahore city was over 11 million and that Christians accounted for around 5% (550,000) of the population²⁸. In 2021, an official at the British High Commission (BHC), Islamabad, noted that the majority of Christians resided in Punjab – the

¹⁹ Encyclopedia.com, ‘[Pakistan, The Catholic church in](#)’, 24 November 2020

²⁰ WCC, ‘[Church of Pakistan](#)’, no date

²¹ WCC, ‘[Presbyterian Church of Pakistan](#)’, no date

²² CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 45), 2020

²³ IEM, ‘[What we do](#)’, no date

²⁴ TEAM, ‘[The Association of Evangelical Churches of Pakistan \(AEC\)](#)’, no date

²⁵ WCC, ‘[Church of Pakistan](#)’, no date

²⁶ WCC, ‘[Church of Pakistan](#)’, no date

²⁷ UCA News, ‘[Church in Pakistan](#)’, no date

²⁸ CLJ, ‘[Shame and Stigma in Sanitation](#)’ (page 19), 2019

largest religious minority in the province – with a significant number living in and around Lahore, Sialkot, Gujramwala and Faisalabad (approximately 2 million in Lahore and 0.5 million in the rest of Punjab)²⁹.

- 4.2.3 The largest Christian neighbourhood in Pakistan was reported to be the Lahore district of Youhanabad^{30 31}. There were a reported 570,000 Catholics in the diocese of Lahore³². A 2016 report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (APPG) noted there were 54 Christian villages in Punjab³³. There were Christian colonies in Lahore, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi³⁴. According to the BBC News, reporting in October 2018, there were ‘countless Christian villages in the Punjab heartland...’³⁵
- 4.2.4 Many Christians were said to reside in Karachi, Sindh province, including the Goan Christian community³⁶. In May 2015, Bishop Sadiq Daniel, leader of the Church of Pakistan in Sindh province, told The Washington Post that about 1 million of Karachi’s 22 million inhabitants were Christian³⁷. The APPG reported in 2016 that there were 4 predominantly Christian villages in Sindh³⁸. In December 2015, a reported 60,000 Christians lived in Islamabad³⁹. Approximately 50,000 Christians were reported to live in Quetta in Balochistan⁴⁰. BBC News indicated there was a ‘sizeable population’ of Christians living in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in Peshawar city⁴¹.
- 4.2.5 According to the 2020 CLJ 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 origin⁴².
- 4.2.6 The CLJ report also noted that, historically, people of the same faith lived together in communities and Christians continue to do this⁴³. Many were reported to live in illegally-occupied areas or informal settlements known as katcha abadis^{44 45}.
- 4.2.7 Between 28 September and 3 October 2018, a British Parliamentary delegation visited Islamabad and Lahore and met with various government

²⁹ BHC, ‘[Letter to CPIT](#)’, 15 February 2021

³⁰ Dawn, ‘[Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Ahmadi or “other”...](#)’, 22 May 2017

³¹ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 17), November 2020

³² Denver Catholic, ‘[The life of Catholics in Pakistan](#)’, 25 July 2019

³³ APPG, ‘[Freedom of Religion or Belief in Pakistan & UK Government ...](#)’ (page 59), March 2016

³⁴ PIPS, ‘[Freedom of faith in Pakistan](#)’ (page 20), August 2018

³⁵ BBC News, ‘[Why are Pakistan's Christians targeted?](#)’, 30 October 2018

³⁶ BHC, ‘[Letter to CPIT](#)’, 15 February 2021

³⁷ The Washington Post, ‘[A “bulletproof” cross rises in Karachi](#)’, 15 May 2015

³⁸ APPG, ‘[Freedom of Religion or Belief in Pakistan & UK Government ...](#)’ (page 59), March 2016

³⁹ AFP, ‘[Islamabad's largest Christian slum praying for survival](#)’, 25 December 2015

⁴⁰ The Telegraph, ‘[Christians claim they are being forced out](#)’, 21 April 2018

⁴¹ BBC News, ‘[Why are Pakistan's Christians targeted?](#)’, 30 October 2018

⁴² CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 44), 2020

⁴³ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 56), 2020

⁴⁴ The News, ‘[A questionable existence: 52 katchi abadis of Islamabad](#)’, 9 August 2015

⁴⁵ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (pages 56-57), 2020

officials, NGOs and members of religious communities to discuss issues relating to religious freedom⁴⁶. The subsequent report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Pakistani Minorities (APPG 2019 Report) was published in September 2019 and noted:

‘While slums in Pakistan are not exclusively inhabited by religious minorities, the delegation learnt that Christians and other religious minority groups account for a disproportionately high number of people living in these informal settlements. The delegation had the opportunity to visit some slum colonies on the outskirts of Islamabad where residents (a number of whom were victims of persecution and survivors of blasphemy allegations) informed those present about the extremely difficult situation in which they live. For example, residents of slums have no security of tenure and can be evicted at any time by the relevant authorities. Lack of ownership and property deeds means that the residents are not able to borrow money from lawfully established banks or financial institutions to improve their lives. Often, there are no schools or hospitals in or near settlements and the State does not provide basic services.’⁴⁷

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4.3 Churches, religious symbols and publications

- 4.3.1 The Constitution provides for the right for all religious denominations to establish, maintain and manage their religious institutions⁴⁸.
- 4.3.2 In a study on violence and discrimination against women of religious minority backgrounds, in which 48 Christians (36 women and girls and 12 men) took part in July 2020, by the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID), published in November 2020, all respondents said they were able to access their places of worship ‘... due to the fact that they live in a community settlement and can go to church on foot. However, as to the question of whether they can carry out their religious activities peacefully, though the response was affirmative, after the twin suicide attacks at two churches in Yuhannabad and the aftermath, they believe that their safety and security could be compromised at any time, which sometimes imposes limitations on their peaceful enjoyment of religious activities.’⁴⁹
- 4.3.3 Following a fact-finding mission undertaken in 2019, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) reported on the case of a church closure following an objection by Muslim residents⁵⁰. The case was brought to court and was ongoing⁵¹.
- 4.3.4 According to the 2020 CLJ report, ‘Evangelical Christians have established a large number of churches within their localities.’⁵² A 2018 CNN article on

⁴⁶ APPG, ‘[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)’ (page 2), September 2019

⁴⁷ APPG, ‘[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)’ (page 37), September 2019

⁴⁸ [Constitution](#) (Article 20b)

⁴⁹ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 181), November 2020

⁵⁰ HRCP, ‘[Access Denied](#)’ (pages 6-11), February 2020

⁵¹ HRCP, ‘[Access Denied](#)’ (pages 6-11), February 2020

⁵² CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 58), 2020

some of Pakistan's cathedrals in Lahore and Karachi indicated that, whilst security was in place due to past attacks against Christians, in general they were well-attended by parishioners⁵³. In April 2020, UCA News reported on the construction of more than 50 churches, including 25 Catholic places of worship, mostly in the dioceses of Lahore, Faisalabad and Multan, over the past 3 years⁵⁴.

4.3.5 The 2020 CLJ report noted:

'The provincial government introduced the Punjab Security of Vulnerable Establishment Ordinance in 2015 to impose security measures at hospitals, worship places, railway stations etc. This included churches as well because Christians have been particularly targeted by terrorists. However, this measure created problems for smaller churches that could not afford to put security measures in place like walkthrough security gates, metal detectors for frisking, barbed wire around the boundary walls etc. Few churches were closed due to lack of such facilities and in rare cases pastors were also charged under this law.'⁵⁵

4.3.6 A report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, dated July 2020 (APPG 2020 Report), noted that, according to Aid to the Church in Need '... security improvements in churches include raised-up perimeter walls, complete with razor wire, surveillance cameras, bomb-proof gates, guards and patrols.'⁵⁶ In February 2021, the BHC noted that there were many churches in Pakistan and, while most are safe, 'they can be targets for extremist actions.'⁵⁷

See also [State support, security and outreach](#).

4.3.7 In regard to the public display of religious symbols, the 2020 CLJ report noted that in cities, Christmas trees were displayed in high-end hotels and some shops⁵⁸. As examples, in December 2020, Christmas trees were displayed in Rawalpindi⁵⁹, Lahore⁶⁰ and Islamabad⁶¹. Many Christians displayed crosses in their vehicles although this practice was said to have declined⁶².

4.3.8 Christians were free to publish religious literature and Christian publications, scriptures and relics were available at church-run book stores, shops and stalls outside religious gatherings, although Christian religious leaders stated they had to be vigilant in case anything controversial in the text was

⁵³ CNN, '[The crumbling colonial-era churches of Pakistan](#)', 30 March 2018

⁵⁴ UCA News, '[One man's mission to build churches](#)', 6 April 2020

⁵⁵ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 59), 2020

⁵⁶ APPG, '[Suffocation of the Faithful](#)' (page 76), July 2020

⁵⁷ BHC, '[Letter to CPIT](#)', 15 February 2021

⁵⁸ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 69), 2020

⁵⁹ AsiaNews.it, '[A large Christmas tree shines in central Rawalpindi](#)', 18 December 2020

⁶⁰ The Nation, '[Christian community celebrates Christmas today](#)', 25 December 2020

⁶¹ Express Tribune, '[Christmas trees adorn shopping areas](#)', 21 December 2020

⁶² CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 69), 2020

published⁶³. Major Christian publishers included: The Bible Society, Masihi Ishaat Khana and St. Paul Communication Centre, all based in Lahore⁶⁴.

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Section 5 updated: 15 February 2021

5. Legal context

5.1 Legal rights for religious minorities

5.1.1 There are no specific laws that discriminate against Christians in Pakistan and the [Constitution](#) states that 'every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion.'⁶⁵ However, some Articles in the Constitution favour Islam over minority religions, for example, restricting positions of high office, such as the Prime Minister, to Muslims only, and that all existing laws shall conform with the rules of Islam and no law shall be enacted which is 'repugnant' to Islam⁶⁶.

5.1.2 The Government of Pakistan's response to the Expert Committee's Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD), published on 26 November 2015, cited Articles 20, 21, 22, 26, 27 and 28 of the Constitution of Pakistan, which state minorities are equal citizens of Pakistan and are free to profess their religion and visit their places of worship⁶⁷.

5.1.3 The Government's response to the UNCERD added 'We have a number of legislative measures and policies that translate constitutional principles into firm state action for promotion and protection of rights of minorities. [The] Government has recently strengthened [the] National Commission for Minorities (NCM) which works for the protection of minorities' rights. The Commission comprises members representing all minority communities living in the country.'⁶⁸

See also [State support, security and outreach](#).

5.1.4 The Government's response to the UNCERD cited a Supreme Court judgement from 2012, which held that 'a Church being a religious institution, its construction could not be halted as it was an expression of the right of the Christian citizens of Pakistan under the Constitution's Article 20.'⁶⁹

5.1.5 The Government of Pakistan also cited a case heard at the Lahore High Court in 2005, noting:

'In response to the plea that the Provincial Government [of Punjab] be directed to impose ban on the book "God's Special Agents" and that the respondent be restrained from preaching and projecting Christian faith in

⁶³ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 70), 2020

⁶⁴ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 70), 2020

⁶⁵ [Constitution](#), (Article 20a)

⁶⁶ [Constitution](#)

⁶⁷ UNCERD, '[Consideration of reports...](#)' (paragraph 19), 26 November 2015

⁶⁸ UNCERD, '[Consideration of reports...](#)' (paragraph 19), 26 November 2015

⁶⁹ UNCERD, '[Consideration of reports...](#)' (paragraph 61), 26 November 2015

Pakistan, the court held that under Article 20 of the Constitution, every citizen enjoys Fundamental Right to profess, practice and propagate his religion and every religious denomination and every sect thereof has a right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions. The court was of the view that the Petitioner failed to point out and advance any argument as to how the actions of the respondent violated any particular law, public order or morality so as to exclude the application of Article 20 of the Constitution.⁷⁰

- 5.1.6 Despite some constitutional provisions, in its July 2017 report, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNCESCR) expressed concern at the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, whilst also noting concern that ‘... the legal provisions regarding non-discrimination within the State party, including articles 25-27 of the Constitution, only prohibit discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth in respect of access to places of public entertainment or resort and places not intended for religious purposes only, as well as in respect of appointment to positions of public service.’⁷¹
- 5.1.7 In 2019, a private members bill by a Christian legislator, calling for an amendment to the Constitution to allow non-Muslims to become Prime Minister or President of Pakistan, was blocked by parliament⁷².

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5.2 Personal laws

- 5.2.1 The Christian Marriage Act, 1872, relates to the solemnisation of marriages for Christians in Pakistan⁷³. The dissolution of marriages for Christians is governed by the Christian Divorce Act, 1869, though the law only allows adultery to be grounds for dissolution⁷⁴. In August 2019, the Federal Cabinet approved a draft bill, the Christian Marriage and Divorce Act 2019^{75 76}. The bill aimed to update the old laws, including to allow greater scope for divorce^{77 78}. The bill was under consultation and had still to be approved by the National Assembly at the time of writing^{79 80}.

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5.3 Apostasy

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

⁷⁰ UNCERD, ‘[Consideration of reports...](#)’ (paragraph 64), 26 November 2015

⁷¹ UNCESCR, ‘[Concluding observations...](#)’, (paragraph 19), 20 July 2017

⁷² CLAAS, ‘[Pakistan’s parliament blocks bill allowing non-Muslims to the country’s...](#)’, 6 October 2019

⁷³ [Christian Marriage Act](#), 1872

⁷⁴ [Christian Divorce Act](#), 1869

⁷⁵ Daily Times, ‘[Christian Marriage and Divorce Act 2019 — a long awaited...](#)’, 4 September 2019

⁷⁶ Dawn, ‘[Christian Marriage and Divorce Bill caught between feuding ministries](#)’, 5 November 2019

⁷⁷ Daily Times, ‘[Christian Marriage and Divorce Act 2019 — a long awaited...](#)’, 4 September 2019

⁷⁸ Dawn, ‘[Christian Marriage and Divorce Bill caught between feuding ministries](#)’, 5 November 2019

⁷⁹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

⁸⁰ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 36), 2020

‘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.’⁸¹

- 5.3.2 Whilst there is no law against religious conversion⁸², but, according to Shehryar Fazli, Senior Analyst and Regional Editor at the International Crisis Group (ICG), speaking at an EASO conference on Pakistan in October 2017, ‘A person who converts out of Islam will be accused of apostasy.’⁸³ As stated in a letter to CPIT by the British High Commission (BHC), Islamabad, ‘... 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.’⁸⁴
- 5.3.3 As noted in the USSD IRF Report 2019, ‘The penal code does not explicitly criminalize apostasy, but renouncing Islam is widely considered by clerics to be a form of blasphemy, which can carry the death penalty.’⁸⁵
- 5.3.4 The CREID report 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.’⁸⁶
- 5.3.5 CPIT is not aware of specific cases where someone has been charged and judged by these religious doctrines.

See also [Consequences of converting from Islam to Christianity](#).

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5.4 Blasphemy

- 5.4.1 Tabulated summary of the blasphemy laws and penalties for breaching them, as prescribed in the Pakistan Penal Code⁸⁷:

Penal Code	Description	Penalty
298	Uttering words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings.	One year imprisonment, or fine, or both
298a	Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of holy personages.	Up to 3 years imprisonment, or fine, or both

⁸¹ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, ‘[Freedom of expression...](#)’ (page 4), March 2010

⁸² CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 184), November 2020

⁸³ EASO, ‘[COI Meeting Report – Pakistan](#)’ (page 42), February 2018

⁸⁴ BHC, ‘[Letter to CPIT](#)’, 15 February 2021

⁸⁵ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section I), 10 June 2020

⁸⁶ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 184), November 2020

⁸⁷ [Pakistan Penal Code](#), 1860 (with amendments)

Penal Code	Description	Penalty
298b	Misuse of epithets, descriptions and titles, etc., reserved for certain holy personages or places	Up to 3 years imprisonment and fine
298c	Person of Quadiani [Ahmadi] group, etc., calling himself a Muslim or preaching or propagating his faith	Up to 3 years imprisonment and fine
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
295a	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
295b	Defiling, etc., of Holy Quran	Life imprisonment
295c	Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet	Death or life imprisonment and a fine

5.4.2 As noted in the USSD IRF Report 2019, ‘Under the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony is responsible for reviewing internet traffic and reporting blasphemous or offensive content to the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) for possible removal, or to the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) for possible criminal prosecution.’⁸⁸

5.4.3 The report added:

‘In 2018 the Federal Cabinet approved a bill with amendments to PECA to bring online blasphemy and pornographic material within its ambit. Further proposed amendments include life imprisonment for “desecrating the Quran through information systems” and the death sentence for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad. The bill remained in legislative process at year’s end.

‘The government continued its warnings against blasphemy and other illegal content on social media through periodic print advertisements and text messages sent by the PTA. The text messages stated, “Sharing of blasphemy, pornography, terrorism, and other unlawful content on social media and the internet is illegal. Users are advised to report such content on content-complaint@pta.gov.pk for action under PECA 16”.’⁸⁹

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⁸⁸ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

⁸⁹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

6. State treatment and attitudes

6.1 State support, security and outreach

6.1.1 The BHC noted in a letter dated February 2021, '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, though it has been redundant since 2019 due to the lack of serving Commissioners.'⁹⁰

6.1.2 The APPG 2019 Report listed the main functions of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (MoRH)⁹¹. Whilst the list included a Minorities Welfare Fund, the APPG indicated the ministry's focus was '... exclusively upon promoting the interests of Muslims including promoting the religious ceremonies of Muslims such as Hajj and Ummra in Saudi Arabia. Neither an independent Ministry for Minorities nor a Commission for Minorities (focusing on promoting and protecting the interests of non-Muslim minorities) exists.'⁹²

6.1.3 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted that the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony budget '... 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.'⁹³

6.1.4 According to the USSD IRF Report 2019, although a National Commission for Minorities had not been established, as per a 2014 Supreme Court decision ordering the government to take steps to ensure minority rights, some progress had been made to implement the judgement:

'On October 3, the Supreme Court established a special judicial panel made up of Supreme Court justices to hear petitions related to the rights of minorities and appointed a commissioner to oversee the court's own implementation of the judgment. According to officials from the Ministry of Human Rights, the Ministry of Interior established a task force convening cabinet ministries, police branches, Inter-Services Intelligence Agency, and religious representatives to discuss implementation of the judgment. As chair of the task force, the Ministry of Human Rights stated it had given 10 priority action points to the ministries involved. The government did not establish a special task force to protect minority places of worship, as was called for by the judgment. Many faith community members, however, said they believed the government did increase efforts to protect places of worship.'⁹⁴

6.1.5 The BHC letter of February 2021 noted:

'In May 2020, the National Commission on Minorities (NCM) was established, however there are concerns regarding the NCM's effectiveness

⁹⁰ BHC, '[Letter to CPIT](#)', 15 February 2021

⁹¹ APPG, '[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)' (page 12), September 2019

⁹² APPG, '[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)' (page 12), September 2019

⁹³ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

⁹⁴ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

and independence – it currently sits under the remit of the MoRH. In addition, a Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Interfaith Harmony was appointed in September 2020. There is no clarity on how effective this new role will be with concerns that the Advisor will focus on intra-faith rather than interfaith work.⁹⁵

- 6.1.6 A Parliamentary Committee to Protect Minorities from Forced Conversions was established in November 2019, whose aim was to frame legislation against forced conversions⁹⁶.

See also [Forced conversions to Islam](#).

- 6.1.7 In October 2020 the government announced a plan to establish interfaith harmony councils across the country to promote religious tolerance^{97 98}.

- 6.1.8 In its 2019 Annual Report, covering 2018, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted ‘While the government in 2014 established an overall counterterrorism plan – known as the National Action Plan (NAP) – in practice it has pursued few of the plan’s objectives.’⁹⁹ Although the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) noted in its 2019 report that ‘... the incidence of violence against religious minorities and sects in the country has been falling for the last five years.’¹⁰⁰

- 6.1.9 The APPG 2020 Report noted that following the Easter Sunday attack in 2016 in Lahore, ‘Pakistan launched a widespread counter-terrorism operation in South Punjab, arresting more than 200 people.’¹⁰¹

See also [Militant violence](#).

- 6.1.10 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted that, at various times during the year, enhanced security was provided for minority religious places of worship, including those for Christians¹⁰². The report said:

‘After an attack on a mosque in New Zealand that killed 51 on March 15 [2019], the government increased security at churches throughout the country, which Christian community members stated was out of concern for potential retaliation against Christians. Sindh Minorities’ Affairs Minister Hari Ram Kishori Lal announced on November 18 the provincial government would provide CCTV cameras to enhance security at 243 religious minority houses of worship in Sindh. Several activists and Christian pastors reported improved security at places of worship, notably in Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta during the major holidays of Holi, Ashura, and Christmas.’¹⁰³

- 6.1.11 The PIPS noted in its 2019 report:

⁹⁵ BHC, [‘Letter to CPIT’](#), 15 February 2021

⁹⁶ HRCP, [‘State of Human Rights in 2019’](#) (page 12), April 2020

⁹⁷ The News, [‘Interfaith harmony councils to be formed’](#), 14 October 2020

⁹⁸ Dawn, [‘Govt to establish interfaith harmony councils: Ashrafi’](#), 14 October 2020

⁹⁹ USCIRF, [‘Annual Report 2019 – Pakistan’](#) (page 2), April 2019

¹⁰⁰ PIPS, [‘Pakistan Security Report 2019’](#) (page 123), 5 January 2020

¹⁰¹ APPG, [‘Suffocation of the Faithful’](#) (page 77), July 2020

¹⁰² USSD, [‘IRF Report 2019’](#) (section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁰³ USSD, [‘IRF Report 2019’](#) (section II), 10 June 2020

'Media coverage in the last fortnight of 2019 highlights that the authorities tightened security around churches and mass prayer sites across the country ahead of Christmas. The security measures that were deemed necessary included not just walk-through gates, but also deployment of snipers on the rooftops and having bomb disposal units at hand. The Punjab police chief said the idea was to ensure that Christians could celebrate their religious festival without any fear.'¹⁰⁴

See also [Christian festivals](#).

- 6.1.12 The 2020 CLJ report noted that, in the wake of past terrorist attacks targeting Christians, 'the government has been providing security to churches and Christian educational institutions...'¹⁰⁵ During a fact-finding mission in Southern Punjab in August 2019, the HRCP were told by a church official that police security was provided at his church in the city of Liaquatpur on major occasions, whilst adding that at other times they had to provide their own security measures¹⁰⁶.

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6.2 Christian festivals

- 6.2.1 Christmas and Easter festivals are officially celebrated in Pakistan¹⁰⁷, although the 2020 CLJ report suggested that Christian holidays were 'somewhat vague', owing that 25 December was an official holiday on account of the birth of the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and Easter day falls on a Sunday¹⁰⁸, already a non-work day¹⁰⁹. The CREID report indicated that all respondents said they could easily celebrate their religious festivals in their communities and 83% were able to take leave on Christmas Day¹¹⁰. In a notification of public holidays for 2021, Boxing Day was included¹¹¹. Optional holidays for government employees included Good Friday and Easter Monday¹¹².
- 6.2.2 In 2009, 11 August was declared National Minorities Day (though not as an official holiday)¹¹³.
- 6.2.3 The President and Prime Minister offered Easter and Christmas greetings to Christians in 2020^{114 115}.
- 6.2.4 In December 2020, Sindh and Punjab provincial governments announced their plans to pay Christian government employees their December salaries and pensions by 19 and 20 December, respectively, due to Christmas¹¹⁶.

¹⁰⁴ PIPS, '[Pakistan Security Report 2019](#)' (page 123), 5 January 2020

¹⁰⁵ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 35), 2020

¹⁰⁶ HRCP, '[Faith-based discrimination in Southern Punjab](#)' (page 15), December 2019

¹⁰⁷ UNCERD, '[Consideration of reports...](#)' (paragraph 99), 26 November 2015

¹⁰⁸ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 33), 2020

¹⁰⁹ Gulf News, '[Friday or Sunday, what will be the new weekend in Pakistan?](#)', 21 February 2019

¹¹⁰ CREID, '[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)' (page 181), November 2020

¹¹¹ INCPak, '[Public Holidays in Pakistan for 2021 \[Complete List\]](#)', 12 December 2020

¹¹² INCPak, '[Public Holidays in Pakistan for 2021 \[Complete List\]](#)', 12 December 2020

¹¹³ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 36), 2020

¹¹⁴ New Indian Express, '["Rise together in our fight against COVID-19": Imran Khan...](#)', 12 April 2020

¹¹⁵ Islamabad Scene, '[Pakistan's PM and President wish Christian community...](#)', 25 December 2020

¹¹⁶ Bol News, '[Sindh To Disburse Salaries Early To Christian Employees...](#)', 14 December 2020

- 6.2.5 The Business Recorder reported in December 2020 that the Chief Minister of Punjab directed that ‘as many as seven Christmas Bazaars would be established in Faisalabad district in order to provide essential commodities to the Christian community on subsidised prices for the celebrations of Christmas.’¹¹⁷ It was also announced that ‘district administration would make necessary security and administrative arrangements in connection with the Christmas celebrations and concerned departments have been directed for cleanliness of surroundings of the churches besides ensuring repairing of roads and street lights.’¹¹⁸
- 6.2.6 Urdu Point reported on the build up to Christmas celebrations in 2020 in Sukkur, Sindh province, which included Christian families undertaking their Christmas shopping and churches being decorated with bunting, bells and Christmas trees¹¹⁹.

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6.3 Political representation

- 6.3.1 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted that, 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 identity¹²⁰. Further adding:

‘The constitution reserves seats for non-Muslim members in both the national and provincial assemblies. The 342-member National Assembly has 10 reserved seats for non-Muslims. The 104-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. Political parties elected by the general electorate choose the minority individuals who hold these seats; they are not elected directly by the minority constituencies they represent.’¹²¹

- 6.3.2 The National Assembly listed the [10 non-Muslim MPs](#) though did not state their religious affiliation¹²².
- 6.3.3 The 2020 CLJ report named the Christians in elected reserved seats in the National Assembly as Shunila Ruth (federal parliamentary secretary) and Ejaz Augustine (Minister for Human Rights and Minority Affairs in Punjab)¹²³. Although Ejaz Augustine did not appear on the National Assembly’s list of non-Muslim MPs, he was cited as the Punjab Minister for Human Rights and Minority Affairs in the media^{124 125}.

¹¹⁷ Business Recorder, ‘[Seven Christmas Bazaars to be established in Faisal...](#)’, 14 December 2020

¹¹⁸ Business Recorder, ‘[Seven Christmas Bazaars to be established in Faisal...](#)’, 14 December 2020

¹¹⁹ Urdu Point, ‘[Christmas Shopping Started In The Sukkur](#)’, 10 December 2020

¹²⁰ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹²¹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹²² National Assembly, ‘[Non-Muslims](#)’, no date

¹²³ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 32), 2020

¹²⁴ Express Tribune, ‘[Govt to introduce bill for protection of transgender...](#)’, 17 September 2020

¹²⁵ Urdu Point, ‘[Ejaz Alam Augustine Congratulates Winners Of PTI From GB](#)’, 16 November 2020

- 6.3.4 Kamran Michael and retired Brigadier John Kenneth Williams, both Christians, took 2 of the 4 reserved seats in the Senate¹²⁶. In 2018, Salman Talibuddin was appointed Advocate General in Sindh province, the second Christian to hold the post¹²⁷. Talibuddin served as Additional Attorney General from 2014-2018¹²⁸.
- 6.3.5 The February 2019 DFAT report noted ‘There are three Christians in the National Assembly, two in the Senate, seven in the Punjab Provincial Assembly and one in the Sindh Assembly. There are no Christians in the Balochistan or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assemblies.’¹²⁹
- 6.3.6 The HRCP 2019 report stated, ‘The single seat reserved for non-Muslims from the merged tribal districts went to PTI [Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf – the ruling party] member Wilson Wazir, a Christian, who became the first member of any religious minority community from the merged tribal districts to make it to the KP Assembly on a reserved seat.’¹³⁰
- 6.3.7 According to the APPG 2019 Report ‘Minority members [of political parties] are often kept in marginalised wings of the party and the issues they raise tend not to be mainstreamed and have negligible influence. Minority members are nominated on the basis of loyalty to party leaders and donations to the party, rather than their standing and contribution within their particular community.’¹³¹
- 6.3.8 The USSD IRF Report 2019 similarly noted:
 ‘Some religious minority leaders stated the system of selecting minority parliamentarians through the internal deliberations of mainstream parties resulted in the appointment of party stalwarts or those who could afford to “buy the seats,” rather than legislators who genuinely represented minority communities. Others said parliamentarians occupying reserved seats had little influence in their parties and in the National Assembly because they did not have a voting constituency.’¹³²

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6.4 Discrimination

- 6.4.1 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted official discrimination against Christians persisted, according to members of religious minority communities, and ‘...there continued to be an inconsistent application of laws safeguarding minority rights and enforcement of protections of religious minorities at both the federal and provincial levels by the federal Ministry of Law and Justice, as well as by the federal Ministry of Human Rights and its provincial counterparts.’¹³³

¹²⁶ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 33), 2020

¹²⁷ The News, ‘[Sindh appoints a Christian as chief law officer](#)’, 16 September 2018

¹²⁸ Kabraji & Talibuddin, ‘[Salman Talibuddin](#)’, no date

¹²⁹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report Pakistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.138), 20 February 2019

¹³⁰ HRCP, ‘[State of Human Rights in 2019](#)’ (page 138), April 2020

¹³¹ APPG, ‘[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)’ (page 27), September 2019

¹³² USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹³³ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

6.4.2 The same source noted:

‘Christian advocacy organizations and media outlets reported four cases of police mistreatment of and discrimination against Christians in August and September, including one case that resulted in the death of Amir Masih in September... Instances of torture and mistreatment by some police personnel were part of broader human rights concerns about police abuses against citizens of all faiths reported by local and international human rights organizations.’¹³⁴

For further information on human rights abuses committed by state actors, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Actors of protection](#).

6.4.3 The 2020 CLJ report indicated that minority neighbourhoods and amenities were neglected, stating:

‘Each year, the government rolls out development schemes in residential areas. These schemes are for road construction, street lights, availability of natural gas, water supply etc. All the communities that live in minority neighbourhoods shared that their areas were neglected. For example, Martinpur and Youngsonabad are the most historic Christian villages in Nankana Sahib District of Punjab. Piped natural gas is provided to adjacent villages but not to these two villages.

‘Youhanabad in Lahore is the largest Christian neighbourhood. Advocate Riaz Anjum, a resident of Youhanabad, says that road construction and cleanliness in the adjacent Nishtar Town and Youhanabad is markedly “different”.’¹³⁵

6.4.4 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted ‘Some community representatives said Christians faced difficulties in registering marriages with Islamabad union councils because the councils claimed they had no authority to deal with unions recorded by Christian marriage registrars – usually church authorities.’¹³⁶

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6.5 Justice system

6.5.1 The USSD IRF Report 2019 also noted ‘Police intervened on multiple occasions to quell mob violence directed at individuals accused of blasphemy.’¹³⁷ The report cited a case in which the police persuaded a Muslim cleric, who had called for attacks on Christian homes, to drop the blasphemy charges made against a Christian¹³⁸. The report added, however, that in other cases, police ‘... arrested and charged the accused under the blasphemy law and did not always charge those responsible for the violence.’¹³⁹

6.5.2 According to the USSD IRF Report 2019:

¹³⁴ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹³⁵ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 57), 2020

¹³⁶ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹³⁷ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹³⁸ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹³⁹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

'While the law required a senior police official to investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint could be filed, a requirement that NGOs and legal observers stated would help contribute to an objective investigation and the dismissal of many blasphemy cases, some NGOs said police did not uniformly follow this procedure. There were some cases in which police received custody of the accused from a court for 14 days in order for a senior officer to carry out an investigation. At the same time, NGOs reported that sometimes lower-ranking police would file charges of blasphemy, rather than a senior police superintendent who had more authority to dismiss baseless claims, or that police would not carry out a thorough investigation. NGOs and legal observers also stated police often did not file charges against individuals who made false blasphemy accusations.'¹⁴⁰

6.5.3 The 2019 CSJ report noted 'Procedural measures, such as requiring investigation of blasphemy accusations by senior police officers before cases are lodged, have been largely unimplemented. That has been so particularly when the authorities have considered pacifying frenzied mobs as a priority, often by lodging blasphemy cases to end protests.'¹⁴¹

6.5.4 The APPG 2019 Report commented on a lack of training for law enforcement agencies and stated '... when someone is accused of blasphemy, there are no standardised questions for police offers to ask and hearsay is often used as evidence of wrongdoing, with the police regularly failing to even question the parties involved.'¹⁴²

6.5.5 Respondents to the CREID study believed the authorities or police would not be supportive in cases of violence against Christian women and girls, indicating they used delaying tactics to register cases or did not make a strong case¹⁴³. In cases of harassment, one respondent said police usually blamed the woman for wearing modern dress¹⁴⁴.

See also [Women and girls](#).

6.5.6 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted that, as well as overturning some blasphemy convictions and acquitting others, including the high-profile case of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010, whose acquittal was upheld by the Supreme Court in January 2019, courts also upheld the sentences of persons convicted of killing individuals accused of blasphemy¹⁴⁵.

6.5.7 However, the same source added that judges involved in some blasphemy cases, dating back to 2014:

'... repeatedly delayed hearings, adjourned hearings without hearing arguments, or sent appeals to other judicial benches. Civil society and legal sources said judges were generally hesitant to decide blasphemy cases due to fear of violent retribution. The Center for Legal Aid, Assistance, and

¹⁴⁰ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁴¹ CSJ, '[Challenges in exercising religious freedom in Pakistan](#)' (page 27), December 2019

¹⁴² APPG, '[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)' (page 32), September 2019

¹⁴³ CREID, '[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)' (page 187), November 2020

¹⁴⁴ CREID, '[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)' (page 187), November 2020

¹⁴⁵ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

Settlement (CLAAS) stated it believed the widespread protests following the Supreme Court's 2018 overturning of Asia Bibi's conviction may have increased many judges' reluctance.¹⁴⁶

6.5.8 The APPG 2019 Report noted:

'In criminal prosecution, the law has been modified so that currently there is no burden on the prosecution to establish any intention or mens rea^[147] to blaspheme. This fact has led to people with severe mental disabilities being charged with blasphemy. There was agreement among all the people whom the delegation met that such blatant misuse of the law is not only immoral and unethical, but it hampers and delays the Pakistani legal system. In a country of over 200 million people with only 4,000 judges, it is vital that fraudulent, frivolous cases do not take up valuable court time.'¹⁴⁸

6.5.9 The USSD IRF Report 2019 also observed that:

'Legal observers continued to raise concerns regarding the failure of lower courts to adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases, which led to 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 in an intimidating atmosphere, with members of anti-blasphemy groups such as the TLP [Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan] often threatening the defendant's attorneys, family members, and supporters. At other times, they reported, blasphemy trials were held inside the jail for security reasons, in which case the hearings were not public, resulting in a gain in immediate security but a loss of transparency. These observers said the general refusal of lower courts to hold timely hearings or acquit those accused persisted due to fear of reprisal and vigilantism. Legal observers also reported judges and magistrates often delayed or continued trials indefinitely to avoid confrontation with, or violence from, groups provoking protests.'¹⁴⁹

6.5.10 According to the USSD IRF Report 2019, Anti-terrorism Courts (ATCs) 'convicted and sentenced several individuals affiliated with terrorist organizations and involved in past sectarian attacks and targeted killings against religious minorities', including Christians¹⁵⁰.

See also [Militant violence](#).

For further information on the judiciary, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: Actors of protection](#).

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¹⁴⁶ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁴⁷ ICLR, '[Mens rea and actus reus](#)', no date. Mens rea is often described as the "mental element" in a crime. It can include what used to be known as "malice aforethought", ie conscious planning or intent, as well as something culpable but less deliberate, such as recklessness or negligence.

¹⁴⁸ APPG, '[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)' (pages 17-18), September 2019

¹⁴⁹ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁵⁰ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

6.6 Arrests, convictions and imprisonment under blasphemy laws

- 6.6.1 Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reported in September 2019 that, according to 'The National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), a human rights organisation based in Pakistan, found that a total of 776 Muslims, 505 Ahmadis, 229 Christians and 30 Hindus were accused under the blasphemy laws between 1987 and 2018.'¹⁵¹
- 6.6.2 CPIT extracted data from annual reports by the USSD International Religious Freedom (USSD IRF), Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and the Christian charity, Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), on registered blasphemy cases between 2015 and 2019:
- In 2015, police registered 3 cases of blasphemy and the USSD IRF Report for 2015 referred to 2 cases recorded against Christians¹⁵².
 - In 2016, 18 cases were registered, though religious affiliation was not cited¹⁵³. The USSD IRF Report for 2016 referred to 9 Christians being arrested or sentenced, though charges against 2 persons – a boy and his mother – were dropped after police found no evidence¹⁵⁴. CLAAS noted 7 cases of blasphemy were registered in 2016¹⁵⁵.
 - In 2017, 10 new blasphemy cases were registered against 17 persons¹⁵⁶. Religious affiliation was not cited, though, according to the USSD IRF Report for 2017, at least 2 Christians were arrested and 2 others were sentenced (one to death and one to life imprisonment)¹⁵⁷. CLAAS reported 9 cases in 2017¹⁵⁸. In contrast to the relatively small number of cases cited by the USSD IRF Report for 2017 and CLAAS, the HRCP reported there were 189 cases of blasphemy (religion not recorded), according to official figures for January to November 2017¹⁵⁹.
 - In 2018, 7 cases were registered. Religious affiliation was not cited in all cases, but according to the USSD IRF Report for 2018, at least 2 Christians were arrested¹⁶⁰. HRCP recorded 18 cases of blasphemy in 2018¹⁶¹. CLAAS reported 16 new blasphemy cases in 2018, 3 of which were against Christians¹⁶².
 - In 2019, at least 10 cases were registered but religious affiliation was not mentioned¹⁶³.

¹⁵¹ CSW, '[Long read: ... Pakistan's blasphemy laws](#)', 18 September 2019

¹⁵² USSD, '[IRF Report for 2015](#)' (Section II), 10 August 2016

¹⁵³ USSD, '[IRF Report for 2016](#)' (Section II), 15 August 2017

¹⁵⁴ USSD, '[IRF Report for 2016](#)' (Section II), 15 August 2017

¹⁵⁵ CLAAS, '[Annual Report 2016](#)' (page 1), 2017

¹⁵⁶ USSD, '[IRF Report for 2017](#)' (Section II), 29 May 2018

¹⁵⁷ USSD, '[IRF Report for 2017](#)' (Section II), 29 May 2018

¹⁵⁸ CLAAS, '[Annual Report 2017](#)' (page 1), 2018

¹⁵⁹ HRCP, '[State of Human Rights in 2017](#)' (page 93), March 2018

¹⁶⁰ USSD, '[IRF Report for 2018](#)' (Section II), 21 June 2019

¹⁶¹ HRCP, '[State of Human Rights in 2018](#)' (page 71), March 2019

¹⁶² CLAAS, '[Annual Report 2018](#)' (page 12), May 2019

¹⁶³ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

6.6.3 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted:

‘According to religious organizations and human rights groups, while the majority of those accused and convicted of blasphemy were Muslim, religious minorities continued to be disproportionately accused of blasphemy relative to their small percentage of the population. According to data compiled from multiple sources, since 2001 there were 28 convictions of non-Ahmadi Muslims, 16 convictions of Christians, and four convictions of Ahmadi Muslims.’¹⁶⁴

6.6.4 In regard to sentences received, the same source stated:

‘According to civil society reports, there were at least 84 individuals imprisoned on blasphemy charges, and at least 29 under sentence of death, compared with 77 and 28, respectively, in 2018. The government has never executed anyone specifically for blasphemy. According to data provided by NGOs, authorities registered new blasphemy cases against at least 10 individuals during the year. Courts issued two new death sentences and sentenced another individual to five years’ imprisonment. The Supreme Court overturned the conviction of one person for blasphemy, and a lower court acquitted another person charged with blasphemy during the year. Other blasphemy cases continued without resolution. At least one individual was accused of spreading blasphemous content through social media under PECA. Civil society groups continued to state that the blasphemy laws disproportionately affected members of religious minority communities. Of the 84 imprisoned for blasphemy, 31 were Christian, 16 Ahmadi, and 5 Hindu. According to civil society sources, as of the end of the year, 29 individuals remained on death row for alleged blasphemy. Persons accused of blasphemy were often simultaneously charged with terrorism offenses. NGOs continued to report lower courts often did not adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases.’¹⁶⁵

6.6.5 In its 2019 Annual Report, USCIRF noted it was ‘... aware of at least 40 individuals currently sentenced to death or serving life sentences for blasphemy in Pakistan, including two Christians, Qaiser and Amoon Ayub, who were sentenced to death by a district judge in December 2018 based on allegations that they insulted the Prophet Muhammad in articles and images posted online.’¹⁶⁶

6.6.6 On 8 September 2020 it was reported that a Christian man was sentenced to death by a Lahore court^{167 168}. The man had been in custody since he was convicted for blasphemy in 2013 after he was accused of sending derogatory remarks about the Prophet Mohammed in a text message to his former work supervisor^{169 170}. In other cases, 2 Christian men were acquitted by appeals courts in October 2020 and December 2020, though both had spent many

¹⁶⁴ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁶⁵ USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁶⁶ USCIRF, ‘[Annual Report 2019 – Pakistan](#)’ (page 4), April 2019

¹⁶⁷ Al Jazeera, ‘[Pakistani Christian sentenced to death for “blasphemous texts”](#)’, 8 September 2020

¹⁶⁸ Reuters, ‘[Pakistan court sentences Christian to death on blasphemy charges](#)’, 8 September 2020

¹⁶⁹ Al Jazeera, ‘[Pakistani Christian sentenced to death for “blasphemous texts”](#)’, 8 September 2020

¹⁷⁰ Reuters, ‘[Pakistan court sentences Christian to death on blasphemy charges](#)’, 8 September 2020

years in prison (7 and 11 years respectively) under sentence of death and life imprisonment for blasphemy^{171 172 173}.

- 6.6.7 Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF) International, an NGO which monitors a range of human rights concerns, has been tracking incidents worldwide where people are imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief since 2013¹⁷⁴. As at 10 January 2021, the HRWF Prisoner Database reported there were 53 persons serving prison sentences in Pakistan for their faith¹⁷⁵. Of those, 31 were Christians (2 Anglicans, 1 Catholic and 28 Protestants) and 11 had been sentenced to death, whilst a further 9 were awaiting trial or sentence¹⁷⁶.
- 6.6.8 According to a 2015 report by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), over 80% of blasphemy cases were overturned on appeal¹⁷⁷.

See also [Justice system](#) and [Accusations of blasphemy](#).

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Section 7 updated: 15 February 2021

7. Societal treatment and attitudes

7.1 Accusations of blasphemy

- 7.1.1 Sources indicated that, although the majority of people accused of blasphemy were Muslim, minority religious groups, including Christians, were disproportionately affected^{178 179}. As noted in 2021 by the BHC, 'Abuse and misuse of Pakistan's blasphemy laws to settle personal disputes is common, and religious minorities, including Christians are disproportionately targeted', adding 'The majority of blasphemy cases come from the Punjab, which has a high Christian population.'¹⁸⁰
- 7.1.2 The number of reported blasphemy allegations varied and it was not always clear how many resulted in arrests, charges or convictions (see [Arrests, convictions and imprisonment under blasphemy laws](#)).
- 7.1.3 A 2019 BBC News report on the blasphemy laws noted that, according to data provided by National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), 229 Christians had been accused under various clauses of the blasphemy law from 1987 until 2018¹⁸¹. In examining the data of blasphemy allegations, the CSJ reported that, of 1,572 accusations that occurred between 1987 and 2018, at least 253 were against Christians¹⁸².

¹⁷¹ Al Jazeera, '[Pakistani court acquits Christian man on death row for blasphemy](#)', 7 October 2020

¹⁷² Dawn, '[Man acquitted of blasphemy charge after six years](#)', 7 October 2020

¹⁷³ Barnabus Fund, '[Pakistani Christian acquitted of "blasphemy" charge after...](#)', 22 December 2020

¹⁷⁴ HRWF, '[Prisoners Database - Other countries](#)', updated 10 January 2021

¹⁷⁵ HRWF, '[Prisoners Database - Other countries](#)', updated 10 January 2021

¹⁷⁶ HRWF, '[Prisoners Database - Other countries](#)', updated 10 January 2021

¹⁷⁷ ICJ, '[On Trial: The Implementation of Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws](#)' (page 7), November 2015

¹⁷⁸ EASO, '[COI Meeting Report – Pakistan](#)' (page 34), February 2018

¹⁷⁹ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁸⁰ BHC, '[Letter to CPIT](#)', 15 February 2021

¹⁸¹ BBC News, '[What are Pakistan's blasphemy laws?](#)', 8 May 2019

¹⁸² CSJ, '[Challenges in exercising religious freedom in Pakistan](#)' (page 29), December 2019

7.1.4 The APPG 2019 Report noted that during the visit the delegation were informed that blasphemy laws were widely misused to settle personal scores, ‘There have been many reported cases of people being falsely accused of blasphemy by other parties in arguments or conflicts. Lawyers informed the delegation that in Pakistan, accusations of blasphemy are registered by local police who often conduct little to no investigation of the credibility of the claims, or who are sometimes willing to register cases through First Information Reports (FIRs) in exchange for bribes.’¹⁸³

See also [Justice system](#).

7.1.5 Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reported in 2019:

‘CSW has learned from blasphemy victims and lawyers taking blasphemy cases that once an accusation is made, the victim and their family live in a constant state of fear. They experience harassment and threats from their accusers, even when the allegation is found to be false. The accused and their family cannot resume normal life, as there is no safe place for them to live. Internal relocation is extremely difficult and even if victims do manage this, they are constantly pursued by their accusers. Zohra Yusuf, chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), stated [in 2017], “Anyone even accused of blasphemy practically carries a death sentence even if they are released”.’¹⁸⁴

7.1.6 The 2019 CSJ report noted ‘The mere charge of blasphemy, even in the absence of proof, has frequently led to vicious mob assaults on the accused, intimidation of their family, and – in case of an accused’s affiliation with a religious minority – at times attacks on and destruction of entire settlement of a religious minority.’¹⁸⁵

7.1.7 Reporting on the general use of blasphemy laws, Al Jazeera noted in September 2020:

‘In the last decade, the “offences” committed by those accused of blasphemy have been as absurd as throwing a business card into the rubbish (the man’s name was Muhammad), a rural water dispute, spelling errors, the naming of a child, the design of a place of worship, burning a (non-religious) talisman or sharing a picture on Facebook.

‘Increasingly, cases are being settled with violence outside the courtroom, with mob and targeted attacks against those accused. In many cases, families and lawyers of the accused, and even judges who have acquitted defendants, have been targeted.

‘Since 1990, at least 77 people have been killed in connection with such accusations, the latest murder occurring in a courtroom last month.’¹⁸⁶

7.1.8 The 2019 APPG Report noted ‘Once accusations are registered, mob violence against the accused often ensues. Thus, the mere registration of an

¹⁸³ APPG, ‘[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)’ (page 17), September 2019

¹⁸⁴ CSW, ‘[Pakistan: Religious freedom under attack](#)’ (pages 17-18), December 2019

¹⁸⁵ CSJ, ‘[Challenges in exercising religious freedom in Pakistan](#)’ (page 27), December 2019

¹⁸⁶ Al Jazeera, ‘[Explained: Pakistan’s emotive blasphemy laws](#)’, 21 September 2020

accusation of blasphemy can amount to (extra-judicial) death sentence.¹⁸⁷ The APPG cited a Supreme Court judgement from October 2018, which said “[S]ince 1990, 62 people have been murdered as a result of blasphemy allegations, even before their trial could be conducted in accordance with law”.¹⁸⁸

- 7.1.9 In its annual report for 2019, the HRCP reported on the allegations of blasphemy faced by 4 Christian women, who were accused by a Muslim couple of desecrating the Koran in February 2019¹⁸⁹. According to the report, the women’s Christian neighbourhood in Karachi was attacked, displacing 200 Christian residents¹⁹⁰. According to Asia News, a Christian news site, when police intervened, the accusers admitted making up the allegations and no charges were brought against the women¹⁹¹. Reporting on the incident, the British Pakistani Christian Association (BPCA) noted the displaced Christian families ‘relocated to areas within Karachi that are considered less dangerous.’¹⁹²
- 7.1.10 A report by the BPCA in May 2019 noted that 2 Christian families in the Arif Wala Tehsil district of Punjab province were forced to flee from their homes when they were attacked by a crowd of about 40 Muslim men and children with weapons, after an accusation of blasphemy was made against them¹⁹³. A First Information Report (FIR) was registered against some of the attackers, but according to the BPCA no action had been taken¹⁹⁴. No charges of blasphemy were brought against the Christians and they later returned to their homes, although 5 Christian men were kept in safe police custody for their own protection¹⁹⁵.
- 7.1.11 According to the Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Religious Harmony, speaking in October 2020, ‘... blasphemy cases had witnessed a decline over the past two years due to effective coordination between clerics and religious scholars.’¹⁹⁶

See also [Communal violence](#) and [Arrests, convictions and imprisonment under blasphemy laws](#).

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7.2 Consequences of converting from Islam to Christianity

- 7.2.1 According to sources consulted by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada’s Research Directorate in 2012, Pakistani society in general is extremely hostile to converts with reports of converts being harassed,

¹⁸⁷ APPG, [‘Religious Minorities of Pakistan’](#) (page 17), September 2019

¹⁸⁸ APPG, [‘Religious Minorities of Pakistan’](#) (page 17), September 2019

¹⁸⁹ HRCP, [‘State of Human Rights in 2019’](#) (page 74), April 2020

¹⁹⁰ HRCP, [‘State of Human Rights in 2019’](#) (page 74), April 2020

¹⁹¹ Asia News, [‘Two hundred families in Karachi flee after three young Christian ...’](#), 3 July 2019

¹⁹² BPCA, [‘200 Pakistani Christian families displaced after 4 falsely accused...’](#), 26 February 2019

¹⁹³ BPCA, [‘Telephone call anger leads to blasphemy allegation for innocent Christians’](#), 21 May 2019

¹⁹⁴ BPCA, [‘Telephone call anger leads to blasphemy allegation for innocent Christians’](#), 21 May 2019

¹⁹⁵ BPCA, [‘Telephone call anger leads to blasphemy allegation for innocent Christians’](#), 21 May 2019

¹⁹⁶ Dawn, [‘Govt to establish interfaith harmony councils: Ashrafi’](#), 14 October 2020

attacked and ‘tortured’¹⁹⁷. The sources stated that ‘attacks on those who have converted can re-occur years or even decades after they have changed religion.’¹⁹⁸

7.2.2 According to sources consulted by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), reporting in 2015, when a Muslim decides to become a Christian and their conversion becomes known, their life is at risk¹⁹⁹. Sources informed the CSW that a Mullah who hears of apostasy will issue a fatwah ordering the death of the convert²⁰⁰.

7.2.3 In a letter regarding conversion to Christianity, dated 15 February 2021, the British High Commission’s (BHC) Political Section, which deals with humanitarian and human rights issues, indicated it was ‘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.’²⁰¹ Anecdotal evidence from the BHC’s external contacts in Pakistan reported that:

‘... 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.’²⁰²

7.2.4 Speaking at a 2017 EASO conference on Pakistan, Matthew Nelson, Reader in Politics, PhD, at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, stated:

‘Converts from Islam to Christianity ... face a legal loophole. And the loophole is that Pakistan still has no formal statutory law governing Muslim apostasy. If you look at the legal landscape and you say, “What is the law governing someone who leaves Islam to become say Christian?” There is no law for that. Maybe that is a good thing.

‘But what it means is that there is a space of informal engagement. The social persecution of converts from Islam to Christianity or something else is quite severe. But if you need to change your ID card, and you need to suddenly say, “I am not a Muslim,” informally you might be able to change your ID card. A little bit of negotiation. So, informal politics. This is not common, this is not easy, but this may be possible.’²⁰³

7.2.5 Information obtained from locally engaged staff at the BHC and other open sources was provided to CPIT in 2021, stating that:

¹⁹⁷ IRB, [‘Pakistan: Religious conversion, including treatment of converts...’](#), 14 January 2013

¹⁹⁸ IRB, [‘Pakistan: Religious conversion, including treatment of converts...’](#), 14 January 2013

¹⁹⁹ CSW, [‘House of Lords Hearing’](#), (pages 2-3), 10-11 November 2015

²⁰⁰ CSW, [‘House of Lords Hearing’](#), (pages 2-3), 10-11 November 2015

²⁰¹ BHC, [‘Letter to CPIT’](#), 15 February 2021

²⁰² BHC, [‘Letter to CPIT’](#), 15 February 2021

²⁰³ EASO, [‘COI Meeting Report – Pakistan’](#) (page 34), February 2018

‘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...’²⁰⁴

- 7.2.6 According to the USSD IRF Report 2019 ‘There were no reports of individuals killed for apostasy, but members of civil society reported that converts from Islam lived in varying degrees of secrecy for fear of violent retribution from family members or society at large.’²⁰⁵

See also Legal context – [Blasphemy](#) and [Apostasy](#)

- 7.2.7 Writing in February 2021, the BHC noted:

‘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.’²⁰⁶

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7.3 Discrimination and harassment

- 7.3.1 The DFAT report noted that Christians ‘... face significant social prejudice and class discrimination.’²⁰⁷ The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Annual Human Rights Report 2019 noted that intolerance towards Pakistan’s religious minorities, including Christians, remained a significant concern²⁰⁸.
- 7.3.2 According to the 2020 CLJ report, most respondents to the study said their Christian faith was ridiculed by Muslims, for example, being told Jesus was not the son of God or that the Bible had been altered²⁰⁹. The same source noted ‘Christians are the only religious minority who suffer rampant caste-based name-calling of “Chuhra” (sweeper). It is a highly pejorative term comparable with N-word. The Christians from Peshawar said that in Pashto they are called “Chuwana” while in Quetta, Karachi and Hyderabad they are called “Bhangi” – synonymous terms with the word Chuhra.’²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ BHC, [‘Letter to CPIT’](#), 15 February 2021

²⁰⁵ USSD, [‘IRF Report 2019’](#) (section III), 10 June 2020

²⁰⁶ BHC, [‘Letter to CPIT’](#), 15 February 2021

²⁰⁷ DFAT, [‘Country Information Report Pakistan’](#) (paragraph 3.136), 20 February 2019

²⁰⁸ FCO, [‘Human Rights and Democracy 2019’](#) (Chapter 4, section 6.18), 16 July 2020

²⁰⁹ CLJ, [‘The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan’](#) (page 70), 2020

²¹⁰ CLJ, [‘The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan’](#) (pages 79-80), 2020

7.3.3 The CREID report also noted the widespread use of derogatory terms against Christians²¹¹. Another CLJ report, dated 2019, which focussed on the social stigma and discrimination attached with sanitation work, noted that the term Chuhra was used as a substitute word for Christian in conversational use²¹². CSW noted that Christians may also be described as kafir (infidel) or perceived as sympathetic to the West²¹³.

See also [Access to employment](#).

7.3.4 The 2020 CLJ report noted ‘According to Hindus and Christians, Muslims are not reluctant in renting out their property to non-Muslims because they believe that persons belonging to minority communities are too weak to default on rent payments or make any attempt to grab the property. However, in recent years, few such cases have surfaced where minorities were denied a house on rent.’²¹⁴

7.3.5 According to the 2020 CLJ report, Christians believed they were racially profiled as they were associated with having darker skin²¹⁵. Both the 2020 CLJ and CREID reports cited micro aggressions experienced by many Christians, including people refusing to use the same crockery or utensils, touch items touched by Christians, eat food cooked by them or cut their hair^{216 217}. Whilst these acts were more common in rural areas, they also occurred in urban areas²¹⁸.

See also [Discrimination in schools, textbooks and curricula](#).

7.3.6 The 2020 CLJ report noted that, whilst the constitution provided for the right to propagate religion, all respondents to the survey said they could not do this among Muslims without fear of reprisal²¹⁹.

7.3.7 According to media reports, Christians and other minorities were denied food aid and other relief during the Covid-19 pandemic^{220 221 222}.

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7.4 Women and girls

7.4.1 The CREID report noted that Christian women and girls faced multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination due to their minority status and gender²²³.

²¹¹ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 194), November 2020

²¹² CLJ, ‘[Shame and Stigma in Sanitation](#)’ (Executive summary), 2019

²¹³ CSW, ‘[Pakistan: Religious freedom under attack](#)’ (page 19), December 2019

²¹⁴ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 67), 2020

²¹⁵ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 80), 2020

²¹⁶ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 81), 2020

²¹⁷ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 174), November 2020

²¹⁸ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (pages 76 and 81), 2020

²¹⁹ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 71), 2020

²²⁰ The Diplomat, ‘[COVID-19 Fans Religious Discrimination in Pakistan](#)’, 28 April 2020

²²¹ International Christian Concern, ‘[Pakistani Christians Suffer Layered Persecution...](#)’, 6 June 2020

²²² Vatican News, ‘[Pakistan Church condemns violence, discrimination against minorities](#)’, 9 July 2020

²²³ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 162), November 2020

- 7.4.2 The HRCP reported in 2019 on ‘an FIA [Federal Investigation Agency] crackdown on the sex trafficking of Pakistani girls to China.’²²⁴ Referring to events in Punjab province, the report stated:
- ‘... traffickers had reportedly been targeting impoverished, mostly Christian, families since 2018, paying them up to PKR3 million to allow their daughters and sisters, some of them teenagers, to marry Chinese men. At least one Muslim cleric was implicated, running a marriage bureau from his madrassah. Investigators compiled a list of 629 Pakistani girls and women sold to China as brides over a period up to early 2019. Once in China, the women are often neglected and starved, abused, sold into prostitution or the illegal organ trade. Several contacted their families, pleading to be rescued.
- ‘Scores of Chinese nationals and middlemen were picked up by the FIA. Then the biggest operation against traffickers began to stall. The Chinese government refuted the claims of trafficking. The Pakistan Foreign Office cautioned against “sensationalising” the situation. Finally, reports emerged that the FIA was under pressure to curtail its investigations. The Chinese nationals were either acquitted or bailed and allowed to leave the country.’²²⁵
- 7.4.3 Referring to women identifying as a religious minority generally, a shadow report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), submitted by the CSJ on behalf of 22 civil society organisations (CSOs) in February 2020, noted ‘Minority women, a majority of whom belong to marginalized socio-economic sections, face three tiered discrimination on the basis of gender, minority (religious identity) and class...’²²⁶
- 7.4.4 The 2020 CLJ report noted that, whilst sexual harassment affected all women, regardless of their faith:
- ‘Christian women are sometimes identified from their attire. This identification can result in their harassment. “Our women do not take dupatta (head covering). Hence, they believe Christian women are more courtable,” said Tahir Jadoon Johnson from Quetta. Karachi University Assistant Professor of Sociology Dr Sabir Michael said, “They tease our women because they know that there will be no retaliation.” “Christian women feel more insecure from Christian youths,” said Imran Titus Bhatti, the national coordinator of the Church of Pakistan and the Administrator of the UCH [United Christian Hospital].’²²⁷
- 7.4.5 All respondents in the CREID survey indicated sexual harassment was a problem generally and a third of Christian women said they faced harassment from men in their own community, though did not provide further detail²²⁸.

For information on employment for women, see [Access to employment](#).

For the general situation of women in Pakistan, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Pakistan: women fearing gender-based violence](#).

²²⁴ HRCP, ‘[State of Human Rights in 2019](#)’ (page 54), April 2020

²²⁵ HRCP, ‘[State of Human Rights in 2019](#)’ (page 54), April 2020

²²⁶ CSJ, ‘[Discrimination lingers on... II](#)’ (page 6), 12 February 2020

²²⁷ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 64), 2020

²²⁸ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 185), November 2020

7.5 Forced conversions to Islam

7.5.1 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted

'On August 14 [2019], Prime Minister Imran Khan publicly stated, "Those in Pakistan who convert people to Islam by force...are going against Islam." On November 21 [2019], the Senate established a Parliamentary Committee to Protect Minorities from Forced Conversions. The committee included the minister of religious affairs and interfaith harmony, the minister of human rights, and several Christian and Hindu senators. Religious minorities, however, said they remained concerned that government action to address coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam was inadequate. Minority rights activists in Sindh cited the province's failure to enact legislation against forced conversions as an example of the government's retreating in the face of pressure from religious parties.'²²⁹

7.5.2 A report by Ghulam Hussain on forced or faith conversions, published by the Institute of Peace Studies in October 2020 (IPS report), presented a critical analysis of the data and narrative often cited in regard to forced conversions in Pakistan, in which NGOs asserted around 1,000 Christian and Hindu women and girls were forcibly converted to Islam each year²³⁰. The IPS report noted 'claims are made in the NGO reports based on unverifiable evidence. Almost every report cites another report, which is then presented as the primary evidence...'²³¹

7.5.3 The 2020 CLJ report noted 'No known organisation has ever provided data to verify that 1,000 non-Muslim girls are forced to convert every year.'²³² The report added:

'In 2014, an NGO, named Movement for Solidarity and Peace in Pakistan (MSP), quoted a report based on the data collected by the Catholic news agency Fides from undisclosed sources. The report claimed that about 700 Christian women and 300 Hindu women were kidnapped and forced to change their faith in Pakistan every year. The report did not mention any names or incidents in support of its claim. Now, the data compiled by the [Centre for Social Justice](#) (CSJ), a non-government organisation working on minority rights, shows that 160 incidents of forced conversion took place over six years (2013-2019), which seems more reasonable.'²³³

7.5.4 The data compiled by the CSJ (published in an undated report) actually cited 162 allegations of forced conversion between 2013 and 2019²³⁴, although CPIT notes the report did not indicate that this was the sum total of all forced conversions during that period. In a tabulated summary of 146 cases of

²²⁹ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

²³⁰ IPS, '[Forced Conversions or Faith Conversions](#)' (pages 7 and 9), 20 October 2020

²³¹ IPS, '[Forced Conversions or Faith Conversions](#)' (page 19), 20 October 2020

²³² CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 65), 2020

²³³ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 65), 2020

²³⁴ CSJ, '[Silence of the Lamb II](#)' (page 6), no date

alleged forced conversions and related crimes against minority women and girls, the CSJ recorded 69 cases were Christian²³⁵.

- 7.5.5 The IPS report concluded that a 'faith conversion', that is, converting to another faith voluntarily, was often portrayed as a 'forced conversion', when that was not always the case²³⁶. Conversions occurred for a variety of reasons, including for social mobility and economic prosperity, as well as for marriage, which was not always accepted by families^{237 238}.
- 7.5.6 A 2014 Supreme Court judgement, cited in the IPS report, found, in the case of alleged forced conversions of Hindu women, that most had eloped and married of their own free will²³⁹. The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted 'There were reported cases of government intervention and assistance from courts and law enforcement in situations of attempted kidnapping and forced conversion, although enforcement action against alleged perpetrators was rare.'²⁴⁰ Whilst the IPS report noted that 'Most of the cases that were highlighted as "forced conversion" [by NGOs] and contested in the court of law have so far failed to prove the culpability of the alleged victims.'²⁴¹ However, the CREID reported that minority women feared their 'abductors' and would not admit in court to being forcibly converted, but instead say they had converted of their own free will²⁴². The CREID report also noted, 'The police and the administrative machinery usually side with the culprits who happen to be from the majority community, and socially and economically influential. The lower courts have generally ignored the circumstances, i.e. isolation from family, the crime of abduction and rape, the age of the so-called converted, and so on.'²⁴³
- 7.5.7 An undated working paper by the CSJ noted 'According to CSJ monitoring desk 35 Christian women had subjected to abduction, rape and conversion, one girl was murdered on refusing to have a relationship, 10 were beaten by police and landlords, and four women had been falsely accused of committing blasphemy between January and November, 2019.'²⁴⁴ According to the human rights NGO, CLAAS, cited in the USSD IRF Report 2019, '... at least 15 young Christian women were kidnapped and forcibly converted during [2019]. Of these cases, three women were returned to their families by orders of the court.'²⁴⁵
- 7.5.8 The Sindh Minorities Rights Commission Bill and the Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill, which aimed, amongst other things, to protect against forced conversions, were still pending as at 9 October 2020²⁴⁶.

²³⁵ CSJ, '[Silence of the Lamb II](#)' (pages 15-24), no date

²³⁶ IPS, '[Forced Conversions or Faith Conversions](#)' (page 71), 20 October 2020

²³⁷ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (pages 65-66), 2020

²³⁸ CREID, '[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)' (page 188), November 2020

²³⁹ IPS, '[Forced Conversions or Faith Conversions](#)' (page 43), 20 October 2020

²⁴⁰ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

²⁴¹ IPS, '[Forced Conversions or Faith Conversions](#)' (page 66), 20 October 2020

²⁴² CREID, '[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)' (page 184), November 2020

²⁴³ CREID, '[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)' (page 184), November 2020

²⁴⁴ CSJ, '[Silence of the Lamb II](#)' (page 6), no date

²⁴⁵ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section III), 10 June 2020

²⁴⁶ Dawn, '[Lawmakers' body discusses minorities' rights bill, forced conversion](#)', 9 October 2020

8. Attacks against Christians and Christian communities

8.1 Communal violence

- 8.1.1 Blasphemy allegations can trigger acts of communal violence against minorities²⁴⁷ (see [Accusations of blasphemy](#)).
- 8.1.2 The 2020 CLJ report cited incidents of targeted attacks against Christian (mostly Protestant) institutions and worship places over the past 2 decades, noting ‘Christian schools and churches were targeted after sacrilegious caricatures were published in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten in 2006. Christian neighbourhoods of Gojra (2009) and Joseph Colony (2013) were looted, ransacked and then set on fire on the pretext of blasphemy. In 2012, anti-Islam film protestors set a church on fire in Mardan.’²⁴⁸
- 8.1.3 In 2016, CLAAS reported on numerous cases of violence or discrimination against Christians or their places of worship²⁴⁹. The organisation provided legal assistance to 52 Christians, nearly half of which were referred to as family matters or domestic violence²⁵⁰. The USSD IRF Report for 2016 referred to 2 cases of mob violence against Christians following blasphemy accusations²⁵¹. In both cases, police and community members diffused the situation²⁵².
- 8.1.4 In 2017, the HRCP reported on the lynching of a schoolboy for drinking from the same glass as his Muslim classmate²⁵³. In the same year there was also a report of church vandalism and threats against Christian residents in a Faisalabad neighbourhood to leave or convert to Islam after a Christian girl converted and eloped with a Muslim boy²⁵⁴. In its annual report for 2017, CLAAS reported on 6 suspected murders of Christians, though not all were religiously motivated²⁵⁵, and 2 rape cases²⁵⁶.
- 8.1.5 CLAAS investigated 9 cases of violence, including murder, against Christians in 2018²⁵⁷. Violent protests forced 800 Christians to flee their neighbourhood in February 2018 after 2 teenagers were accused of posting religiously sensitive material on Facebook²⁵⁸. In June 2018, unknown assailants shot dead a Christian couple in Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa²⁵⁹.
- 8.1.6 The National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) reported episodes of faith-based violence in 2019, including, ‘On May 12, some faithful noticed

²⁴⁷ CSW, ‘[Pakistan: Religious freedom under attack](#)’ (page 17), December 2019

²⁴⁸ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 31), 2020

²⁴⁹ CLAAS, ‘[Annual Report 2016](#)’ (pages 43, 91-93), 2017

²⁵⁰ CLAAS, ‘[Annual Report 2016](#)’ (page 6), 2017

²⁵¹ USSD, ‘[IRF Report for 2016](#)’ (Section II), 15 August 2017

²⁵² USSD, ‘[IRF Report for 2016](#)’ (Section II), 15 August 2017

²⁵³ HRCP, ‘[State of Human Rights in 2017](#)’ (page 89), March 2018

²⁵⁴ HRCP, ‘[State of Human Rights in 2017](#)’ (page 88), March 2018

²⁵⁵ CLAAS, ‘[Annual Report 2017](#)’ (pages 28-35), 2018

²⁵⁶ CLAAS, ‘[Annual Report 2017](#)’ (page 7), 2018

²⁵⁷ CLAAS, ‘[Annual Report 2018](#)’ (page 27), May 2019

²⁵⁸ USCIRF, ‘[Annual Report 2019 – Pakistan](#)’ (page 4), April 2019

²⁵⁹ Tribal News Network, ‘[Police find bullet-riddled bodies of Christian couple in Mardan](#)’, 6 June 2018

damaged and broken crosses on 40 tombs in a Catholic cemetery in Antonioabad. The same month, Javed Masih, a 36-year-old Christian, was killed by his Muslim employer in the village of Chak 7, near Faisalabad.²⁶⁰

8.1.7 In February 2020, a Christian man was tortured and murdered after he used a Muslim landowner's well to wash himself²⁶¹.

8.1.8 The CLJ report noted that violence against young Christian men was reported:

'Dr Sabir Michael from Karachi said that violence with Christian youths was taking place in his own neighbourhood. "Two months ago [no date given], about 50 Muslim youths marched on our colony because a trivial issue had been given a religious colouring".

'Kamran Michael says that "our youths avoid getting into fights because they know it would turn into a religious matter".

'In Quetta, Christians have not suffered much of this violence but there is deep segregation.

'Methodist Bishop of Multan Leo Roderick Paul says that this type of violence with Christian youths takes place in remote areas of South Punjab. It seems that the locality, its size, income level of its residents and similar indicators are also important factors.'²⁶²

8.1.9 The 2020 CLJ report added that many incidents of 'small scale mob violence' go unreported²⁶³, although the report also noted that attacks on minority neighbourhoods had decreased²⁶⁴, though did not provide any comparative data.

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8.2 Militant violence

8.2.1 The CLJ report observed that 'Pakistani Christians, mostly Protestant churches and missionary institutions, have been the main non-Muslim group targeted by terrorists since 9/11.'²⁶⁵ The report cited 15 terrorist attacks against Christians, their schools or places of worship, that occurred between 2001 and 2017²⁶⁶.

8.2.2 The APPG 2020 Report noted 'On Easter Sunday 2016, at least 75 people were killed and over 340 injured in a suicide bombing that hit the main entrance of Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park, one of the largest parks in Lahore, Pakistan. The attack targeted Christians who were celebrating Easter... Jamaat-ul-Ahrar [JuA], a group affiliated with the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for the attack.'²⁶⁷ According to the USSD IRF Report for 2016, the JuA also claimed responsibility for an attack on a Christian

²⁶⁰ Vatican News, '[Pakistani Church alarmed at growing anti-minority violence](#)', 17 October 2019

²⁶¹ APPG, '[Suffocation of the Faithful](#)' (page 81), July 2020

²⁶² CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 60), 2020

²⁶³ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 60), 2020

²⁶⁴ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 88), 2020

²⁶⁵ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 62), 2020

²⁶⁶ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (pages 62-63), 2020

²⁶⁷ APPG, '[Suffocation of the Faithful](#)' (page 77), July 2020

neighbourhood in Peshawar in September 2016, which killed a security guard²⁶⁸.

- 8.2.3 Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) cited 2 terrorist attacks targeting Christians in 2015 and 2017: a double bombing at St John's Church and Christ Church in Youhanabad in March 2015, which killed 14 and injured over 70, and a suicide bomb attack in December 2017 at the Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta, which killed 9 and injured over 30²⁶⁹.
- 8.2.4 On 2 April 2018, 4 members of a Christian family were shot and killed whilst travelling in a rickshaw near a church in Quetta's Shah Zaman road area²⁷⁰²⁷¹. Islamic State claimed responsibility²⁷². On 15 April 2018, Islamic State claimed responsibility for an attack that killed 2 Christians and injured 5 others after they were shot when leaving a church service in Quetta's predominately Christian neighbourhood of Esra Nagri²⁷³ ²⁷⁴.
- 8.2.5 The USSD IRF Report 2019 observed that, unlike in previous years, there were no reports of Christians being targeted by armed sectarian groups in 2019²⁷⁵. The PIPS Security Report for 2019 noted that incidents of faith-based violence declined in 2019 compared to 2018, adding '... the incidence of violence against religious minorities and sects in the country has been falling for the last five years.'²⁷⁶ The South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) provided a timeline of terrorist activities in 2020, but did not record any terrorist-related attacks against Christians during that year²⁷⁷. The BHC indicated in its letter dated February 2021 that violent attacks against Christians were becoming less common²⁷⁸.

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Section 9 updated: 15 February 2021

9. Education and employment

9.1 Access to employment

- 9.1.1 The APPG 2019 Report noted, 'In 2009, Pakistan introduced a requirement that 5% of all Federal and Provincial Government posts must be filled by religious minority workers... However... The Annual Statistical Bulletin of Federal Government Employees 2017–18, states that out of 581,240 employees, only 16,711 or 2.8% were Non-Muslims, and most of them were concentrated in the low paid work.'²⁷⁹ A report by the NGO, the Centre for

²⁶⁸ USSD, '[IRF Report for 2016](#)' (Section II), 15 August 2017

²⁶⁹ CSW, '[Pakistan: Religious freedom under attack](#)' (pages 22-23), December 2019

²⁷⁰ Dawn, '[4 Christians among 7 killed in separate firing incidents in Quetta](#)', 2 April 2018

²⁷¹ Pakistan Today, '[Four Christians killed in Quetta terror attack](#)', 3 April 2018

²⁷² Pakistan Today, '[Four Christians killed in Quetta terror attack](#)', 3 April 2018

²⁷³ Dawn, '[At least 2 dead, 5 injured in attack on Christian community near church...](#)', 15 April 2018,

²⁷⁴ Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, '[Pakistani Christians Killed In Drive-By...](#)', 16 April 2018,

²⁷⁵ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

²⁷⁶ PIPS, '[Pakistan Security Report 2019](#)' (page 123), 5 January 2020

²⁷⁷ SATP, '[Pakistan: Timeline \(Terrorist Activities\) – 2020](#)', January to December 2020

²⁷⁸ BHC, '[Letter to CPIT](#)', 15 February 2021

²⁷⁹ APPG, '[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)' (page 19), September 2019

Social Justice (CSJ), indicated that over 90% (15,069) of the 16,711 non-Muslim employees were Christians²⁸⁰.

9.1.2 The APPG 2019 Report noted ‘... the delegation was informed that other organisations have tried to meet the 5% requirement by advertising sanitation jobs and other low paying work as being exclusively for Christians or other religious minorities.’²⁸¹

9.1.3 The USSD IRF Report 2019 stated:

‘Christian religious freedom activists continued to report widespread discrimination against Christians in private employment. They said Christians had difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor; some advertisements for menial jobs even specified they were open only to Christian applicants. Media reported Javed Masih, a Christian, was killed by his employer, Abbas Olaf, after informing Abbas he was leaving the farm job for which he was paid less than minimum wage. Yasir Talib, an activist who collaborates with the Punjab Provincial Ministry for Human Rights and Minority Affairs in Faisalabad, said, “Many Muslims also work in the fields, but conditions for Christians are four times worse.” In November Christian journalist Gonila Gill stated she resigned her job in Lahore after harassment from Muslim coworkers pressuring her to convert to Islam and denigrating her religion.’²⁸²

9.1.4 The CREID report found that most Christian respondents experienced religious discrimination in the workplace, unless they worked for a church or community-run organisation²⁸³.

9.1.5 According to the 2020 CLJ report, many Christians youths remain uneducated and work in menial jobs²⁸⁴. The report added that all Christians in the study agreed they were associated with sanitation jobs²⁸⁵. However, the report also noted many Christian women were employed as nurses and teachers²⁸⁶, although the CREID report indicated that it was only about 2% of minority women as a whole who worked in professions such as nursing, teaching or office work, and that most worked in formal and informal labour sectors like agriculture, sanitation, the brick-kiln industry and domestic work²⁸⁷. According to CSW, 90-95% of employees in the sanitation sector were Christians²⁸⁸.

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9.2 Religious education and schools

9.2.1 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted that students must declare their religious affiliation on application forms to enter all public or private educational

²⁸⁰ CSJ, ‘[Challenges in exercising religious freedom in Pakistan](#)’ (page 20), December 2019

²⁸¹ APPG, ‘[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)’ (page 19), September 2019

²⁸² USSD, ‘[IRF Report 2019](#)’ (section III), 10 June 2020

²⁸³ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 177), November 2020

²⁸⁴ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 45), 2020

²⁸⁵ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (page 80), 2020

²⁸⁶ CLJ, ‘[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)’ (pages 45 and 63), 2020

²⁸⁷ CREID, ‘[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)’ (page 164), November 2020

²⁸⁸ CSW, ‘[Pakistan: Religious freedom under attack](#)’ (page 20), December 2019

institutions, including universities, and that non-Muslims must have their religious affiliation verified by the head of their local religious community²⁸⁹.

9.2.2 The same report stated:

'The constitution states 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 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 state-run schools. Although students of other religious groups are not legally required to study Islam, schools do not always offer parallel studies in their own religious beliefs. In some schools, however, non-Muslim students may study ethics. Parents may send children to private schools, including religious schools, at the family's expense.'²⁹⁰

9.2.3 The 2020 CLJ report stated 'Islamic Studies is a compulsory subject and in most of the cases non-Muslim students cannot avoid it. Islamic teachings are part of Urdu, English, Science, History and other textbooks. Non-Muslim students can opt for "Ethics" instead of Islamic Studies but teachers, as well as textbooks of the subject, are not readily available. Also, marks in Islamic Studies are liberally given so non-Muslim students opt for this even if they can choose Ethics.'²⁹¹

9.2.4 Pakistan's second largest city Lahore has approximately 50 Catholic Church schools and schools of other confessions²⁹².

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9.3 Discrimination in schools, textbooks and curricula

9.3.1 Whilst noting the contribution that madrassas (Islamic schools) had made to enhance access to education, the UN CESCR expressed concern, in its Concluding observations, dated July 2017, '... at repeated reports that the curricula of some madrassas do not provide any education other than that based on the Qur'an and have content that may incite hatred against religious and ethnic minorities. It is also concerned that some textbooks and curricula used in Sindh and Punjab contain stereotyped images of religious and ethnic minorities.'²⁹³ In August 2017, the UN Human Rights Committee (UN HRC) also expressed concern at the religiously biased content of textbooks and curricula in both public schools and madrasas²⁹⁴.

9.3.2 Regarding Christian schools and textbooks, Nathalie Boschman of Cedoca, the Belgian COI service, stated at an EASO conference held in 2017, '... the role of religious minorities from textbooks is removed and textbooks are

²⁸⁹ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

²⁹⁰ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

²⁹¹ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 68), 2020

²⁹² APPG, '[Freedom of Religion or Belief in Pakistan & UK Government ...](#)' (page 59), March 2016

²⁹³ UNCESCR, '[Concluding observations...](#)', (paragraph 83), 20 July 2017

²⁹⁴ UNHRC, '[Concluding observations...](#)' (paragraph 33), 23 August 2017

reviewed by each provincial education board. Christian schools are obliged to buy the same books as the Muslims and each textbook starts with an explanation of Islam, even textbooks on chemi[stry] or biology.²⁹⁵

9.3.3 PIPS director, Muhammad Amir Rana, speaking at the same conference, said:

‘Christians and Hindus have complained that the existing curriculum is inciting hatred against them. In many educational institutions, they have been forced to learn the Quran and take Islamic studies. Though they have the option to take other alternative subjects like ethics, they then have a lot of issues. The administration says they do not have the teachers or the resources, and this creates issues for them, and their youth feel more alienated within the society.’²⁹⁶

9.3.4 According to a 2018 report by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW):

‘Some school teachers have an extremist mindset and directly or indirectly try to influence non-Muslim children to convince them that their faith is illogical, and contrary to the universal truth and Islam as the divine faith. A Christian student said that in Class 6 (age 12 to13), twelve Christians left because of the “aggressive discrimination and pressure to convert”. It was a government school. Student interviews indicated that teachers often instructed non-Muslims and especially Ahmadi and Christian students to eat, sit, and play separately from other students; this response is a combination of teachers’ attitudes or ideology, the school curriculum, parents and the madrassa education (many children attend the mosque or madrassa in the morning or evening for religious instruction along with regular school).’²⁹⁷

9.3.5 The CSW report added:

‘In 2017 CSW interviewed children from religious minority groups who described how they were routinely subjected to severe physical and psychological ill-treatment including being segregated, bullied, teased and beaten on multiple occasions by both teachers and classmates. Students from each faith group reported that they were made to sit separately from other students, and were insulted and humiliated by students and teachers because of their religion. Many reported being subjected to psychological torment, mental abuse, humiliation and routine taunts, and felt they had to accept this discriminatory treatment as part of their education.’

9.3.6 The APPG 2019 Report indicated ‘Discrimination against religious minorities is promoted through school textbooks which stigmatise non-Muslims and, with distorted historical facts, portray non-Muslims as inferior to Muslims. In the worst cases, some textbooks include hate materials and actively encourage discrimination or violence against religious minority groups.’²⁹⁸

9.3.7 The APPG 2019 Report noted significant efforts had been made by Pakistani Government ‘... in removing some of the most offensive materials from

²⁹⁵ EASO, [‘COI Meeting Report – Pakistan’](#) (page 45), February 2018

²⁹⁶ EASO, [‘COI Meeting Report – Pakistan’](#) (page 52), February 2018

²⁹⁷ CSW, [‘Discrimination on the Basis of Religion or Belief in Education’](#) (page 63), February 2018

²⁹⁸ APPG, [‘Religious Minorities of Pakistan’](#) (page 21), September 2019

school curricula but there is nevertheless considerable space for improvement.²⁹⁹ Similarly, several respondents to the CLJ study were noted as saying that numerous examples of offensive school textbook content had been removed in the past few years, indicating a drive by the government to improve the treatment of minorities³⁰⁰.

9.3.8 According to the USSD IRF Report 2019:

'The Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Education held consultations with minority faith representatives during the year in a review of textbooks for derogatory material. Officials of the Ministry of Human Rights stated in August that after their review and further reviews from the provincial governments of Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, "All hate speech had been removed" from school textbooks in these provinces. The Ministry of Human Rights reported the Ministry of Education adopted all its recommendations to remove hate speech, but its recommendations to include new rights-based content were not accepted. Some minority faith representatives said their inclusion in the review process was minimal, however, and stated they feared problematic content would remain in curricula. In a March peace conference, Punjab Minister for Human Rights and Minority Affairs Ejaz Alam Augustine stated that Christian representatives would sit on the Punjab Textbook Board during the preparation of curriculum to ensure derogatory statements were removed, but the promise was reportedly not fulfilled at year's end.'³⁰¹

9.3.9 The USCIRF Annual Report 2020, covering 2019 events, noted:

'The government has taken steps to address educational material with discriminatory content against religious minorities, including announcing in April that it would bring 30,000 madrassas under government control to combat religious extremism, despite earlier provincial governments' failures to register madrassas comprehensively under the 2015 National Action Plan. In 2019, the government also announced it would implement a common national curriculum beginning in 2021.'³⁰²

9.3.10 In regard to the treatment of students, according to the APPG Report 2019:

'Minority students are routinely subjected to physical and psychological ill-treatment, including being segregated, bullied, teased, beaten and pushed towards conversion. There are consistent reports that teachers often turn a blind eye to this discrimination or, in many cases, participate in it. Segregation policies have also been practised in a number of schools, including in some cities where school officials have prohibited Christian or other non-Muslim pupils from drinking water or using lavatories reserved for Muslim students.'³⁰³

²⁹⁹ APPG, '[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)' (page 21), September 2019

³⁰⁰ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 67), 2020

³⁰¹ USSD, '[IRF Report 2019](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

³⁰² USCIRF, '[Annual Report 2020 – Pakistan](#)' (page 33), August 2020

³⁰³ APPG, '[Religious Minorities of Pakistan](#)' (page 21), September 2019

- 9.3.11 The 2020 CLJ report noted 'Psychological violence was also quoted as a major reason for students facing difficulty in excelling in education.'³⁰⁴ The same source noted, 'It was reported that some Christians hide their identity to avoid religious segregation. There are complaints by students that their classmates call them Isai Chuhra [a derogatory term]. They refuse combined eating and drinking or even sitting together. The area, city and school the minority student goes to also matters.'³⁰⁵ Some Christians were said to give their children Islamic names so they would not be singled out as potential targets for discrimination at school³⁰⁶.
- 9.3.12 An assistant university professor cited in the CLJ report said that even though the standard of education in Christian schools had dropped considerably, he still sent his children there for them to avoid social discrimination³⁰⁷. In contrast, a 2018 CNN report indicated the standard of education in Christian schools was high, stating, 'Pakistan's Christian schools, which have educated much of the country's leadership, have an excellent reputation, and most of the school's pupils are in fact Muslim.'³⁰⁸
- 9.3.13 The CREID report noted that only the Christian students who attended Christian-run schools did not face discrimination³⁰⁹.

See also [Discrimination and harassment](#).

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³⁰⁴ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 66), 2020

³⁰⁵ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 66), 2020

³⁰⁶ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 67), 2020

³⁰⁷ CLJ, '[The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan](#)' (page 67), 2020

³⁰⁸ CNN, '[The crumbling colonial-era churches of Pakistan](#)', 30 March 2018

³⁰⁹ CREID, '[Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious...](#)' (page 177), November 2020

Annex A

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

Drafted 16 December 2013

Updated 15 February 2021

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
- 1.5% Christian
- 1.5% Hindu
- 0.6% other

On this basis, there would be around 2.8m 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, Gujramwala 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 fifth on the Christian support group Open Doors World Watch List 2020 of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. Christians are 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.

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

Violent attacks on Christians in Pakistan are becoming less common. 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, though it has been redundant since 2019 due to the lack of serving Commissioners. 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. In addition, a Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Interfaith Harmony was appointed in September 2020. There is no clarity on how effective this new role will be with concerns that the Advisor will focus on intra-faith rather than interfaith work.

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.

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

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 necessarily 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.

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Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised 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
- Conversion to Christianity
 - Apostasy
- State treatment and attitudes
 - State support and outreach
 - Political representation
 - Discrimination
 - Access to justice
- Societal treatment and attitudes
 - Community relations
 - Harassment and discrimination
 - Women and girls, including forced conversions to Islam
 - Allegations of blasphemy
 - Consequences of converting to Christianity
- Communal and militant violence
 - Attacks against Christians
- Access to education and employment

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **4.0**
- valid from **22 February 2021**

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment

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