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Pakistan: Religious Minorities

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Pakistan: Religious Minorities

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This report serves the specific purpose of collating legally relevant information on conditions in countries of origin pertinent to the assessment of claims for asylum. It is not intended to be a general report on human rights conditions. The report is prepared within a specified time frame on the basis of publicly available documents as well as information provided by experts. All sources are cited and fully referenced.

This report is not, and does not purport to be, either exhaustive with regard to conditions in the country surveyed, or conclusive as to the merits of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Every effort has been made to compile information from reliable sources; users should refer to the full text of documents cited and assess the credibility, relevance and timeliness of source material with reference to the specific research concerns arising from individual applications.

An electronic version of this report is available on www.ecoi.net.

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List of Abbreviations

AMC	Ahmadi Muslim Community
ASWJ	Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat
ATA	Anti Terrorism Act
ATC	Anti-Terrorism Court
CNIC	Computerised National Identity Card
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FIR	First Information Report
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LeJ/LJ	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
NADRA	National Database and Registration Authority
MOHR	Pakistani Ministry of Human Rights
MoRH	Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony
NAP	National Action Plan
NCM	National Commission for Minorities
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIC	National Identity Card
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf
PPC	Pakistan Penal Code
SMP	Sipah-e-Mohammed Pakistan
SSP	Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan
TLP	Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan

1 Background

Physical map of Pakistan. Source: CIA, 2010a (map as of 2010)

The beginnings of today's Islamic Republic of Pakistan date back to August 1947, when British Colonial Rule in South Asia ended and left two new independent states behind: India and Pakistan (BpB, 7 April 2014; see also Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021,

Introduction & Quick Facts and CIA, updated 29 January 2021). The partition of the land that was before 1947 known as British India was the result of demands of Islamic Nationalists, who feared that Muslims would not be adequately represented in a united state with a predominantly Hindu population (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Introduction & Quick Facts). The violence that followed between the two states after partition still has an impact on the two countries until today (BpB, 7 April 2014; see also Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Introduction & Quick Facts).

The state religion of Pakistan is Islam, which is professed by more than 95 per cent of the population (Political Handbook of the World, 2018-2019, 2019, p. 1209). The Pakistani state is, after Indonesia, the second largest Islamic state in the world (MRG, updated June 2019). The name Pakistan in Urdu and Persian language means "land of the pure" (The Nation, 2 September 2017).

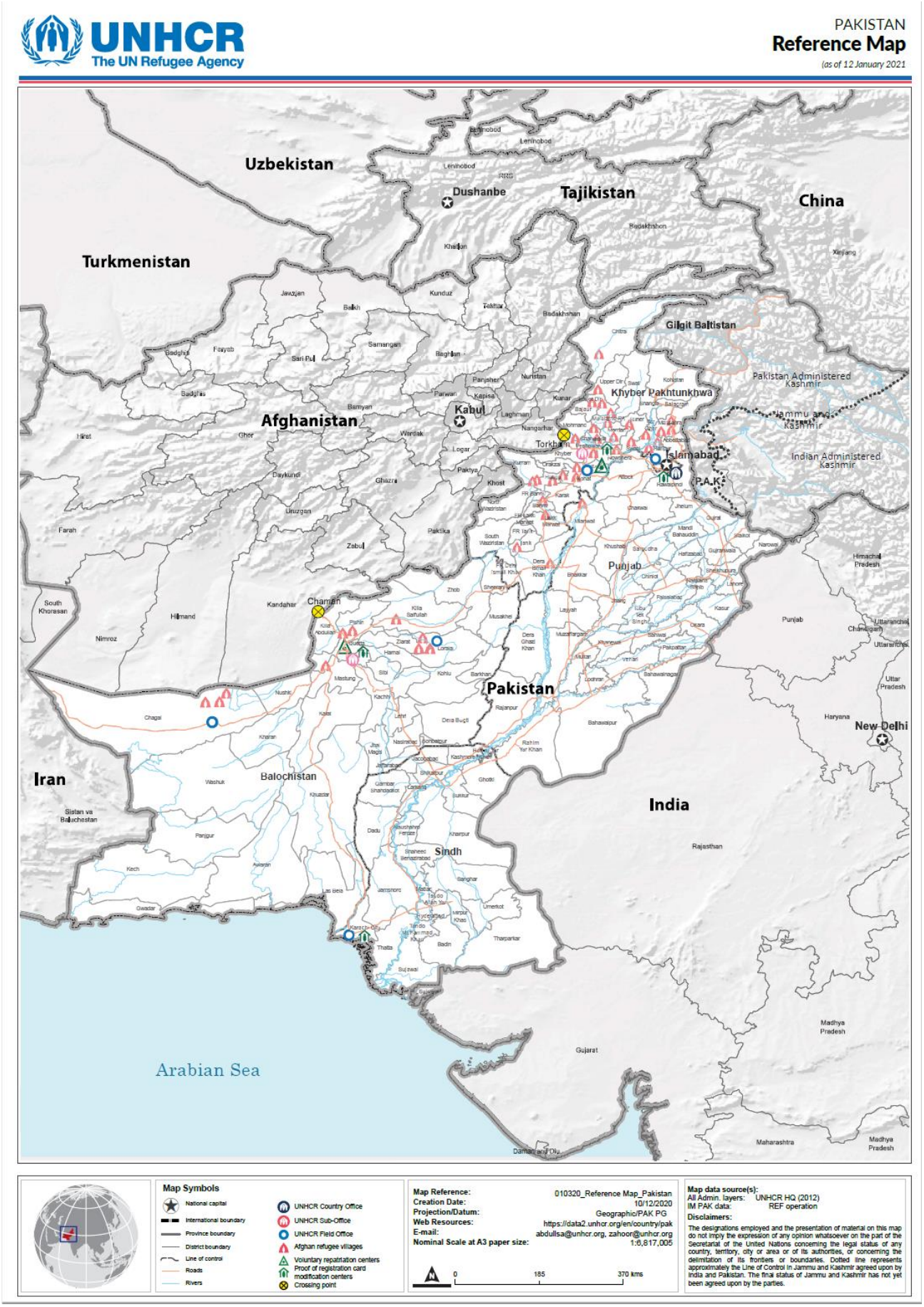
For more than twenty years, Pakistan consisted of two geographically separated parts: West Pakistan and East Pakistan. East Pakistan was located approximately 1,600 kilometres further east and gained its independence as Bangladesh in 1971 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Introduction & Quick Facts; see also Political Handbook of the World, 2018-2019, 2019, p. 1209).

Since its beginnings Pakistan has struggled to attain political stability and has alternated between quasi-democracy and military rule (BBC News, 23 July 2018; Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Government and society). For almost half of its history the country was ruled by military administrations (1958–69, 1969–71, 1977–88, and 1999–2008) (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Government and society). The 2018 general election was only the third consecutive transfer of power from one civilian government to another in the history of the country (ORF, 18 December 2018). After the 2018 general elections former cricketer Imran Khan, whose party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) dominated the election, was sworn-in as prime minister of Pakistan (BBC News, 6 August 2018; BBC News, 18 August 2018). Observers have expressed concerns with regard to pre-election interference by the military (USDOS, 11 March 2020, executive summary), which was accused of influencing opinion against Imran Khan's rivals (BBC News, 6 August 2018; BBC News, 18 August 2018).

Linguistically Pakistan is a heterogeneous country "and no single language can be said to be common to the whole population" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021). The national language of Pakistan is Urdu. Even so, it is the mother tongue of only 8 per cent of the population. The dominant language spoken by approximately half of the population is Punjabi, followed by Sindhi (12 per cent), Saraiki (10 per cent) and Pashtu (8 per cent). English is official language and lingua franca in business and government (Political Handbook of the World, 2018-2019, 2019, p. 1209; CIA, updated 22 January 2021).

1.1 Geography

Administrative Division of Pakistan. Source: CIA, 2010b (map as of 2010); Please note: FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) were semi-autonomous from 1947 to 2018 and not governed under Pakistani laws (Al Jazeera, 2019). In May 2018 FATA were merged with neighbouring province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa of which they since form a part (The Express Tribune, 25 May 2018; Al Jazeera, 2019)



This map shows the administrative division after 2018. Source: [UNHCR, 12 January 2021](#) (map as of 12 January 2021)

Pakistan is located in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent (Political handbook of the World, 2018-2019, 2019, p. 1209). The southern border of Pakistan is defined by the Arabian Sea, to its west the country is bordered by Iran, to the northwest and north by Afghanistan, to the northeast by China and to the east and southeast by India (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Land).
Pakistan's territory extends over approximately 800,000 square kilometres (CIA, updated 22 January 2021; Political Handbook of the World, 2018 – 2019, 2019, p. 1209), excluding Jammu and Kashmir. The Pakistan administered part of Jammu and Kashmir stretches over roughly 83,000 square kilometres (Political Handbook of the World, 2018 – 2019, 2019, p. 1209).
On the country's relief the English-language online Encyclopaedia Britannica notes:

> "Pakistan is situated at the western end of the great Indo-Gangetic Plain. Of the total area of the country, about three-fifths consists of rough mountainous terrain and plateaus, and the remaining two-fifths constitutes a wide expanse of level plain. The land can be divided into five major regions: the Himalayan and Karakoram ranges and their subranges; the Hindu Kush and western mountains; the Balochistan plateau; the submontane plateau (Potwar Plateau, Salt Range, trans-Indus plain, and Sialkot area); and the Indus River plain. Within each major division there are further subdivisions, including a number of desert areas." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Land)

Pakistan's total population according to the 2017 census amounted to 207.8 million, which shows an average annual increase of 4 million since 1998, when the last census took place (ÖAW, June 2019, p. 4). The overall literacy rate in 2017 was 59.1%, around 71 per cent of men and 47 per cent of women at the age of 15 years or older were literate (UIS, 2017).
The capital of the country is Islamabad with approximately 1.1 million inhabitants. The most populous cities are Karachi (approximately 11.6 million) and Lahore (approximately 6.3 million), Faisalabad (approximately 2.5 million) and Rawalpindi (1.7 million) (Political Handbook of the World, 2018 – 2019, 2019, p. 1209).

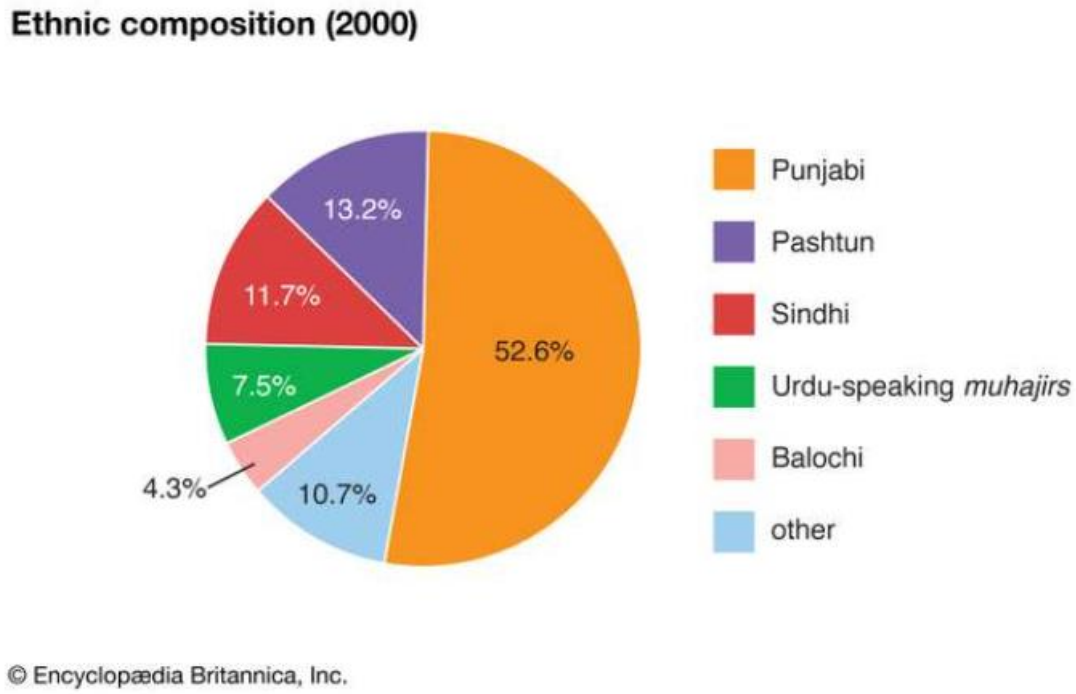
Pakistan is a federation and is comprised of the four provinces Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Islamabad Capital Territory and the two Pakistan-administered areas Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan (CIA, 22 January 2021).
The status of Jammu and Kashmir with its predominantly Muslim population is since the 1949 ceasefire unresolved between India and Pakistan. The territory is divided into Indian- and Pakistani-administered sectors (Political Handbook of the World, 2018 – 2019, 2019, p. 1210; SWP, October 2020, p. 2).

1.2 Religious and ethnic groups

The most recent data on religion and languages provided by the state agency Pakistan Bureau of Statistics is from the 1998 national census (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, updated 4 February 2021). The 2017 national census data was approved by the government only in December 2020 (Dawn, 23 December 2020), but apart from provisional results concerning population numbers no current information has been published on the website of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, neither results concerning language nor data on religious affiliation are provided (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, updated 4 February 2021; see also Dawn, 22 May 2017). Several sources

cite unofficial 2017 census data on religious affiliation (Tribune, 27 May 2018; RFI, 2020, p. 64; The Nation, 28 May 2018) which at the time of writing of this compilation was not available on the website of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (The Express Tribune, 27 May 2018; RFI, 2020, p. 64; The Nation, 28 May 2018).

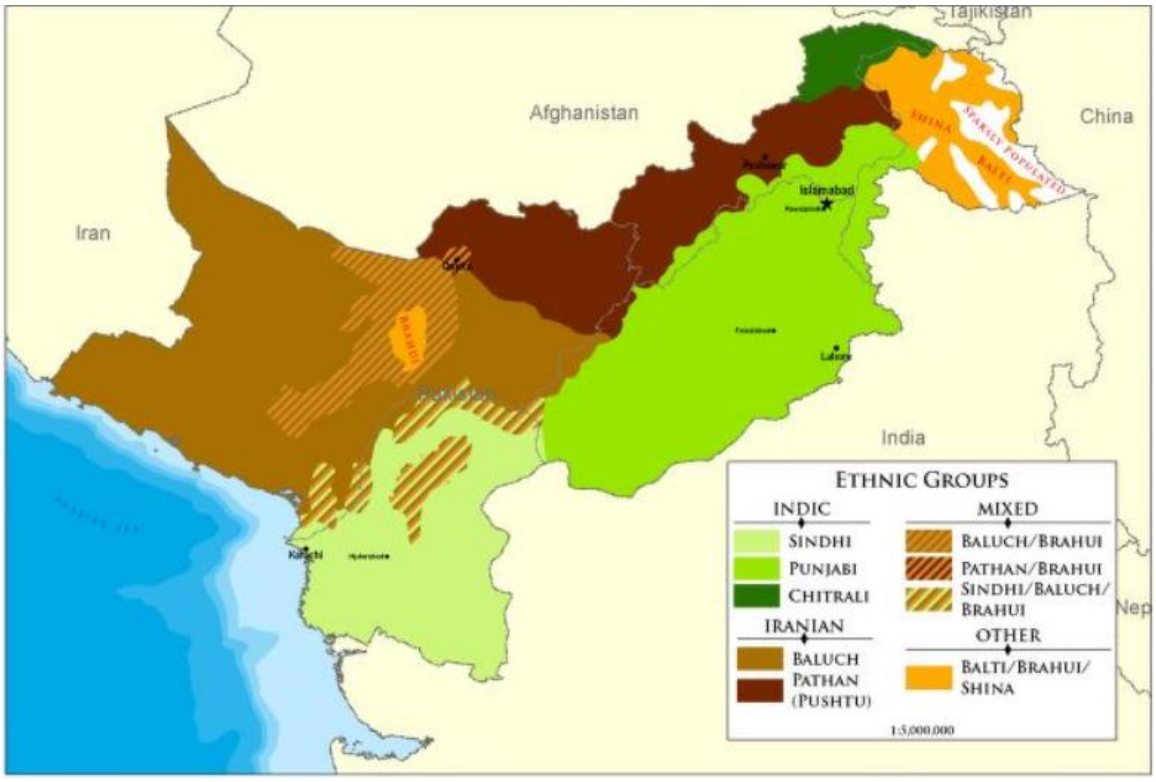
The CIA World Factbook lists Pakistan's largest ethnic groups according to their share of the total population: Punjabis (44.7 per cent of the total population), followed by Pashtuns (Pathan) (15.4 per cent), Sindhis (14.1 per cent), Saraikis (8.4 per cent), Muhajirs (7.6 per cent) and Balochis (3.6 per cent). Other ethnic groups amount to about 6 per cent of the population. (CIA, updated 22 January 2021)
A pie chart of the Encyclopaedia Britannica shows slightly different shares of Punjabis and Pashtuns of the total population. As the Saraiki language is "intermediate between Sindhi and Punjabi" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, People) and the CIA World Factbook explains Saraiki as a variant of the Punjabi language (CIA, updated 22 January 2021), the higher number of Punjabis in the chart depicted below might be explained by adding up Saraiki speakers (around 8 per cent) and Punjabi speakers (around 45 per cent). According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, Pashtuns account for approximately 13 per cent of the population:



Ethnic composition. Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, People; chart as of 2000

A May 2018 article by the English-language daily newspaper The Express Tribune reports on the provisional figures of the 2017 Census (see above). According to this article the provisional 2017 census data on the share of the population by mother tongue reads as follows: Punjabi (about 92 million, 39 per cent), Pashtu (about 38 million, 18 per cent), Saraiki (about 25 million, 12 per cent), Urdu (about 15 million, 7 per cent), Balochi (about 6 million, 3 per cent), others: about 6 per cent of the total population. (The Express Tribune, 27 May 2018)

The great majority of ethnic groups in Pakistan is identified on basis of their language (Alvi, 2017, p. 195). The largest ethnic group, the Punjabis, are dominant in politics, bureaucracy, economics and military (Fair Observer, 14 July 2020). The majority of Pashtu-speaking Pakistanis, who are known as Pashtuns, lives in the plains of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (MRG, updated June 2018a). Muhajir, meaning "immigrant" (MRG, updated June 2018b) is the term used for the Urdu-speaking Muslim migrants coming from India during or after partition and their descendants (Fair Observer, 14 July 2020; Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, People). Muhajirs and Sindhi-speaking Sindhis are the two large communities living in the province Sindh. (MRG, updated June 2018b). According to Minority Rights Group International (MRG), an international NGO, that campaigns for disadvantaged minorities and indigenous peoples, Sindhi people are concerned about the continuing settlement and immigration by Muhajirs in the province Sindh as well as by an influx of Punjabis (MRG, updated June 2018b; see also Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Zia ul-Haq). Like most of the other ethnic groups, the Saraikis are identified on basis of their language (Alvi, 2017, p. 195). The Saraiki language is, as already mentioned above, considered by some as a dialect of Punjabi (Fair Observer, 14 July 2020), but "it has become a symbol of ethnic bond among the people of Southern Punjab" (Alvi, 2017, p. 197). The number of Balochis in Pakistan in 2006 was estimated to be about 8 million. They are the indigenous population of the province Balochistan and the majority speaks Balochi or Brahui. According to Minority Rights International, more than half of the Pakistani Balochis live below the poverty line (MRG, updated June 2018c).
Apart from these larger ethnic groups there is a number of smaller ones like for example the Sheedis or Hazaras (MRG, updated June 2019).



Ethnic groups. Source: Jackson, 22 June 2009

96 per cent of Pakistan's population are Muslims (The Express Tribune, 27 May 2018; RFI, 2020, p. 64; CIA, updated 22 January 2021), the majority of which are Sunni. Sources differ in the

breakdown of the Muslim population between Sunni and Shia Muslims: 85-90 per cent Sunni and 10-15 per cent Shia (CIA, updated 22 January 2021; MRG updated June 2018e) or 80-85 per cent Sunni and 15-20 per cent Shia (USDOS, 10 June 2020; RFI, 2020, p. 15).
Among the Pakistani Sunnis Sufism is influential (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Religion), a religious practice involving spiritual exercises with the aim of proceeding with "a spiritual quest to unify with God, to bring the individual close to God" (EASO, February 2018, p. 26). There are subdivisions within Sunni Islam in Pakistan, primarily between two popular reform movements: the Deoband and the Barelvi[1] schools, whose members are often involved in violent conflict (MRG, updated June 2019; see also Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Religion; EASO, February 2018, p. 31).
The Pakistani Shiites are also divided into subsects: the majority of Pakistani Shiites belong to the Twelver School, while a minority are Ismailis (RFI, 2020, p. 15), also called Seveners (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 33). The Twelvers resemble the Iranian Shiite tradition, while the Ismailis are well-known in commerce and industry (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Religion). Shiites in Pakistan live throughout the country and belong to different ethnic groups (MRG, updated June 2018e).
Violence between radical Sunni and Shiite followers is common (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Religion).

The Religious Freedom Institute (RFI), a research group based in Washington, DC, advocating religious liberty as a fundamental human right (RFI, undated), in a 2020 report on religious freedom in Pakistan, refers to unofficial results of the 2017 census: "The remaining 4% of the population include religious Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, and smaller groups of Parsis/Zoroastrians, Ba'hais, Sikhs, Buddhists and others." (RFI, 2020, p. 15; see also The Express Tribune, 27 May 2018)
Also relying on provisional 2017 census data, the RFI states that 92 per cent of the minority population is comprised of Hindu and Christian communities, around 3.6 million Hindus constituting 1.7 per cent and Christians around 1.3 per cent of the total Pakistani population, while other minorities stay below one per cent. (RFI, 2020, p. 15)
Religious minorities are distributed all over Pakistan, however, 95 per cent of religious minorities live in the two provinces Punjab and Sindh (RFI, 2020, p. 15).
Although most Hindus left Pakistan for India in 1947 during the partition of India and Pakistan, a small community stayed behind (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Religion). The Express Tribune in an August 2019 article cites information from the National

[1] Sources report that Barelvis constitute the majority in Pakistan (DW, 11 December 2017; The Diplomat, 28 September 2020; Qantara, 23 October 2020). DFAT writes in February 2019 that "[a]round 60 per cent of the Sunnis adhere to the Barelvi school" (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 33). IRB mentions in a December 2020 query response that according to sources Barelvis are targeted by Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan and other Deobandi organizations (IRB, 14. Dezember 2020). DFAT notes that "[m]any Shi'a and Barelvi Sunnis in Pakistan venerate Sufi saints and shrines. Sufi places of worship have been common targets for sectarian attacks" (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 33). Qantara reports in October 2020 that "[t]heir opponents often accuse the Barelvis of shirk (polytheism) on the grounds that they revere saints. Their shrines have repeatedly been the targets of terrorist attacks by radical groups such as the Taliban." (Qantara, 23 October 2020).

Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), according to which the Hindu population of Pakistan may be around eight million (The Express Tribune, 27 August 2019), a number more than twice as high as the 2017 Census data cited by the RFI (see RFI, 2020, p. 15). The Hindu population of Pakistan is geographically concentrated in the rural areas of the Sindh province, where more than 90 per cent of Pakistani Hindus live. Small groups of Hindus can be found in Balochistan and Punjab as well (MRG, updated June 2018g). The Minority Rights Group gives the following description of the Hindu community in Pakistan:

> "The Hindus of Pakistan – residing in the interior of Sindh or Baluchistan – belong principally to the so-called untouchable class, the Scheduled Caste Hindus. Many of them are landless bonded labourers, working on the lands of big Sindhi landlords (known as Jagirdars). Those who live in towns and cities also have a menial standing and are generally employed as sweepers or Jamadars." (MRG, updated June 2018g)

The small group of Christians in Pakistan is of a variety of denominations, but to the largest part Pakistani Christians are Roman-Catholics (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Religion). On Christians in Pakistan the MRG writes:

> "Unlike many Hindus and Sikhs who emigrated to India at the time of partition, Christians for the most part remained in newly-founded Pakistan. According to the 1998 Census, Christians make up approximately 1.59 per cent of Pakistan's total population. In fact, the exact number is unknown and estimates range from less than 2 million to as many as 3 million. There are Christian communities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, including around 70,000 in Peshawar, but the bulk of Pakistani Christians live in Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad and numerous small communities in Punjab." (MRG, updated June 2018h)

The religious movement of the Ahmadis originated in India and the members believe that after Muhammad other prophets followed. This belief is rejected by more conservative Muslims who consider this blasphemous. In 1974 Pakistani parliament declared the Ahmadis non-Muslims and an according amendment was introduced in the constitution (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 29 January 2021, Religion; MRG, updated June 2018f). Estimated numbers for the Ahmadi community differ quite broadly, between 500,000 (Dawn, 22 May 2017) and 2.9 to 5.2 million (MRG, updated June 2018f). The MRG describes the Ahmadi community as a relatively small group that emphasizes education, learning and spiritual reform (MRG, updated June 2018f).

Other, even smaller religious minorities residing in Pakistan comprise Ismailis, Bohras, Parsis and Sikhs (MRG, updated June 2019).

2 Legislative framework

The legislative framework concerning religious minorities in this section applies, if not mentioned otherwise, to the four provinces Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well as the Islamabad Capital Territory. The legal human rights situation of the two autonomous Pakistan-administered areas Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan is not identical to the situation in the rest of Pakistan. Azad Kashmir for example has its own interim constitution and its own legal system (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, December 2020, p. 61). A December 2020 report of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the situation of Ahmadis and Christians in Pakistan in the period 2017 to 2020 mentions that Azad-Kashmir declared Ahmadis constitutionally non-Muslims in 2018, while Gilgit Baltistan is reputed to be religiously tolerant, including towards Ahmadis (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, December 2020, p. 61).

2.1 Pakistani Law and Sharia

The 1973 constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan declares Islam to be the state religion (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 2; see also BAMF, May 2020, p. 2). Article 227 of the Constitution states that Pakistani laws should be in accordance with Sharia (see also BAMF, May 2020, p. 2 and Bertelsmann Stiftung, 29 April 2020, p. 7):

> "All existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the Injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah, in this part referred to as the Injunctions of Islam, and no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such Injunctions." (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 227)

The Constitution establishes a Federal Shariat Court (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 203C), which is to decide "whether or not any law or provision of law is repugnant to the Injunctions of Islam, as laid down in the Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet" (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 203D). If the Federal Shariat Court declares a provision of law as repugnant to the injunctions of Islam, the government must amend the law in a way as to bring it in conformity with the injunctions of Islam (Federal Judicial Academy Islamabad, May 2015, p. 14). On the influence of Shariah on Pakistani law the Bertelsmann Stiftung, a German non-profit think tank, notes:

> "[…] Shariah law in fact has little influence on lawmaking in Pakistan. Most of the laws follow the British model and the conventional practices in the subcontinent. The areas where the Shariah has heavily influenced the judicial practices in Pakistan include blasphemy laws (which prohibit blasphemy against any recognized religion) and the Hudood Ordinances." (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 29 April 2020, p. 7)

For information on blasphemy laws please see below.

According to a February 2019 country information report on Pakistan by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Australian Government (DFAT), the so-called Hudood Ordinances of 1979 prohibit sex outside marriage, pornography and the consumption of

alcohol. From the latter non-Muslims are exempt, the others do apply to non-Muslims as well, although "the testimony of a non-Muslim person is accepted only where the accused is also not Muslim" (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 33).
The Federal Shariat Court can examine judgements of lower courts in cases where the Hudood Ordinances apply, but its decisions can be appealed to the Supreme Court (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 64; USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 1e; USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II).

2.2 Constitution

The current Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was passed by the National Assembly of Pakistan in 1973 (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Preface) and has since been amended 26 times (The Express Tribune, 13 May 2019; see also National Assembly of Pakistan, updated 16 February 2021).
The Website of the National Assembly of Pakistan provides the English version of the Constitution including all modifications up to the 25th amendment[2]:

- Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018 http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1549886415_632.pdf

The following constitutional articles contain provisions relevant to religious minorities:

Article 20 of the Constitution grants freedom of religion to every citizen:

> "Subject to law, public order and morality, — (a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion; and (b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions." (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 2)

Matthew Nelson, Professor of Politics at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London, during a meeting organised by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in October 2017 explains that the term "public order" mentioned in Article 2 of the constitution is experiencing a shift in interpretation:

> "In the past, religious vigilantes who would attack religious minorities in Pakistan were accused of disturbing the peace for acting against religious minorities in defiance of State authority. Nowadays this pattern is increasingly reversed. Religious minorities, the Ahmadi, figured prominently here. The minority is often considered a disruptive provocateur and thus a source of public disorder. That religious difference is regarded as agitating the public, and the difference, on its own, is regarded as 'provoking' the rest of the population. […] Basically, this notion that religious freedom is protected subject to public order gets turned around. So, where there is a risk of public disorder, the 'religious freedom'

[2] The 26th amendment, which has not yet been incorporated in the English version provided by the National Assembly of Pakistan, concerns the number of seats for the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in the National Assembly and the assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (The Express Tribune, 13 May 2019; The International News, 14 May 2019).

> (regarded as a provocation) can be derogated. […] The clauses in the Pakistan Constitution about religious freedom are usually regarded as a space of protection for religious minorities. This is not always the case where the religious minority is regarded as a provocation to public disorder." (EASO, February 2018, p. 25)

According to the constitution "[a]ll citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law" (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 25). However, to be qualified for election as President or Prime Minister, a person must be of Muslim faith (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Articles 41, 91).
The Pakistani constitution explicitly defines the terms "Muslim" and "non-Muslim" and even lists certain denominations as explicitly "non-Muslim". These include the group of the Ahmadis (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 260), an Islamic sect whose belief is unorthodox in some aspects (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 11 May 2015), but who might define themselves as Muslims (EASO, February 2018, p. 29) :

> "(a) 'Muslim' means a person who believes in the unity and oneness of Almighty Allah, in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him), the last of the prophets, and does not believe in, or recognize as a prophet or religious reformer, any person who claimed or claims to be a prophet, in any sense of the word or of any description whatsoever, after Muhammad (peace be upon him); and
> (b) 'non-Muslim' means a person who is not a Muslim and includes a person belonging to the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Budhist or Parsi community, a person of the Quadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name), or a Bahai, and a person belonging to any of the scheduled castes." (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 260)

With Article 36 the constitution commits the state specifically to the protection of its minorities:

> "The State shall safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the Federal and Provincial services." (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 36)

A specific number of seats in the National Assembly is reserved for non-Muslims (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 51) and Article 22 guarantees that:

> "No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or take part in any religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own." (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 22).

2.3 Penal Code – Blasphemy laws and Anti-Ahmadi laws

The International Labour Organization (ILO) in its Natlex Database provides an English Version of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) of 1860, including amendments until February 2017[3]:

- PPC - Pakistan Penal Code, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017 (available on Natlex Database)
  https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/64050/88951/F1412088581/PAK64050%202017.pdf

Chapter XV of the PPC comprises "Offences relating to Religion". According to the International Commission of Jurists, an international, non-governmental human rights organisation consisting of 60 eminent jurists, "all 'offences against religion' are commonly referred to as 'blasphemy offences' in Pakistan" (ICJ, November 2015, p. 13). Most sources discussing Pakistani blasphemy laws focus on the following sections or some of them: 295, 295A, 295B, 295C, 298, 298A, 298B and 298C (for the full legal text of these sections see below and section 2.3.6 of this compilation).

Sections 298B and 298C are also known as Anti-Ahmadi laws, because they are specifically directed towards the religious community of the Ahmadis (see below).

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Australian Government (DFAT) the legal provisions associated with blasphemy are found in Sections 295 and 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 34). DFAT briefly summarises the content of the Sections 295A, 295B, 295C and 298A:

> "Article 295A prohibits insulting any religion, not just Islam, and carries a sentence of up to ten years' imprisonment, which may also be accompanied by a fine. […] Article 295C outlaws the use of 'derogatory remarks' against the Holy Prophet. Punishment for blasphemy is death. Under Article 295B, 'defiling' a copy of the Quran is punishable by life imprisonment, and under Article 298A, defiling 'the sacred name of any wife, or members of the family, of the Holy Prophet, or any of the righteous Caliphs' carries a maximum punishment of three years in prison, which may also be accompanied by a fine." (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 34)

Sections 295 to 298A of the PPC apply to all Pakistani citizens, including Muslims, while sections 298B and 298C are applicable only to Ahmadis (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, December 2020, p. 83).

A December 2020 report by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the position of Ahmadis and Christians in Pakistan describes the Sections 295 to 298A as "asymmetrical" ("niet 'symmetrisch'"), because insulting or desecrating Mohammed and the Koran are explicitly punishable, but there is no comparable provision for insulting Jesus Christ or the Bible. While desecration of the Bible can be punished with up to 10 years imprisonment and a fine under Section 295A, desecration of the Koran according to Section 295B irrevocably leads to life

[3] The PPC has since been amended several times. None of the amendments found stipulates any changes to Sections 295 or 298 of the PPC.

imprisonment and insulting the prophet Muhammed is punishable by death (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, December 2020, p. 83).

2.3.1 Full legal texts of Sections 295, 295A, 295B, 295C, 298 and 298A of the PPC

As described above, Sections 295, 295A, 295B, 295C, 298 and 298A of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) are commonly referred to as blasphemy laws. The full legal texts of these sections are listed here. Section 295 of the PPC deals with injuring or defiling a place of worship:

> "295. Injuring or defiling place of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class. Whoever destroys, damages or defiles any place of worship, or any object held sacred by any class of persons with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of any class of persons or with the knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such destruction, damage or defilement as an insult to their religion, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both." (PPC, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017, Section 295)

Section 295A refers to insulting religion or religious beliefs:

> "295A. Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs. Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of 2 [the citizens of Pakistan], by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations insults or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, or with fine, or with both." (PPC, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017, Section 295A)

Section 295B deals with defiling a copy of the Quran:

> "295B. Defiling, etc., of copy of Holy Quran. Whoever wilfully defiles, damages or descrates a copy of the Holy Quran or of an extract therefrom or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable with imprisonment for life." (PPC, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017, Section 295B)

Section 295C stipulates penalties for the defiling of the name of the Prophet Muhammad:

> "295C. Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet. – Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, […], and shall also be liable to fine." (PPC, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017, Section 295C)

Section 298 deals with uttering words with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings:

> "298. Uttering words, etc. with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings. Whoever, with deliberate intention of wounding or outraging the religious feelings of any person or inciting religious, sectarian or ethnic hatred, utters any words by using loudspeaker or sound amplifier or any other device or makes any sound in the hearing of that person or makes any gesture in the sight of that person or persons, shall be punished with

imprisonment of either description of a term which may extend to three years but shall not be less than one year, or with 0.5, million fine, or with both." (PPC, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017, Section 298)

Section 298A proscribes penalties for the use of derogatory remarks with respect to holy personages:

> "298A. Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of holy personages. Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of any wife (Ummul-Mumineen), or members of the family (Ahle-bait), of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), or any of the righteous Caliphs (Khulafa-e-Raashideen) or companions (Sahaaba) of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both." (PPC, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017, Section 298A)

2.3.2 Application of blasphemy laws

According to a June 2020 report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan on the freedom of religion, the application of the blasphemy laws is a phenomenon that increased from the 1980s onwards. Since the introduction of blasphemy laws in the colonial era until 1986 only a total of seven cases were filed. From 1987 to 2018 case numbers increased to over 1,500 (HRCP, June 2020, p. 5).

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), a Pakistani NGO advocating human rights, examined data of 1,572 people accused of having committed blasphemy in the period 1987 to 2018 in Pakistan. The religious denomination of 44 of these cases could not be verified, the others were as follows: 728 Muslim (46 per cent), 516 Ahmadi (33 per cent), 253 Christian (16 per cent) and 31 Hindu (2 per cent) (CSJ, December 2019, p. 29).

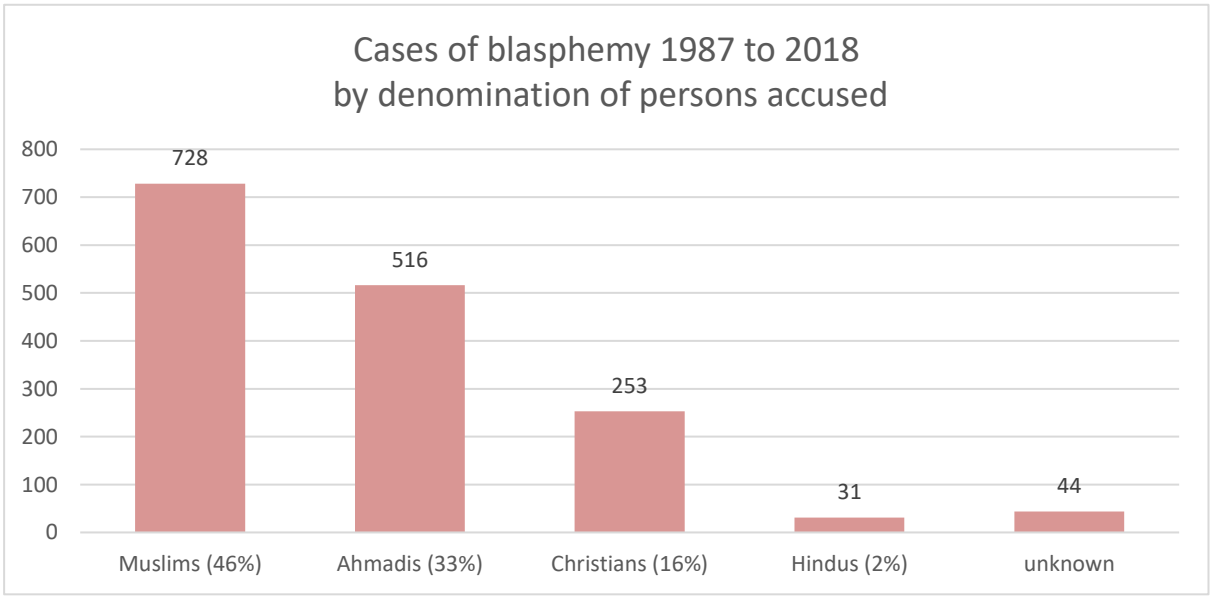


Chart based on CSJ, December 2019, p. 29

On these findings, the December 2019 publication of the CSJ states:

> "Although the highest number of the accused (46.3%) is from the Muslim faith, the statistics show that the majority (51.9%) of those charged under the law are from minority religious faiths. The proportion seems particularly high when it is considered that 51.9% of the accused are from minority communities that form less than 4% of the national population. Over this period, the highest number of individuals accused of blasphemy was reported from Punjab (1,156), followed by Sindh (335), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (39), Islamabad (21), Balochistan (9) and Gilgit Baltistan (6)." (CSJ, December 2019, p. 29)

In its April 2020 annual report on religious freedom the US Commission on international Religious Freedom (USCIRF) states that it "is aware of nearly 80 individuals who remained imprisoned for blasphemy, with at least half facing a life sentence or death" (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32). The same report gives a brief overview of incidents related to blasphemy accusations in 2019:

> "In March 2019, a student murdered Professor Khalid Hameed over perceived 'anti-Islamic' remarks. Protestors in Sindh attacked and burned Hindu shops and houses of worship following two incidents: in the first, a cleric accused a Hindu veterinarian of wrapping medicine with paper printed with Qur'anic verses; in the second, a student leveled blasphemy charges against a Hindu principal. A mob also attacked a Christian community in Punjab after a mosque claimed over its loudspeaker that the community had insulted Islam. In another incident, nearly 200 Christian families in Karachi were forced to flee their homes due to mob attacks after false blasphemy accusations against four Christian women. […] After spending five years in solitary confinement for allegedly posting blasphemous content online, Junaid Hafeez was given the death sentence in December 2019." (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32)

In August 2020 the international human rights organisation Amnesty International (AI) wrote about an "alarming uptick" in blasphemy accusations across the country (AI, 25 August 2020). In a September 2020 press release the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expresses its grave concern:

> "The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is gravely concerned at the recent surge in blasphemy cases being registered against sectarian and religious minorities, particularly the Shia community, and the potential for ensuing sectarian violence. Anecdotal evidence suggests that over 40 such cases may have been registered under the blasphemy laws in the last month [August 2020] alone." (HRCP, 5 September 2020)

Amnesty International in August 2020 recognises that victims of blasphemy accusations often belong to "the most marginalized people in society, including children, individuals with mental disabilities, members of religious minorities, and poorer people" and recent incidents indicate a widening of this spectrum to include artists, journalists and human rights defenders (AI, 25 August 2020).

BBC News in a May 2019 article on Pakistan's blasphemy laws reports on the accusations behind blasphemy cases filed from 1987 to 2018 and notes that the "vast majority of these

cases were lodged for desecration of the Koran - far fewer for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad." (BBC News, 8 May 2019)

2.3.3 Misuse of blasphemy laws

Amnesty International notes that the blasphemy laws are of a "broad, vague and coercive nature" (AI, 25 August 2020). USCIRF also assesses that Pakistan's blasphemy laws are "vague" and states that "[a]ccusers are typically not required to present evidence, and judges are often under extreme pressure from religious groups to convict" (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33).
Several sources report that the blasphemy laws are misused as a pretext for the persecution of religious minorities (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 29 April 2020, p. 9; USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33; see also AI, 25 August 2020) and that behind accusations of blasphemy often lie personal motives to settle personal vendettas (BBC News, 8 May 2019; HRCP, March 2019, p. 120; Qantara, 17 February 2020). According to CSW:

> "The law itself is poorly defined and has low standards for evidence, as it does not require specific proof of intent to commit blasphemy; as a result spurious accusations are commonplace. […] they are indiscriminately used as a weapon of revenge against both Muslims and non-Muslims to settle personal scores or to resolve disputes over money, property or business, under the guise of insults to religion." (CSW, December 2019, p. 13)

The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF) in a May 2020 report on Pakistan recognises another source of existential threat for religious minorities through the misuse of blasphemy laws, except from private individuals: organisations that instrumentalise religious intolerance politically by bringing charges of blasphemy against members of religious minorities with striking frequency. BAMF in this context highlights the role of two such organisations, the Jamaat ud-Dawa, the charitable-political wing of the jihadist-militant Lashkar-e-Taiba, and the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Party (TLP). The TLP is particularly radical in its public outreach, both in favour of maintaining blasphemy legislation and in relation to blasphemy allegations, has held regular rallies in Islamabad and the provincial capital of Punjab, Lahore (BAMF, May 2020, p. 1; p. 7), and demands a strict implementation of blasphemy laws (Schaflechner, 2019, pp. 211-212).

2.3.4 Consequences of blasphemy accusations

In more than 80 per cent of the legal cases involving blasphemy laws the accused are eventually acquitted (HRCP, 5 September 2020; DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 35; HRCP, June 2020, p. 5). The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan writes of approximately 40 people being on death row under the blasphemy law at the time of writing a report on freedom of religion in Pakistan in 2019, which was published in June 2020 (HRCP, June 2020, p. 5). Although for the past 30 years (BBC News, 1 February 2019) the designated punishment for persons convicted of the use of derogatory remarks in respect of the prophet Mohammed or of the defilement of his sacred name has been the death penalty (see Section 295C of the PPC above), so far no-one has been executed (BBC News, 1 February 2019), even though "[t]here have been 1,549 known cases of the most serious charges - either blasphemy against Muhammad or desecration of the Koran" (BBC News, 1 February 2019). Although most cases are eventually acquitted, this often happens only after extended periods of detention (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 35; HRCP, 5 September 2020).

Those being accused of blasphemy, whether founded or unfounded and even if acquitted of the accusations, are at risk of becoming victims of violence, together with their families and lawyers (CSJ, December 2019, p. 29; HRCP, 5 September 2020). The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in June 2020 reports that "since 1986 at least 75 people have been murdered extra-judicially after accusations of blasphemy as the near-total capitulation of the state in such instances provides a carte blanche to violent mobs" (HRCP, June 2020, p. 5). BBC News in a May 2019 article writes that according to correspondents "the mere accusation of blasphemy is enough to make someone a target for hardliners, as is defending those accused of blasphemy or calling for the laws to be reformed" (BBC News, 8 May 2019; see also CSJ, December 2019, p. 29). A prominent example is the former governor of Punjab province, Salman Taseer, who was killed in 2011 by a member of his security staff because of advocating a reform of Pakistan's blasphemy laws (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 34; BBC News, 29 February 2016). His murderer was by some Islamist groups hailed as a hero and thousands of hard-line activists supported him during protests (BBC News, 29 February 2016).
Several sources note the danger of mob violence against people accused of blasphemy (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 35; CSW, December 2019, p. 13; HRCP, 5 September 2020; FES/PIPS, December 2020, p. 49). If the accused person belongs to a religious minority, the whole community can be at risk (CSJ, December 2019, p. 29) as mass violence against minority groups can be triggered by blasphemy accusations (CSW, December 2019, p. 17; see also Bertelsmann Stiftung, 29 April 2020, p. 7) and lead to attacks of entire villages and communities (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 36).

According to the Bertelsmann Stiftung and a joint report by the non-governmental think tank Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) and the German political foundation Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, state protection in cases of blasphemy accusations is weak:

> "The government generally has a poor record of protecting religious minorities and religious freedom, particularly amid vigilante social mobilizations against vulnerable individuals accused of blasphemy (even when those individuals have been acquitted by courts)." (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 29 April 2020, p. 7)

> "The institutions supposed to safeguard the lives and rights of citizens are generally not able to offer effective protection in case of charges of blasphemy being levelled. There are numerous incidents of blasphemy accused being killed or injured in police custody, in lock-ups and prisons." (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 49)

2.3.5 Attitude of population towards and reforms of blasphemy laws

A 2019 BBC News article reports the following on the opinion of Pakistanis about blasphemy laws:

> "A large majority of Pakistani people support the idea that blasphemers should be punished, but there is little understanding of what the religious scripture says as opposed to how the modern-day law is codified. Many believe the law, as codified by the military regime of General Zia-ul Haq back in the 1980s, is in fact straight out of the Koran and therefore is not man-made." (BBC News, 8 May 2019)

There have been attempts to reform the blasphemy laws (CSW, December 2019, p. 18) or at least to introduce some safeguards to prevent the abuse of the law, but unsuccessfully so (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 49). Due to fear of retribution by extremists, few politicians have been willing to call for amending or repealing blasphemy laws (USCIRF, April 2019, p. 75; see also CSJ, December 2019, p. 29). To criticize blasphemy laws or to call for their reform can lead to death threats and assassination (DW, 18 January 2013; Schaflechner, 2019, p. 214; Daily Times, 10 January 2020). In 2015 a judge of the Supreme Court observed that criticism of the blasphemy law does not itself amount to blasphemy (CSJ, December 2019, p. 29).
Before becoming prime minister after the 2018 election, Imran Khan at a gathering of Muslim leaders vowed to defend the blasphemy laws of the Pakistan Penal Code (Pakistan Today, 8 July 2018; The Guardian, 9 July 2018).

2.3.6 Sections 298B and 298C of the PPC, Anti – Ahmadi Laws

In 1984 Sections 298B and 298C were added to the Pakistan Penal Code (MRG, updated June 2018f). These two sections apply only to those who call themselves Ahmadis and define a restriction on the freedom of religion as mentioned in the constitution. However, according to a 1993 Supreme Court decision, the legislation known as "anti-Ahmadi laws" is not unconstitutional (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, December 2020, p. 83). Due to these legal provisions Ahmadis are "subject to severe legal restrictions and suffer from officially sanctioned discrimination" (USCIRF, April 2019).
Sections 298B and 298C "prohibit Ahmadis from self-identifiying as Muslims, propagating or disseminating materials about their faith, or calling their houses of worship mosques" (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33). The PPC refers to two groups, the Quadiani and the Lahori group (PPC, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017, Section 298B; Section 298C). The Ahmadi community is split (MRG, updated June 2018f) between these two, members of the Quadiani group believe its founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a prophet and members of the Lahori group regard the founder as a reformer (IRB, 16 December 2020).

> "298B. Misuse of epithets, descriptions and titles, etc., reserved for certain holy personages or places. – (1) Any person of the Quadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name) who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation,
>
> (a) refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a Caliph or companion of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as 'Ameer-ul-Mumineen', 'Khalifa-tul-Mumineen', 'Khalifatul-Muslimeen', 'Sahaabi' or 'Razi Allah Anho':
>
> (b) refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as 'Ummul-Mumineen':
>
> (c) refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a member of the family (Ahle-bait) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as Ahle-bait; or
>
> (d) refers to, or names, or calls, his place of worship as 'Masjid':
>
> shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, and shall also be liable to fine. (2) Any person of the Quadiani group or Lahori

group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name) who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, refers to the mode or form of call to prayers followed by his faith as 'Azan', or recites Azan as used by the Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, and shall also be liable to fine." (PPC, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017, Section 298B)

"298C. Person of Quadiani group, etc., calling himself a Muslim or preaching or propagating his faith. – Any person of the Quadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name). who, directly or indirectly, poses himself as a Muslim, or calls, or refers to, his faith as Islam, or preaches or propagates his faith, or invites others to accept his faith, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, or in any manner whatsoever outrages the religious feelings of Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine." (PPC, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017, Section 298C)

For the application of these laws and attacks on Ahmadis see section 4.1 of this compilation.

2.4 Marriage Laws

In Pakistan, according to the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, the minimum legal age of marriage is 16 years for women and 18 for men (Girls not Brides, April 2020; Landinfo, 25 January 2021, p. 11). Exception to this is the province Sindh, where in 2014 the Sindh Child Marriage restraint Act was adopted. By this Act the minimum age for girls was set to 18 as well and child marriage was made a punishable offence (Girls not Brides, April 2020; see also Landinfo, 25 January 2021, p. 11).

There are no provisions in Pakistani civil or common law concerning marriages (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The United States Department of State (USDOS) 2019 report on International Religious Freedom explains that "marriage certificates are signed by religious authorities and registered with the local marriage registrar" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II).
Two legal acts provide mechanisms to regulate marriages for Hindus and enable them to formally register and prove legitimacy of their marriages: the Sindh Hindu Marriage Act of 2016 and the Hindu Marriage Act of 2017 (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II), the latter applying to the provinces Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) - as well as the capital territory around Islamabad. Before the introduction of these bills Hindu marriages have not been formally recognised by law (BBC News, 10 March 2017). According to the daily Newspaper Dawn, the main achievement of the Hindu Marriage Bill of 2017 was that it helps Hindu women to document their marriage, which was difficult for them to prove before (Dawn, 18 February 2017). The bill also allows married Hindus to appeal in courts of law in case of separation and to remarry if separated or widowed (Dawn, 2 January 2017). The USDOS report provides some more information about the two Hindu marriage acts:

"In addition to addressing a legal gap by providing documentation needed for identity registration, divorce, and inheritance, the 2017 Hindu Marriage Act allows marriages to be voided when consent 'was obtained by force, coercion or by fraud.' The act allows for the

> termination of the marriage upon the conversion of one party to a religion other than Hinduism. In 2018, the Sindh provincial government further enacted amendments to its 2016 legislation allowing couples to seek divorce and granting Hindu women the right to remarry six months after a divorce or a spouse's death. The 2016 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act also applies to Sikh marriages. The 2018 Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act allows local government officials to register marriages between a Sikh man and Sikh woman solemnized by a Sikh Anand Karaj marriage registrar." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

The Sindh Hindu Marriage Act was amended in May 2018 "awarding the right of separation to both husband and wife in addition to ensuring financial security of wife and children" (Dawn, 26 May 2018).

The Sindh Hindu Marriage Act also applies to Sikh marriages taking place in the province of Sindh. Still, according to the USDOS 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom, "members of the Sikh community reportedly continued to seek a separate Sikh law so as not to be considered part of the Hindu religion" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II).
The Times of India (TOI), the largest English-language daily newspaper in India, reports in March 2018 that an Act was passed by the Punjab Assembly that now separately regulates matters of the Sikh community:

> "The Punjab Assembly unanimously passed the Punjab Sikhs Anand Karaj Marriages Act 2017. This is the first time that family matters of the community, such as marriage, will be separately regulated. […] Previously, the records of Sikh marriages were maintained in a Gurdwara. […] It says a marriage ceremony, or Anand Karaj which is defined as 'the lawful union of a Sikh male and Sikh female' will be performed in accordance with the religious practices as permitted in the Sikh religious text Guru Granth Sahib." (TOI, 14 March 2018)

On the Sindh Hindu Marriage Act, the Hindu Marriage Act and the Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act the above-cited USDOS report writes:

> "The 2018 Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act allows local government officials to register marriages between a Sikh man and Sikh woman solemnized by a Sikh Anand Karaj marriage registrar." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

> "Historically, Hindu and Sikh leaders had noted the legal uncertainty surrounding the process of registering marriages for their communities created difficulties for Hindu and Sikh women in obtaining inheritances, accessing health services, voting, obtaining a passport, and buying or selling property. Observers stated the enactment of the 2016 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act and its 2018 amendments, the 2017 Hindu Marriage Act, and the 2018 Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act addressed many of the problems and also codified the right to divorce." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

Christian marriages are governed by the Christian Marriage Act of 1872 and Christian Divorce Act of 1869, both introduced by the British (Dawn, 13 September 2019). From 1981 until 2017, when the Lahore High Court issued a ruling, Christian couples could not dissolve their marriage unless one partner accused the other of adultery (Dawn, 13 September 2019; HRCP, June 2019, p. 7). In 2019 a draft bill was proposed, which aimed to update the 140-year-old Christian

personal laws (Dawn, 5 November 2019), but no information could be found that this bill has been adopted to date.

2.5 Forced marriages and forced conversions

A great concern often brought forward by groups representing and advocating for religious minority groups in Pakistan is forced conversion and forced marriage of girls and women who are members of minority groups (see CREID, November 2020, p. 120; Dawn, 9 October 2020). In November 2011 the National Assembly of Pakistan passed the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act 2011 (FP, 1 December 2011), criminalising several discriminatory customs practised towards women. Among these practises are forced marriages (The Punjab Commission on the status of women, undated), which since the passing of the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act 2011 are regulated under Section 498B of the PPC which criminalises anyone who compels a woman to enter marriage. Perpetrators shall be punished with imprisonment between three and seven years and a fine of 500,000 Pakistani Rupees (OHCHR, 3 November 2017; PPC, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017, Section 498B; Dawn, 7 February 2017). In 2017 a proviso was inserted to Section 498B, by which the punishment was increased to five to ten years imprisonment and a fine of one million Rupees in case the concerned woman is a minor or non-Muslim (Dawn, 7 February 2017):

> "498B. Prohibition of forced marriage. - whoever coerces or in any manner whatsoever compels a woman to enter into marriage shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term, which may extend to seven years or for a term which shall not be less than three years and shall also be liable to fine of five hundred thousand rupees: Provided that in case of a female child as defined in the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 (XIX of 1929), or a non-Muslim woman, the accused shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years but shall not be less than five years and shall also be liable to fine which may extend to one million rupees." (PPC, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017, Section 498B)

A December 2014 article of the English-language daily newspaper The Express Tribune reports on a study that was conducted with the aim to explore the knowledge about the legal provisions three years after their introduction through the Anti-Women Practices Act in 2011. The study author interviewed 74 police personnel in Karachi, Hyderabad, Swat, Islamabad, Peshawar and Mardan. Only four of these 74 police personnel had knowledge of the law (The Express Tribune, 11 December 2014).

According to a November 2020 report on violence and discrimination against women of religious minority groups by CREID, a consortium of organisations with the aim to support inclusive, religiously diverse communities funded by the UK government, "there is no law in place to protect women and girls from religious minorities against forced conversion" (CREID, November 2020, p. 120). A bill was proposed in the Sindh province which would have introduced punishment for perpetrators and facilitators of forced conversions, but the bill was dismissed in 2019 (CREID, November 2020, p. 120), allegedly due to threats from religious parties (The International News, 24 March 2019).

For more detailed information on the unsuccessful attempts to introduce legislation against forced conversions in the province Sindh please refer to section 3.3.6 of this compilation.

3 Treatment of religious minorities by state actors

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), a bipartisan institution of the US government monitoring freedom of religion abroad, in its April 2020 annual report covering 2019 mentions that religious freedom conditions in Pakistan "continued to trend negatively" (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32). In December 2020, the US Secretary of State again (after 2018 and 2019) designated Pakistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for having "engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom" (USDOS, undated; see also USDOS, 10 June 2020, executive summary and USDOS, 21 June 2019, executive summary). Hina Jilani, a lawyer, human-rights activist and former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Human Rights Defenders, during a conference in December 2020 referred to growing religious intolerance and shrinking space for various freedoms in Pakistan "putting the lives of already marginalized communities of religious minorities in grave danger" (Voicepk.net, 9 December 2020).

3.1 Acts of violence by state actors

USDOS in its March 2020 report on human rights practices in 2019 refers to members of religious groups who, according to some of the groups, were detained by authorities based on political affiliation or beliefs (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 1e). The nongovernmental human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) mentions in its annual report published in January 2021 that blasphemy law provisions left religious minorities vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and prosecution (HRW, 13 January 2021; see also OHCHR, 27 February 2020). HRW, the international human rights organisation Amnesty International (AI) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), an international, non-governmental human rights organisation consisting of 60 eminent jurists, note in 2020 that the authorities arrest, detain, and charge Ahmadis because of their religious beliefs and that police have been complicit in harassing them and bringing false charges against them (HRW, 8 May 2020; AI/HRW/ICJ, 26 November 2020). USDOS in its June 2020 annual report on religious freedom in 2019 provides the following information on police mistreatment of religious minorities:

> "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. According to multiple media reports, police in Lahore arrested Masih after he was accused of theft and held him for four days before notifying his family to pick him up. Closed-circuit television showed policemen bringing Masih out of the hospital in a wheelchair, and he died a few hours later. Media reported that a post-mortem examination found signs of torture, including burn marks and broken ribs. According to some media reports, Masih's brother said that one of the policemen made derogatory comments about Christians, including, 'I know how to deal with these infidels.' The Punjab Inspector General of Police removed the investigation officer and arrested five others, but there were no further reports of investigation or prosecution of the officers involved." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also The Nation, 8 September 2019)

The report adds that "[i]nstances 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" and that "some police agencies took steps to curb abuses by incorporating human rights curricula in training programs" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). HRW in a September 2019 article reports on the "widespread problem of custodial deaths in Punjab province" and goes on to say that according to own research results "marginalized groups are particularly at risk of police abuse" (HRW, 2 September 2019). Concerning those accused of blasphemy, BBC News states in February 2019 that according to the Pakistani NGO Centre for Social Justice, in 1,549 known cases of blasphemy or desecration of the Koran 75 accused have been killed before their trials, many of them in police custody or by mobs (BBC News, 1 February 2019). In an October 2019 report on Pakistan's blasphemy law USCIRF explains that "[t]hose incarcerated as alleged blasphemers often report torture and coercion during their interrogation, death threats, or attacks by guards and other inmates while they are incarcerated" (USCIRF, October 2019, p. 2; see also USCIRF, 2020, p. 8). The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) and the German political foundation Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in a December 2020 report note:

> "The institutions supposed to safeguard the lives and rights of citizens are generally not able to offer effective protection in case of charges of blasphemy being levelled. There are numerous incidents of blasphemy accused being killed or injured in police custody, in lock-ups and prisons." (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 49)

USDOS in its March 2020 human rights report (covering 2019) states on the same topic:

> "Civil society organizations reported that prison officials frequently subjected prisoners accused of blasphemy violations to poor prison conditions. NGOs reported that many individuals accused of blasphemy remained in solitary confinement for extended periods, sometimes for more than a year. The government asserted this treatment was for the individual's safety, in view of the likelihood that prisoners accused of blasphemy would face threats from the general prison population." (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 1c)

Voice of America (VOA), an international broadcaster funded by the US government, in February 2018 reports on a Christian blasphemy suspect who jumped from a four-story building in Lahore. The suspect claimed that he jumped in order to escape torture in custody. (VOA, 26 February 2018)

3.2 State discrimination

USDOS in June 2020 refers to continued official discrimination to varying degrees against religious minorities in Pakistan (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in a February 2020 update to the UN Human Rights Council mentions discrimination against religious minorities in Pakistan in law and practice (OHCHR, 27 February 2020).

The South Asia Collective, a group of human rights activists and organisations that document the condition of South Asia's minorities, published a report on the situation of minorities and civil society in November 2020. The report explains that Pakistan's constitution "made Islam the official religion, restricted the office of President and Prime Minister to Muslims, and contained clauses that called for bringing all laws into conformity with Islam" and that "[o]ther

laws introduced later further violated the fundamental rights of religious minorities", for example the amendment declaring Ahmadis as non-Muslims. The report also refers to the "blasphemy laws" contained in the Pakistan Penal Code which explicitly discriminate against Ahmadi Muslims and are being used to persecute religious minorities (The South Asia Collective, November 2020, pp. 174-176; see also HRW, 13 January 2021 and USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32).

For more detailed information on the constitutional provisions mentioned, the blasphemy laws and the Anti-Ahmadi laws, please refer to section 2 of this compilation.

Regarding the situation of religious minorities in the field of education, Naumana Suleman, a human rights professional working with the Minority Rights Group International (MRG), in a May 2020 article notes that rights activists have been demanding a five per cent education quota for minority students in colleges, universities and technical training institutions and that Punjab's government in May 2020 for the first time approved a two per cent quota in universities for non-Muslims (Suleman, 30 May 2020; see also UCA News, 3 May 2020 and Dawn, 1 May 2020). USDOS notes in June 2020 that "[m]inority religious leaders stated members of their communities continued to experience discrimination in public schools and tertiary education" and adds that this "resulted in very few religious minority applicants competing and qualifying for private and civil service employment" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, executive summary). The Pakistani daily newspaper Pakistan Today in October 2019 provides information on a report on faith-based discrimination in educational institutions published by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and the Institute of Development Research and Corresponding Capabilities (IDRAC). According to the findings of the report, "around 60% non-Muslim students experience or feel being discriminated and disrespected, whereas, 70% of the non-Muslim teachers faced discrimination based on their faith" (Pakistan Today, 21 October 2019). The full report can be accessed via the following link:

- HRCP/IDRAC - Human Rights Commission of Pakistan/Institute of Development Research and Corresponding Capabilities: Education and Inequality: Discerning the Foundation of Citizenry, 2019
  http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Education-and-inequality-IDRAC-20190730.pdf

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), a Christian advocacy organisation promoting religious freedom worldwide and seeking to influence governments on religious freedom issues, in a May 2020 report mentions that "[r]eligious minority students endure physical and psychological abuse from teachers and classmates, including beatings and bullying". The report adds that "[n]on-Muslims are often reluctant to opt to study ethics because this identifies them as a religious minority and increases discrimination" (CSW, May 2020, p. 2). HRCP mentions in June 2020 that the subject ethics which non-Muslim students should have the option to choose as an alternative is seldom available due to a "lack of resources or care" and that representatives of minorities demand the inclusion of their religion-specific subjects (HRCP, June 2020, p. 16, Fn). USDOS in June 2020 further mentions that according to members of religious minority communities, Muslim students who memorised the Quran received bonus

grade points but there were no analogous opportunities for students of religious minorities (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also CSW, May 2020, p. 2).

The USDOS June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 provides the following information on discrimination of religious minorities in government hiring:

> "Most minority religious groups said they continued to face discrimination in government hiring, but there were exceptions. In September Pushpa Kumari became the country's first female Hindu assistant subinspector of police. While there remained a 5 percent quota for hiring religious minorities at the federal level, minority organizations said government employers did not enforce it. On October 15, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government notified the Supreme Court it had raised its quota for hiring religious minorities from 3 to 5 percent, bringing it to the 5 percent quota already required by the Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan Provincial governments. According to religious minority activists, however, provincial governments also often failed to meet such quotas for hiring religious minorities into the civil service.
>
> Minority rights activists said most government employment advertisements for janitorial staff still listed being non-Muslim as a requirement. Minority rights activists criticized these advertisements as discriminatory and insulting. In June civil rights activists from many faiths raised concerns over a Pakistan Army advertisement specifying only Christians could apply for the job of sanitation worker in the army's Mujahid Force. On June 28, the director-general of the military's Inter-Services Public Relations Agency responded that the advertisement had been reposted with no discriminatory qualifications.
>
> Representatives of religious minorities said a 'glass ceiling' continued to prevent their promotion to senior government positions, but one NGO also stated that due to insufficient higher education opportunities, few religious minorities met the qualifications to apply for these positions. Although there were no official obstacles to the advancement of minority religious group members in the military, they said in practice, non-Muslims rarely rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to senior positions." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

Concerning the five per cent quota for hiring religious minorities, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), a non-governmental organisation aiming at promoting human rights and trying to prevent their violation, in a report on the state of human rights in 2019 mentions that the quota has yet to be implemented (HRCP, 2020, p. 12). The News on Sunday (TNS), the Sunday version of the English language Pakistani newspaper The News International, in February 2019 notes on the same topic:

> "The government of Pakistan reserved a minimum of five percent job quota for minorities on May 26, 2009, which was intermittently followed by similar provisions from the provincial governments. The empirical evidence indicates that it has so far not shown due results. The minorities are still unable to take advantage of this affirmative action and minority jobs seats remain vacant. The data reveals that after nine years in implementation, the minority job quota is still unmet. The number of minority employees is even below the proportion of minority population in Pakistan. […]

> A comprehensive data on employment share of religious minorities in Pakistan is hardly available. Major official sources published on annual basis, i.e., Economic Survey of Pakistan, Labour Force Surveys, Pakistan Employment Trends, etc., and the provincial development statistics don't provide such data and the segregated figures for religious minorities in jobs are not available.
>
> However, a publication of the federal establishment wing 'Annual Statistical Bulletin of Employees of Autonomous/Semi-Autonomous Bodies/Corporations under the Federal Government' can provide us partial information to indicate severity of the problem. According to its 2012-13 edition, there were a total of 446,816 federal government employees, out of which 10388 belonged to religious minorities. This means that at the federal level, only two percent of the total employees are from religious minorities. It is not only far below the quota requirement but is also lesser than population ratio of religious minorities (3.72 percent) in Pakistan.
>
> The federal government employees' data further reveals that in terms of Basic Pay Scale (PBS), the minority employees are largely placed at lower tier of the government positions." (TNS, 24 February 2019)

Referring to political participation of non-Muslim minorities, USDOS mentions in its March 2020 human rights report covering 2019 that "[t]he Elections Act of 2017 stipulates special measures to enhance electoral participation" of religious minorities, among others (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 3). Freedom House, a U.S.-based NGO which conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom and human rights, states in its March 2020 annual report on political rights and civil liberties in 2019 that "the participation of non-Muslims in the political system continues to be marginal" (Freedom House, 4 March 2020, B4). In its June 2020 religious freedom report USDOS explains:

> "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." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also Freedom House, 4 March 2020, A2, B4)

Freedom House notes in March 2020 that apart from being represented by reserved seats through the party-list system, members of non-Muslim minorities are also allowed to participate in the general vote (Freedom House, 4 March 2020, B4). In its March 2020 human rights report USDOS mentions that minorities have struggled to be directly elected outside of the reserved seats (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 3).

USDOS also refers to the requirement for voters to indicate their religion when registering to vote, adding that "Ahmadis are required to either swear Muhammad was the final prophet of Islam and denounce the Ahmadi movement's founder, or declare themselves as non-Muslims,

in order to vote" with the consequence that many Ahmadis were unable to vote as they consider themselves Muslims and therefore did not comply (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 3; see also IRB, 16 December 2020). HRW explains that by accepting their status as non-Muslim Ahmadis are registered on a separate electoral list (HRW, 8 May 2020; see also Freedom House, 4 March 2020, B4; IRB, 16 December 2020).

3.3 State protection

The Bertelsmann Stiftung, a German non-profit think tank, in its 2020 Transformation Index covering the period 1 February 2017 to 31 January 2019 mentions that '[t]he government generally has a poor record of protecting religious minorities and religious freedom, particularly amid vigilante social mobilizations against vulnerable individuals accused of blasphemy (even when those individuals have been acquitted by courts)" (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 29 April 2020, p. 7). USDOS notes in June 2020 that according to members of religious minority communities "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". The members of religious minority communities further said that "the government was inconsistent in safeguarding against societal discrimination and neglect" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). HRW states in its January 2021 annual report that religious minorities "continued to face violence, discrimination, and persecution, with authorities often failing to provide adequate protection or hold perpetrators to account" (HRW, 13 January 2021).

3.3.1 Mechanisms of state protection

The UK Home Office in a February 2021 report on Christians and Christian converts in Pakistan cites a letter from the British High Commission (BHC) in Islamabad to the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT) drafted in December 2013 an updated in February 2021. The letter provides the following information on state protection:

> "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." (UK Home Office, February 2021, p. 54)

The Pakistani Ministry of Human Rights (MOHR) explains on its website that in the aftermath of an attack in Peshawar in December 2014 a National Action Plan (NAP) was adopted for countering terrorism and extremism. The 20 points approved included also the protection of religious minorities in point No. 9. In a meeting of the National Internal Security Committee in March 2019, an Expert Working Group on Point No. 9 of NAP was formed which is "mandated to formulate an Action Plan with timelines and responsibilities including institutional mechanisms for implementation and monitoring with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)". The action plan foresees the implementation of 26 actions at federal and provincial level in a period of three to five years, among them awareness raising and media campaigns, the review and revision of education curricula and the protection of places of worship (MOHR, undated; see also MOHR, 2020, p. 29).

USDOS mentions in June 2020 that "[t]he government continued to implement the 2014 National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism, including countering sectarian hate speech and

extremism, as well as military and law enforcement operations against terrorist groups" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, executive summary). The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), a not-for-profit, non-governmental think tank based in Islamabad that specialises in the study of political, social and religious conflict, and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), a German political foundation associated with the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), in December 2020 published a report analysing the success of the NAP. The report is based on consultations held with over 100 experts and local resource persons across the country. The report states:

> "The National Action Plan (NAP) was adopted by the federal government as a multi-pronged counterterrorism and counter-extremism roadmap immediately following the December 2014 terror attack on Army Public School in Peshawar. It entailed 20 clauses calling for countering multiple aspects of terrorism and extremism, such as crackdown against hate speech, action against banned and violent sectarian groups as well as terror financing, protecting minorities, and reforming madrassas, among others. […]
>
> As NAP closes in on six years of its inception, there are many who are not impressed by the execution and results of the diverse measures espoused in this state-led counter-terrorism plan. Others, however, point to the declining trends of militant violence and terrorism in the country since the launch of NAP as signs of success. And again many people would contest the assertion attributing the country's success against terrorism and militancy to NAP alone." (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 1)
>
> "The poor performance in achieving some of the NAP goals, mainly those linked to curbing religious persecution and protecting minorities, has been constrained by the government's largely appeasing response to the so-called 'religious pressure groups'. These pressure groups – including the clergy/madrassas, religious organizations, religious-political parties, and banned religious groups – hugely influence the policymaking processes besides exerting pressure on the government on religious/ ideological issues. Religious groups and parties have the street power also, and their religious- ideological views largely resonate with those of the people. That makes it almost impossible for the government to reform any laws dealing with minority rights, religious persecution, etc. Some recent events and developments explain how the government succumbed to pressure by religious groups and compromised on its constitutional role and responsibilities including the NAP implementation. For one, in July 2020, the government backtracked on the decision to allow construction of a Hindu temple in Islamabad, largely under duress from religious groups and parties. Earlier, in 2018, the government had to ask a leading economist Atif Mian, an Ahmadi by faith, to quit the Prime Minister Imran Khanled Economic Advisory Council due to mounting pressure from religious quarters." (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 60)

The above-mentioned report of PIPS and FES refers also to a Supreme Court decision rendered in 2014 and considered "a landmark judgement on the protection of minorities' rights and promotion of a culture of religious and social tolerance in the country" (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 46). The report goes on to explain:

> "The June 19, 2014, judgement was rendered in a case taken up suo motu by the Supreme Court, after the bombing of a church in Peshawar in September 2013 that killed over 125

people and injured another 250. The judgement outlined a list of actions that it demanded the authorities take, including setting up a task force for promoting religious tolerance; ensuring that school curriculum promoted religious harmony; constituting a national council for the protection of minorities to frame policy recommendations for safeguarding and protecting rights of religious minorities; constituting a special police force to protect places of worship of religious minorities; ensuring that action, including registration of criminal cases, was promptly taken to bring to justice perpetrators who violated rights of religious minorities; and assigning a bench of the Supreme Court to oversee implementation of the judgement and entertain complaints related to violation of human rights of minorities in the country." (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 46)

USDOS in its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 provides the following information on the implementation of the 2014 Supreme Court judgement:

> "Civil society groups said the government made some progress in implementing a 2014 Supreme Court decision ordering the government to take several steps to ensure the rights of minorities and promote a culture of religious and social tolerance, including establishing a Supreme Court mechanism to hear complaints, a task force to protect religious minority places of worship, and a national commission for minority rights. 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. Human rights activists continued to state that neither the federal nor most provincial governments had made substantial progress in implementing other aspects of the 2014 decision. According to several human rights activists, the most notable area of inaction was the continued failure to establish an empowered National Commission for Minorities. Officials of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony and the Ministry of Human Rights stated they were committed to establishing such a commission as directed by the Supreme Court. Some civil society groups attributed lack of progress to a belief within the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony that such a commission was not necessary due to the existence of its own interfaith harmony commission." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

The December 2020 report by PIPS and FES mentions that the Supreme Court established a one-person commission to oversee the implementation of its judgement on the protection of minorities' rights (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 47; The News, 18 January 2019). The commission is led by Dr. Shoaib Suddle (The News, 18 January 2019; Pakistan Today, 7 May 2020). Pakistan Today reports in May 2020 that Dr. Shoaib Suddle challenged the move of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (MORA) to reconstitute an already existing

National Commission for Minorities (NCM). According to the article, the Supreme Court in 2014 ordered the government to establish a national council for minorities. According to the commission led by Suddle the body proposed by the ministry has no statutory backing and financial autonomy and "its very existence and composition would be at the whims and mercy of MORA" (Pakistan Today, 7 May 2020). HRW informs in May 2020 that the NCM was established and adds that the cabinet adopted the position of the MORA not to include Ahmadis members, but did not define the powers of the NCM (HRW, 8 May 2020). The Diplomat, a US-based current affairs magazine covering the Asia-Pacific region, in a May 2020 article mentions with regard to the NCM that" there are some major constitutional flaws in the commission that emphasize that the body is hardly set up to address the woes of minority communities in Pakistan" (The Diplomat, 13 May 2020). The South Asia Journal (SAJ), a policy magazine focused on South Asia, notes in May 2020 that "Pakistani minorities, non-Muslim citizens of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and human rights organisations have refused the newly formed minority commission" as it was not constituted through a legislative process (SAJ, 13 May 2020; see also Suleman, 30 May 2020). The Observer Research Foundation (ORF), a think tank based in India, in January provides the following information in the NCM:

> "The government has historically remained toothless when it came to Islamists. Following the bomb blasts of 2013 at the Peshawar All-Saints Church, the then Chief Justice of Supreme Court asked the government to set up the National Commission for Minorities (NCM). The NCM was eventually launched in 2020 with six official and 12 non-official members, including the chairman for a term of three years.
>
> Among the 12 members, three memberships each were reserved for Hindus and Christians, two each for Sikhs and Muslims and one each for Parsi and Kalash communities. The NCM has largely remained ineffective and often been criticised by human rights activists. Most of the religious minorities and their homes, religious places continue to be targeted by Islamists under the pretext of the infamous blasphemy laws.
>
> Forced conversions, hate speech and discrimination remain unchecked. Instead of taking stock of the worsening situation of its own minorities, the NCM has been used by the PTI [Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf] government to discuss the minority rights and discrimination faced by religious minorities across the border. Since its establishment, the NCM has come to be seen as merely a political gimmick of the government rather than doing any good for the minorities at home." (ORF, 26 January 2021)

The above-mentioned letter from the British High Commission (BHC) in Islamabad to the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT) of the UK Home Office drafted in December 2013 an updated in February 2021 notes that "there are concerns regarding the NCM's effectiveness and independence" (UK Home Office, February 2021, p. 54). The letter further mentions a Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Interfaith Harmony who was appointed in September 2020 (UK Home Office, February 2021, p. 54; see also Dawn, 30 September 2020). The British High Commission adds that "[t]here 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" (UK Home Office, February 2021, p. 54).

3.3.2 *Fight against religious extremism and terrorism*

The online news website Naya Daur which is affiliated with the Peace and Justice Network (PJN), a non-profit organisation based in Islamabad, in January 2021 elaborates on the Security Report 2020 published by PIPS. According to Naya Daur, 146 terrorist attacks were perpetrated in 2020 (a decline of more than 36 per cent compared to 2019) in which 220 people were killed and 547 injured. 95 of the 146 attacks involved religiously inspired militant groups, seven attacks were sectarian-related (Naya Daur, 3 January 2021). Naya Daur goes on to explain:

> "Despite this statistical decline in the incidents of terrorism, the PIPS report underlined that the more severe challenge of religious extremism continued to manifest in 2020 such as the enormous gathering at Khadim Rizvi's funeral in Lahore; the anti-Shia demonstrations; growing individual/mob attacks on minority communities and their worship places; persisting narratives of hatred and hate speech, offline and online; and continuing activities of banned religious organizations, etc. There is also little evidence to suggest that National Action Plan has been successful in countering these and related challenges." (Naya Daur, 3 January 2021)

A short summary of the PIPS report can be accessed via the following link. A full version is not available online.

- PIPS - Pak Institute for Peace Studies: Pakistan Security Report 2020, 2021 https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Conflict-and-Peace-Studies.pdf

The December 2020 report by PIPS and FES provides the following information on government actions against sectarian terrorists in Pakistan:

> "In the beginning, the NAP [National Action Plan] action against sectarian terrorists was intense and diverse but it gradually reached the current state where that earlier vigor and focus is no visible. That initial action included arrests, convictions and executions of sectarian terrorists, confiscation of sectarian-related hate material and related arrests, ban on loudspeakers' misuse, as well as security forces' operations against leaders of banned sectarian groups. Some sectarian terrorists or those found involved in sectarian target killing were also among those executed soon after NAP's launch, as an informal moratorium on execution of death penalty convicts had already been partially lifted in December 2014. […] nearly 350 persons were hanged within a year of the NAP adoption, many of those executed were convicted in different cases of sectarian targeted killing. Similarly, just in seven months (from January to August 2015), around 20 major search-and-hunt operations were launched against sectarian groups across Pakistan in which 133 key members and affiliates of sectarian groups were arrested, mainly belonging to Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ)[4] (91) and LeJ [Lashkar-i-Jhangvi][5] (31). Although that campaign

[4] "ASWJ is a sectarian Sunni militant group established in Punjab province in 1985 to counter the Shiite Islam in the country. It was previously known as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP)." (VOA, 29 June 2018)

[5] "Lashkar I Jhangvi (LJ) is the terrorist offshoot of the Sunni Deobandi sectarian group Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan. LJ carries out anti-Shia and other sectarian attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan." (USDOS, 24 June 2020b)

against sectarian terrorists has continued throughout the subsequent years, however, as cited earlier, it is missing that earlier intensity. For one, from January 1, 2019 to September 20, 2020, the security and law enforcement agencies detained 47 members of different violent sectarian groups in 22 search operations conducted across the country. Those arrested suspected sectarian terrorists reportedly belonged to Lashkar-e- Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Muhammad[6], Sunni Tehreek[7] and some unspecified banned sectarian groups of Sunni and Shia denominations." (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 23)

An article by Muhammad Amir Rana, the director of the PIPS, published in Dawn newspaper in January 2021 deals with security trends in 2021. Rana provides the following assessment concerning the fight against religious extremism:

> "[…] tackling religious extremism will remain a low priority for the state, despite the fact that incidents of communal violence and religious and sectarian hatred have become a regular feature of Pakistan's security and political landscape. In one of these incidents, the shrine of a Hindu saint was vandalised and torched in Karak. Similarly, while on the whole sectarian violence has come down in Pakistan in recent years, sectarian discord and the groups promoting it continue to persist. The state's tolerance towards extremist groups is the latter's major strength. State institutions still believe that the threat posed by the extremist groups can be dealt with through political tactics. The government has not devised any strategy to reduce the appeal of their narratives and it is quite possible that the extremists will continue exploiting the government's weakness." (Dawn, 24 January 2021)

USDOS in June 2020 provides the following information on the fight against religious extremism and terrorism in Pakistan:

> "The Ministry of Interior maintained multi-tier schedules of religiously oriented groups it judged to be extremist or terrorist that were either banned or had their activities monitored and curtailed (Schedule 1) and individuals whose activities in the public sphere could also be curtailed, including during religious holidays such as Ashura (Schedule 4)." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also Dawn, 24 August 2020)

> "According to civil society and media, violence and abuses continued to be committed by armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government, including

[6] "Sipah-e-Mohammed Pakistan (SMP) literally meaning 'Army of Muhammad' refers to a Shia group which is involved in sectarian terrorist activity primarily in Pakistani Punjab. The SMP is one of the two sectarian terrorist outfits proscribed on August 14, 2001, by President Pervez Musharraf." (SATP, undated)

[7] "Sunni Tehrik […] is a Sunni Barelvi militant organization, established in 1982 […] The Sunni Tehrik Party is a mid-sized Sunni Muslim extremist organization with a reputation for carrying out bombings, shootings, and other acts of violence." (Globalsecurity.org, 7 September 2018)

> LeJ, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)[8], and SSP [Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan][9], as well as abuses by individuals and groups, such as ISIS, designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments. These groups continued to stage attacks targeting Shia Muslims, particularly the predominantly Shia Hazara community. In a change from previous years, there were no reports of Christians being targeted by armed sectarian groups during the year. […]
>
> According to the SATP [South Asia Terrorism Portal] and media reports, ATCs [Anti-Terrorism Courts] convicted and sentenced several individuals affiliated with terrorist organizations and involved in past sectarian attacks and targeted killings." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

The June 2020 report published by USDOS mentions in addition that media and law enforcement sources reported on government restrictions imposed on dozens of clerics accused of provoking sectarian tensions. The report further notes that the government placed some clerics on a proscribed persons' list (Schedule 4). (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

For more information on legal provisions on fighting extremism as well as on the enforcement and effectiveness of Laws please refer to the following report by the Library of Congress (LOC) last updated in December 2020:

- LOC - Library of Congress: Legal Provisions on Fighting Extremism: Pakistan, September 2015, updated 30 December 2020
  https://www.loc.gov/law/help/fighting-extremism/pakistan.php

For more information on banned groups in Pakistan and on the proscribed persons' list (Schedule 4 of the Anti Terrorism Act), please refer to pp. 19-22 of the December 2020 by PIPS and FES:

- PIPS/FES - Pak Institute for Peace Studies/Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Pakistan: Strengthening Governance in Pakistan - Assessing the National Action Plan to counter Terrorism and Extremism, December 2020
  https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/NAP-Final-from-Hamayun.pdf

3.3.3 Madrassas

PIPS and FES mention in December 2020 that NAP included reforming madrassas, among other things (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. viii). In its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 USDOS states that there were reports some madrassas were teaching "extremist doctrine,

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[8] Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is a Pakistan and Afghanistan-based terrorist organization formed in 2007 to oppose Pakistani military efforts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (formerly known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas)." (USDOS, 24 June 2020c)

[9] "Sources report that the SSP was founded in 1985 by Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, Zia-ur-Rehman Farooqi [Ziaur Rahman Farooqi], Eesar-ul-Haq Qasmi and Azam Tariq […]. According to sources, the SSP returned as the ASWJ after being banned by the government in 2002 […]." (IRB, 14 December 2020)

which the government sought to curb through madrassah registration and curriculum reform" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The report goes on to say:

> "On September 3, the federal government approved the Ministry of Education's assumption of administrative control and registration authority of the country's estimated 30,000 madrassahs. Prime Minister Khan, Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood, and Chief of Army Staff General Javed Bajwa stated the goal of madrassah registration and curriculum reform was to bring madrassah students into the mainstream, create a uniform education policy, and improve madrassah graduates' economic prospects." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33)

The USDOS June 2020 country report on terrorism covering 2019 mentions that the NAP increased the supervision of madrassas by the government and the government intended to increase regulation, but according to security analysts and madrassa reform proponents "many madrassas failed to register with the government or provide documentation of their sources of funding or to limit their acceptance of foreign students to those with valid visas, a background check, and the consent of their governments, as required by law "(USDOS, 24 June 2020a; see also AP, 11 May 2020). PIPS and FES note in December that "the government has not paid much attention to the NAP provision regarding madrassa reforms" adding that "[a]ttempts at reforms have revolved around curriculum, and even that has failed to bring about any change in the madrassa environment or mindset. There has also been no progress on financial regulation of madrassas" (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. viii).

3.3.4 Protection from violence

A February 2019 country report on Pakistan, prepared by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for protection status determination purposes, states that "successful prosecution for politically motivated or sectarian violence is rare. This is due in part to ineffective police investigations, forensics, prosecution and judicial legal understanding, and in part to threats levied against judges, lawyers and witnesses and their families" (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 62).

USDOS in its March 2019 annual report on human rights in 2018[10] provides the following general information on protection of religious minorities by the police:

> "Police often failed to protect members of religious minorities--including Ahmadiyya Muslims, Christians, Shia Muslims, and Hindus--from attacks. Activists from Christian, Sikh, Parsi, and Hindu communities reported widespread distrust of law enforcement within their communities. They explained that community members frequently refrained from reporting crimes, because they believed the police would not act. They also accused law enforcement of treating minorities particularly harshly when they are accused of crimes, and described how police meted out collective punishment on the Christian residents of a Karachi neighborhood in May, after a Christian committed a crime against an intelligence officer. Police carried out unauthorized searches of people and property, arrested

[10] The current USDOS report published in March 2020 does not contain such information as the corresponding section is much shorter.

> Christians at random, and threatened physical and legal retributions against the community at large unless community members brought forward the perpetrator.
>
> Police agencies continued to professionalize and modernize through training, including on human rights. Some local authorities demonstrated the ability and willingness to protect minorities from discrimination and mob lynching, at great risk to their personal safety." (USDOS, 13 March 2019, section 1d)

The USDOS June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 notes:

> "NGOs expressed concern that authorities often failed to intervene in instances of societal violence against religious minorities due to fear of the perpetrators, inadequate staff, or apathy. Perpetrators of societal violence and abuses against religious minorities often faced no legal consequences due to a lack of follow-through by law enforcement, bribes offered by the accused, and pressure on victims to drop cases." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, executive summary)

Referring to the protection of minority places of worship and security measures during religious holidays, USDOS in its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 provides the following information:

> "The government did not establish a special task force to protect minority places of worship, as was called for by the [2014 Supreme Court] judgment. Many faith community members, however, said they believed the government did increase efforts to protect places of worship." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)
>
> "Multiple civil society groups and faith community leaders stated the government had increased efforts to provide enhanced security at religious minority places of worship, which had been frequent targets of attack in past years. Police and security forces throughout the country enhanced security measures during religious holidays, and no religious festival was disrupted by violence for the second year in a row." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, executive summary)
>
> "Authorities also provided enhanced security for Christian and Hindu places of worship at various times throughout the year. After an attack on a mosque in New Zealand that killed 51 on March 15, 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 [Closed Circuit Television] 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." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

BBC News in January 2021 reports on the destruction of a Hindu shrine in December 2020 despite police being deployed to guard the place of worship. Following the incident, 92 police officials were suspended for not having prevented the attack:

> "A century-old sacred Hindu shrine in Pakistan was destroyed by a Muslim mob in December - the second ransacking and desecration of the holy site. Pakistan's Supreme Court has issued an order to officials in the north-western district of Karak to pave the way for rebuilding the Sri Param Hansji Maharaj Samadhi temple, but the attack has left the country's Hindus feeling vulnerable and the government facing accusations that it is failing to protect the country's religious minorities. […]
>
> Police and security guards had been stationed at the temple during the rally but failed to stop the mob. 'They went with impunity,' said the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Gulzar Ahmed, after the attack, adding that the incident had caused 'international embarrassment to Pakistan'. Police arrested 109 people in relation to the attack, including Maulvi Mohammad Sharif, and suspended 92 police officials, including the superintendent of police and deputy superintendent of police who were on duty at the time. 'There were 92 police officials at the spot, but they showed cowardice and negligence,' admitted Sanaullah Abbasi, the local police inspector general. […]
>
> As well as ordering the reconstruction of the temple, the Supreme Court has asked the local authorities to take tougher action against the police officials who were on duty during the attack. One of the suspended policemen - who requested anonymity - told the BBC that the local police had intelligence reports before the attack that trouble was likely, but no-one thought it was worthwhile to counter the clergy. 'Given the developments in the region, the clerics are still relevant to our state policy,' he said. 'If we cross their path, we may risk our jobs. So unless there are very clear instructions from above, we don't do that. And this allows the more ambitious among them to take advantage.'" (BBC News, 12 January 2021)

VOA in an article reporting on the same incident states that "[a]uthorities in northwestern Pakistan have removed 12 police officers from service and penalized 45 others for not preventing an Islamist mob from setting ablaze and destroying a minority Hindu temple." The article further quotes the provincial police chief as saying that "45 additional police personnel have also been given 'minor punishment' and 33 of them have been suspended from the service for a year" (VOA, 15 January 2021).

3.3.5 Blasphemy cases

USDOS in June 2020 provides the following general information on blasphemy cases in Pakistan:

> "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." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

USCIRF mentions in April 2020 that provisions contained in sections 295 and 298 of Pakistan's Penal Code are frequently used against religious minorities by bringing false charges. According to USCIRF, cases often violate legal procedures, "[a]ccusers are typically not required to present evidence, and judges are often under extreme pressure from religious groups to convict" (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33; see also AI, 4 March 2021). USDOS provides in its March 2020 human rights report the following information on the protection of religious minorities by the judiciary in blasphemy cases:

> "Many lower courts remained corrupt, inefficient, and subject to pressure from wealthy persons and influential religious or political figures. […] Civil society groups stated courts often failed to protect the rights of religious minorities against Muslim accusers. While the numerical majority of those imprisoned for blasphemy were Muslim, religious minorities were disproportionately affected, relative to their small percentage of the population. Lower courts often failed to adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases, and most convicted persons spent years in jail before higher courts eventually overturned their convictions or ordered their release." (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 1e)

The USDOS June 2020 religious freedom report covering 2019 contains the following information on courts enforcing blasphemy charges, blasphemy convictions overturned by courts, and the reluctance of judges to decide blasphemy cases:

> "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. […] NGOs continued to report lower courts often did not adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases. […]
>
> On January 29, the Supreme Court upheld its 2018 acquittal of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. Bibi left the country on May 7; numerous sources stated that death threats from anti-blasphemy political party Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) and others made it unsafe for her and her family to remain. […] On December 21, a Multan court sentenced English literature lecturer Junaid Hafeez to death for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad after he spent nearly seven years awaiting trial and verdict. He was simultaneously sentenced to life imprisonment for defiling the Quran and 10 years' imprisonment for outraging the feelings of Muslims. […]
>
> During the year, courts overturned some blasphemy convictions upon appeal and acquitted others of their charges after the accused had spent years in prison. On September 25, the Supreme Court overturned the conviction of Wajih-ul-Hassan, a Muslim, for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad after he had spent 18 years in prison. The Supreme Court's judgment criticized the lower court's conviction of ul-Hassan based on lack of witnesses, weak evidence, and an extrajudicial confession. On January 15, the Kasur Sessions Court in Punjab Province acquitted Christian laborer Pervaiz Masih of blasphemy after a three-year trial. […]

> According to NGOs and media reports, individuals convicted and sentenced to death in well-publicized blasphemy cases dating as far back as 2014 – including Nadeem James; Taimoor Raza; Mubasher, Ghulam, and Ehsan Ahmed; Sawan Masih; and Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausar – remained in prisons and continued to await action on their appeals. In all these cases, judges 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 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." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

The USDOS March 2020 human rights report further provides information on bail in blasphemy cases:

> "NGOs reported authorities sometimes denied bail in blasphemy cases because defendants who faced the death penalty if convicted were likely to flee or were at risk from public vigilantism. Officials often simultaneously charged defendants facing lower-order blasphemy charges with terrorism offenses, which are nonbailable. NGOs also reported that lawyers representing individuals accused of blasphemy often asked that their clients remain in custody to protect them from vigilante violence. Bail is not available in antiterrorism courts." (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 1d)

The same source further notes that "[i]n some cases, police arrested individuals after acts of vigilantism related to blasphemy or religious discrimination" (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 1e). The June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 notes on the same topic:

> "Police intervened on multiple occasions to quell mob violence directed at individuals accused of blasphemy. […] In these instances, police intervened to save the lives of the accused, stop violence, and mitigate damage to property, but they also arrested and charged the accused under the blasphemy law and did not always charge those responsible for the violence." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

The same source also refers to police investigations in blasphemy cases:

> "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." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), a Pakistani NGO advocating human rights, in a December 2019 report notes on the same topic:

> "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." (CSJ, December 2019, p. 27)

Amnesty International (AI) in an August 2020 article reports on the case of a mentally disabled man accused of blasphemy who was shot dead in the Peshawar High Court in July 2020. The article mentions that photos of the attacker being lauded by police surfaced in the internet (AI, 25 August 2020; see also BBC News, 29 July 2020).

For more detailed information on the blasphemy laws, the application and misuse of these laws as well as the consequences of blasphemy accusations, please refer to section 2.3 of this compilation.

3.3.6 Forced conversions, forced marriages

The Pakistani NGO Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) in an undated report on forced conversions observes that "[f]orced conversions in Pakistan, typically involve girls and women from religious minorities, in the Sindh and Punjab provinces of Pakistan" (CSJ, presumably 2020, p. 5). The same publication provides a brief description of how incidents of forced conversions proceed:

> "In most cases, the victim is abducted and subjected to sustained physical and emotional abuse including allurement, violence or a threat of it, towards her loved ones and rape. The kidnapped girl, often minor, sometimes illiterate, is forced or allured to sign an affidavit of conversion and the marriage papers. These papers become a legal defense in any investigation or prosecution to claim that the faith conversion [took place] out of free will. The abducted girls face intimidation, etc. is denied contact with her family on the pretext that she is no more allowed by her husband to make a contact with the family. […] Members belonging to religious minority communities generally lack resources to afford a proper recourse to justice and often do not receive the protection required from state institutions. […] Conservative mindset believes that converting someone to Islam entails Sawab (heavenly reward) which may be a reason why government and police show lethargy when it comes to cracking down on cases of forced conversions in Pakistan. Mass conversions sponsored by wealthy patrons and clerics are common." (CSJ, presumably 2020, pp. 6-7)

The HRCP states that "[c]ases of kidnapping and forced conversion are always accompanied by controversy over whether the girls involved converted and married of their own free will" (HRCP, 2020, p. 33) and valid numbers of forced conversions are a disputed matter (see IPS, 20 October 2020, pp. 16-20). While some sources speak of an estimated 1,000 women forcibly converted to Islam each year (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32; Dawn, 8 April 2014) of which 700 are Christians and 300 are Hindu (Dawn, 8 April 2014), the Institute of Policy Studies Islamabad in a publication on Forced Conversions argues that there is a lack of reliable evidence and "unverifiable figures continued to circulate in various NGO reports with almost each report, in

turn, presented as the primary source of evidence" (IPS, 20 October 2020, p. 16). Referring to another source, IPS states that "no known organization has ever provided data to verify that 1,000 non-Muslim girls are forced to convert every year" (IPS, 20 October 2020, p. 16). The Pakistani NGO Centre for Social Justice together with the Peoples Commission for Minorities' Rights was able to compile data of 162 forced conversions during the period of 2013 to 2019 (CSJ, presumably 2020, p. 6). Referring to CSJ data, Dawn in a November 2020 article writes that 54.3 per cent of the girls and women who were allegedly victims of forced conversions belonged to the Hindu community and 44.4 per cent were Christian (Dawn, 29 November 2020). In another, previous, article on forced conversions of Hindu girls Dawn concludes that "[f]inding reliable data on the matter is difficult" and that there are many cases of alleged forced conversions that are later considered love marriages, which the Hindu community refuses to accept (Dawn, 10 November 2019).

A September 2018 article on forced conversions of Hindu women to Islam in Pakistan published in The Conversation explains the difficulties in assessing whether a conversion was forced on a woman or carried out of her own free will. The author of the article, Jürgen Schaflechner, is a research group leader at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Free University of Berlin and has done research on Hindus in Pakistan and forced conversions. The article observes the public discourse of the topic and notes that the agency of women and girls affected is hardly taken into account. Schaflechner states that "discourses reduce women's suffering to a by-product of a crime which was ultimately inflicted by one male community on another male community" and continues:

> "It seems notions of honour frequently form the basis of cases of forced conversion, and therefore, 'men' often emerge as the apparent victims of such incidents – while the fate of the women involved remains secondary." (The Conversation, 18 September 2018)

The article further notes that "social workers in Sindh confirm that a portion of these incidents consist of women who willingly leave their homes to marry into Muslim families" and reports:

> "Rural parts of Sindh (but also other parts in Pakistan) are highly patriarchal and daughters who decide to marry a man of their own choice are frequently a reason for shame. By labelling an eloped daughter as the victim of a crime, Hindu families avoid ridicule and embarrassment." (The Conversation, 18 September 2018)

There is no law in place against forced conversions, a proposed bill that would have addressed this issue in Sindh was dismissed in 2019 (see section 2.5 of this compilation; see also USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32). Dawn in April 2020 and USDOS in June 2020 provide information on the attempt of the government in the Sindh province to enact legislation against forced conversions and marriages and on pressure from religious parties:

> "Twice the Sindh government attempted to outlaw forced conversions and marriages, including laying guidelines for the court process in the Protection of Minorities Bill, placing an age limit of 18 years upon conversions and enabling better due process. In 2016, the bill was unanimously passed by the Sindh Assembly, but religious parties objected to an age limit for conversions, and threatened to besiege the assembly if the bill received approval of the governor, who then refused to sign the bill into law.

> In 2019, a revised version was introduced, but religious parties protested once again. A sit-in was organised by Pir Mian Abdul Khaliq (Mian Mithu), a political and religious leader and a central character in many cases of forced conversions of underage Hindu girls in Sindh. He and his group claim the girls are not forced, but fall in love with Muslim men and convert willingly. […] Religious groups oppose a minimum age for conversion or marriage on the basis that this is not sanctioned by Islam." (Dawn, 12 April 2020)

> "Sindh Assembly member Nand Kumar Goklani introduced a bill against forced conversions on April 5 [2019]. The draft updated a similar bill approved by the Sindh Assembly in 2016 that the governor refused to sign, reportedly under pressure from extremist groups. On October 23, the Sindh Assembly voted against the new bill after Islamist parties and religious leaders lobbied against it." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

USDOS in June 2020 reports on a Parliamentary Committee to Protect Minorities from Forced Conversions established in November 2019 which included several minority lawmakers as well as the minister of religious affairs and interfaith harmony and the minister of human rights (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II, see also PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 49). USDOS adds that religious minorities "remained concerned that government action to address coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam was inadequate" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II).

During a conference organised by the CSJ and other organisations taking place in December 2020 to discuss forced conversions, an advocate from the Sindh High Court criticised that First Information Reports (FIR)[11] are not registered under the Child Marriage Restraint Act (voicepk.net, 9 December 2020). The Child Marriage Restraint Act defines the minimum legal age of marriage in Pakistan is 18 for boys and 16 for girls, while the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act, which was adopted in 2014 for the province Sindh rules that the minimum legal age of marriage is 18 for both partners (Girls not Brides, April 2020). An article about the conference informs that 46 per cent of victims of forced conversions are younger than 18 (voicepk.net, 9 December 2020). The advocate at the December 2020 conference reported:

> „The judge does not determine the age, only asks if there was forced marriage or not and the victim and culprit both say it was not […]. So the judge ends up releasing an interim order not to arrest anyone. For three to four months afterward, the girl does not get to appear in court. The High Court quashes these cases." (voicepk.net, 9 December 2020)

[11] The Pakistani independent and not-for-profit civil society organisation Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) explains in an undated Guide for Citizens on First Information Reports: "First Information Report (FIR) is a written document prepared by the police when they receive information about the commission of a cognizable offence. […] It is generally a complaint lodged with the police by the victim of a cognizable offence or by someone on his/her behalf. […] It is a duty of police to register FIR without any delay or excuses. Non-registration of FIR is an offence and can be a ground for disciplinary action against the concerned police officer." (CPDI, undated, p. 1)

Dawn in an April 2020 article reports that "[s]ince Sindh has outlawed the marriage of girls under 18, underage girls are taken to Punjab in some cases, where they are married. (Dawn, 12 April 2020)

According to an article published by Dawn in October 2020, the Parliamentary Committee to Protect Minorities from Forced Conversions said that "the state has not fulfilled its responsibility to protect religious minorities from forced conversions" (Dawn, 22 October 2020). UCA News in December 2020 reports that Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan ordered an investigation into forced conversions of minor girls belonging to religious minorities. The article continues that Anglican bishop Azad Marshall welcomed the decision and noted that "[m]any cases go unreported due to societal pressure and fear of reprisal from the accused. Law enforcement agencies and other forums of justice are facilitating such crimes, due to which this trend is increasing." The article also refers to the director of the Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) UK who in a press release "blamed 'police and judicial bias' for the rise in these cases" (UCA News, 2 December 2020). The Inter Press Service – News Agency (IPS), a global non-profit, non-governmental news agency, emphasising on issues of development, globalisation, human rights and the environment, in a November 2020 article on the abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage of a 13-year old Christian girl cites the senior counsel for Human Rights Watch Asia as saying that "[t]he response of the criminal justice system at all three levels of investigation, prosecution and adjudication oscillates between indifference and complicity" explaining that the resulting impunity leads to more cases. The article further quotes a local rights activist according to whom police and judiciary were "neither sensitive enough nor courageous enough to withstand the visible and invisible pressure exerted by the religio-political groups/gangs who perpetuate these crimes" (IPS, 4 November 2020). Concerning state protection, USCIRF mentions the "authorities' failure to address forced conversions of religious minorities" (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32). USDOS states in its June 2020 report that "[t]here 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" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). USCIRF notes in April 2020 that in cases of forced conversion "[l]ocal police, particularly in Punjab and Sindh, are often accused of complicity […] by failing to investigate them properly." USCIRF adds that "[i]f such cases are investigated or adjudicated, the women are reportedly questioned in front of the men they were forced to marry, creating pressure to deny coercion" (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32).
Regarding a 2019 case of alleged forced conversion, the USDOS reports that "[l]ocal police did not file a case immediately and reportedly dismissed the family's claims" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). Agenzia Fides, the news agency of the Vatican, in January 2021 reports on the case of a 17-year-old girl who was kidnapped in Rawalpindi. According to the father, he received no help from the police who refused to file a First Information Report and mocked him (Agenzia Fides, 28 January 2021). The article further cites the director of the NGO CLAAS (Center for Legal Aid, Assistance, and Settlement) with the following statement:

> "Nasir Saeed, Director of the NGO CLAAS, told Fides: 'It is a constant: the police do not take these cases seriously and instead of doing their duty and being impartial, they side with the kidnappers and do not take any action until strong pressure comes from above. Police

> often avoid reporting such cases, believing that they could tarnish Pakistan's image within the international community, which has repeatedly expressed concern over the increased number of cases of forced conversions in Pakistan'." (Agenzia Fides, 28 January 2021)

With regard to forced marriages HRW mentions in its January 2021 annual report on the human rights situation in 2020 that they remain a serious problem. The report emphasises that "[w]omen from religious minority communities remain particularly vulnerable to forced marriage" and adds that "[t]he government has done little to stop such forced marriages" (HRW, 13 January 2021). USDOS notes in its March 2020 human rights report covering 2019 that prosecution in cases of forced marriage remained limited (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 6).

The British daily newspaper The Guardian in a February 2021 article reports on the case of a 12-year-old girl who was kidnapped and forced to marry her abductor. The father of the girl accuses the police of refusing to act. According to the article, police investigators had detained the abductor, but then released him on the grounds that there "was no evidence the girl had not consented to the marriage and that a medical report said she was 16" (The Guardian, 10 February 2021). The article cites an activist based in Faisalabad and a representative of a Catholic organisation making the following statements:

> "Lala Robin Daniel, an activist based in Faisalabad, said of the recent case: 'Despite the parliamentary Senate committee for human rights hearings, I am not hopeful that justice will be served to the poor family. She was injured and in a state of trauma.' 'Teenage girls from religious minority groups are often targeted for forced conversions and marriages due to certain gaps in the law and weak laws. Police and judiciary make fun of the parents seeking justice,' she said.
>
> John Pontifex, of Catholic organisation Aid to the Church in Need, said the British government should be looking at the issue: ' […] He added: 'We receive reports every week of incidents in which girls of minority faith backgrounds are abducted, gang-raped, forcibly converted and who are made to marry their abductor.' 'And it seems the state is complicit by failing to investigate cases, failing to bring the perpetrators to justice and sanctioning child marriages.'" (The Guardian, 10 February 2021)

For more detailed information on the legal framework concerning forced marriages and conversions, please refer to section 2.5 of this compilation.

3.3.7 Hate speech

PIPS and FES state in their December 2020 report that "[s]ectarian hate speech is disseminated on the internet without effective check from the authorities" (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. viii). The report goes on to explain that most who took part in the consultations held for the report "seemed unimpressed by the NAP's success against the spread of hateful and extremist material and speech and actions against extremists' publications and glorification of terrorists" (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 36). The report continues:

> "They also underlined that the victims of hate speech were usually powerless or marginalized groups including religious minority communities, which made falling short of the goal all the more critical. However, most agreed that despite entailing sporadic and

> uncertain triggers, the issue is structural and deep rooted. […] Some underscored the fact that while state institutions had lost their focus, which was evident in the early years of NAP, the government had also simultaneously started extreme media censorship, including against the news media itself, as well as civil society and political workers and leaders, to curb criticism and dissent. It is true that immense focus was placed on countering extremist material, hate speech and glorification of terrorists instantly after the launch of NAP. The Federal Ministry of Interior had directed provincial home departments to curb the distribution of hate material by proscribed organizations; this was accomplished with the help of law enforcement agencies, especially police at the district level. That campaign continued without showing any signs of slowing down at least for two years in all federating units of the country." (PIPS/FES, December 2020, pp. 36-37)

With regard to sectarian hatred on social media platforms the report explains:

> "However, regulating cyberspaces, mainly social media, has been a tricky job for the government. Social media has not only increased the outreach of violent extremist groups and terrorists to propagate their ideologies and get recruits, it has also provided the speakers and disseminators of hatred new avenues. Experts argue that extremism and religious intolerance have in recent years 'grown through their connectivity with larger extremist discourses fanned in cyberspaces. Social media platforms have increased the exposure and vulnerability of the youth to divisive and extremist ideologies.' Banned sectarian groups are at the forefront of the endeavors to fuel sectarian hatred on social media platforms. […] The government has mainly been using tactical approaches to control and regulate social media, mainly through the state institutions, including Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), which has a dedicated National Response Center for Cyber Crimes. The government also keeps negotiating with different social media services providers and technology companies in a bid to control the content, asking many of these companies, including Google, to register their offices in Pakistan. At the same time, however, activists have questioned the government's motives in seeking the offices of the social media services providers and technology companies in Pakistan. Concerns have also been raised about the misuse of cyber laws. Such misuse has indeed already transpired with journalists and civil society activists being booked under the country's anti-cyber-crime law." (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 38)

Freedom Network, which describes itself as a "Pakistan-based media and development sector watchdog" (Freedom Network, undated), in an October 2020 report on the state of digital rights in Pakistan in 2020 provides the following information on the prevalence of hate speech online:

> "Pakistani media, including online current affairs platforms, is deeply stereotypical about its portrayal of the country's 7.5 million citizens of non-Muslim religious minority backgrounds who largely remain unheard, unseen and mostly marginalized in the national discourse. Hate speech against religious minorities on social media and their online harassment are also growing threats to freedom of expression. Religious minorities, security agencies, human rights, gender, politics and development are identified as the main discussion themes online that elicit the most hostile reactions from detractors online.

> A recent study showed that online news media platforms reported facing hate speech, hostility and organized targeting for their content related to religion, religious minorities and human rights and face threats, abuse, trolling, hacking, blocking and charges of treason from various threat actors including individuals, political parties, religious groups, unknown organized groups and even official sources." (Freedom Network, 29 October 2020, pp. 5-6)

Minority Rights Group International (MRG), a London-based international NGO advocating for disadvantaged minorities and indigenous peoples through worldwide campaigns, legal cases and publications, in a May 2020 statement expresses its concern over an anti-Ahmadi social media campaign which began after reports spread that the government would include Ahmadis in its proposed National Commission for Minorities (NCM). According to MRG, "the material which is of gravest concern is a tweet made by the State Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Mr. Ali Muhammad Khan in the late evening of 29 April 2020. The tweet endorses beheading as an acceptable form of punishment for blasphemers". MRG states that it is completely clear from the context that the minister was referring to Ahmadis and his tweet incites violence against persons based on their beliefs or faith (MRG, 1 May 2020).

Express Tribune, a Karachi-based newspaper reports in October 2019 that National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) blocked 2,273 websites containing hate material and 1,943 websites containing hate speeches and 68 websites over links to terrorism (The Express Tribune, 17 October 2019). The daily Pakistani newspaper Dawn reports in September 2020:

> "The Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) claims to have taken action against 218 people allegedly involved in spreading hate speech on social media before and during Muharram. According to a spokesperson, 87 out of the 218 suspects were arrested, booked and sent to jails, while 43 others were detained under Section 3 of the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO). He claimed that the CTD also got over 4,000 social media websites containing hate speech blocked through the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority. The names of these 218 people belonging to all sects were being included in the Fourth Schedule of Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) 1997 to maintain surveillance over their activities, so that they were not be able to spread hate speech further. Additionally, during the first 10 days of Muharram, action was taken against 57 people for spreading hate speech on social media in the form of arrests under ATA and detentions under MPO. He stressed that the government was determined not to allow sectarian hatred." (Dawn, 6 September 2020)

Regarding hate speech contained in school textbooks, Freedom House notes in its annual report published in March 2020:

> "Pakistani authorities have a long history of using the education system to portray Hindus and other non-Muslims negatively, and to rationalize enmity between Pakistan and India, among other ideological aims. Past attempts to modernize education and introduce tolerance into school textbooks have made little progress and minority groups consider negative portrayals of non-Muslims in textbooks as a continuing source of hostility towards them." (Freedom House, 4 March 2020, D3)

USDOS reports in its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 that the government reviewed textbooks for derogatory material:

> "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." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33)

CSW in May 2020 refers to curricula and school textbooks which "promote intolerance between majority and minority faiths". According to CSW, "[b]ooks contain factual/historical inaccuracies and omissions and exclude the contributions of religious minority heroes, some also include biased and derogatory language towards religious minorities." (CSW, May 2020, p. 2)

3.4 Defenders of minority rights

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in a September 2020 press briefing refers to "numerous instances of incitement to violence – online and offline – against journalists and human rights defenders in Pakistan, in particular against women and minorities." It is added that accusations of blasphemy are of special concern as those accused can be exposed to violence (OHCHR, 8 September 2020). The South Asia Collective in its November 2020 report provides the following information on the situation of defenders of minority rights:

> "Journalists, writers and human rights activists who advocate for the rights of minorities, or even simply talk about free speech and give an impression of a liberal Pakistan are increasingly being silenced. Media outlets, small and large, as well as independent writers have experienced growing backlash, harassment, intimidation and criminalisation." (The South Asia Collective, November 2020, p. 189)

> "Lawyers who work as human rights activists, especially those defending blasphemy-related cases against minorities, and lawyers who are themselves minorities, continue to face threats for the work they do. According to the Frontline Defenders, some 371 human rights defenders are at risk in Pakistan. The case of the lawyer Saif ul Mulook, who defended Asia Bibi, is also worth noting as he continues to face considerable threats to his public life as he defends another Christian couple's case." (The South Asia Collective, November 2020, p. 191)

Front Line Defenders, a Dublin-based NGO with the aim to protect human rights defenders at risk, states on its undated country page on Pakistan that the blasphemy laws "are widely used to target HRDs [human rights defenders], especially those defending the rights of Christian

minorities" (Front Line Defenders, undated). CSW notes in May 2020 that "[l]awyers defending blasphemy-related or other sensitive cases relating to minority issues frequently face intimidation and threats of violence, and in some cases extra-judicial killings" (CSW, May 2020, p. 2). USCIRF in April 2020 also mentions that "[e]ven lawyers defending those charged with blasphemy, presiding judges, and individuals speaking against the law are targeted […]" (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33; USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in a June 2020 report on freedom of religion and belief in Pakistan refers to the case of Junaid Hafeez against whom a case was filed under the blasphemy laws. His lawyer was shot dead in his office in 2014 after complaining of "open threats by religious leaders and prosecution lawyers for defending Hafeez". The HRCP reports also on the Sikh rights activist Radesh Singh Tony who was harassed and intimidated for his activism. According to him, he and his son were beaten up by unidentified attackers in December 2019. Finally, he and his family left Pakistan "citing threats from religious extremists to him and his family, and widespread discrimination in finding a residence, jobs and pursuing education of his children" (HRCP, June 2020, p. 6).

4 Treatment of religious minorities by non-state actors

4.1 Ahmadis

The Ahmadis[12] are an Islamic sect founded in 1889 in Qadian (India) by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. When he died, Mawlawi Nur al-Din was elected as caliph (the spiritual and administrative head of the community (CREID, December 2020a, p. 7) (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 11 May 2015). MRG explains that different views concerning the position of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad led to a split within the community (MRG, updated June 2018f). According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, the original group in Qadian recognised Ghulam Ahmad as prophet (nabi) and his son as the second caliph, the new Lahore society on the other hand accepted Ghulam Ahmad only as a reformer (mujaddid) (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 11 May 2015). The Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID), an international consortium led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and funded by UK aid from the UK Government, in December 2020 published a report on Ahmadi women living in poverty in Pakistan written by a leader from the Ahmadi community whose name has been anonymised for security reasons. The author of the report states that the community which was based in Qadian shifted its headquarters after partition in 1947 to Rabwah in Pakistan, where it was located until 1984 (the name of the city was changed to Chenab Nagar in 1998). When the anti-Ahmadi laws were introduced in Pakistan in 1984, the fourth caliph moved to the United Kingdom and the headquarter were shifted to London and in 2019 to a place called Islamabad in the village of Tilford in the English county Surrey. The name of the current caliph is Mirza Masroor Ahmad. (CREID, December 2020a, pp. 7-8). The author further refers to the official website of the community, according to which "membership exceeds tens of millions, with followers in more than 200 countries" (CREID, December 2020a, p. 7).

UK Home Office in a March 2019 report on Ahmadis provides the following information on the number of Ahmadis in Pakistan, citing various sources:

> "There are no reliable statistics on the number of Ahmadis in Pakistan. According to data provided by the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA), cited by The Express Tribune in March 2018, there were just over 167,000 Ahmadis registered in Pakistan. Taking account of the Ahmadi boycott of the official census, other estimates vary from between 400,000 to 600,000, and 2 to 5 million. The large discrepancy in numbers was attributed to the fact that most Ahmadis tend not to register (on the electoral roll) as they are officially regarded as non-Muslims." (UK Home Office, March 2019, p. 15)

The Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), an independent administrative tribunal responsible for making decisions on immigration and refugee matters, notes in a December 2020 query response that according to media sources, an estimated 4 million persons identify as Ahmadi in Pakistan (IRB, 16 December 2020).

[12] MRG mentions that Ahmadis sometimes are referred to as Qadiyanies (MRG, updated June 2018f). The author of the December 2020 report published by CREID explains on the other hand that "Orthodox Muslims in Pakistan […] use different religious slurs such as Qadiani and Mirzai to refer to AM [Ahmadi Muslim]. The term Qadiani originates from Qadian, the birthplace of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and the term Mirzai comes from the surname of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the AMC." (CREID, December 2020a, p. 10)

The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken) in a December 2020 thematic report on the situation of Ahmadis and Christians (covering March 2017 to September 2020) states based on various sources that the main population centres for Ahmadis in Pakistan are Sialkot, Quetta, Multan, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Lahore and Faisalabad. Sources also mention Khewra, Sargodha, Bhalwal, Shahpur and Gujranwala. Chenab Nagar in the Punjab is still considered the centre of the Ahmadi community (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, December 2020, p. 12).
The author of the report published by CREID states that Ahmadis consider themselves to be Muslims (CREID, December 2020a, p. 7). MRG describes the beliefs and teachings of the Ahmadis as following:

> "In many ways the life of Ahmaddiyas conforms to Islam, although there are significant differences between orthodox Muslims and Ahmaddiyas. Orthodox Muslims claim that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmaddiya sect, proclaimed himself as a prophet, thereby rejecting a fundamental tenet of Islam – Khatem-e-Nabowat (a belief in the finality of the Prophet Mohammad). […] The Ahmaddiya movement also rejects the idea of militant jihad (holy war)." (MRG, updated June 2018f; see also CREID, December 2020a, p. 7)

UK Home Office in its March 2019 report cites information provided to the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT) in June 2018 by the International Human Rights Committee (IHRC), a UK-based independent organisation focusing specifically on the Ahmadi Muslim Community. The senior leadership of the Ahmadi Muslim Community stated in an interview conducted by IHRC that "the issue of the 'Second Coming of the Messiah' […] has led to the current day issues." Before 1974 Ahmadis were considered as part of the mainstream Islamic faith but this changed with the anti-Ahmadi laws and Ordinance XX. (UK Home Office, March 2019, p. 14)

MRG explains the historic context of anti-Ahmadi legislation:

> "Growing Ahmaddiya influence became a source of concern after independence and partition. Demands were voiced that they should be declared non-Muslims and should be excluded from definitions of what constituted Islam. Religious friction came to a peak in 1953 with demonstrations and violence against the Ahmaddiya community. Tensions resurfaced in the early 1970s amid renewed demands on the part of Pakistan clerics to declare Ahmaddiyas non-Muslims. As a result of this pressure, Ahmaddiyas were declared non-Muslims in September 1974 by the Pakistan parliament." (MRG, updated June 2018f)

4.1.1 Legal framework

As already mentioned above, the constitution of Pakistan was amended in 1974 to declare Ahmadis as non-Muslims (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33; CREID, December 2020a, p. 9; HRW, 8 May 2020; USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II) by introducing clause 3 in Article 260. (MRG, updated June 2018f)

A full version of the Pakistani constitution as amended on 31 May 2018 can be accessed via the following link:

- Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 12 April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018 http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1549886415_632.pdf

USCIRF goes on to explain that "[b]esides the constitution's second amendment, articles 298(b) and 298(c) of the Penal Code prohibit Ahmadis from self-identifying as Muslims, propagating or disseminating materials about their faith, or calling their houses of worship mosques" (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33). These sections were added to the Pakistan Penal Code in 1984 by Ordinance No. XX (MRG, updated June 2018f). The UK Home Office states in its March 2019 report that the two articles introduced by Ordinance XX are commonly referred to as anti-Ahmadi laws. (UK Home Office, March 2019, p. 16). The Ordinance was promulgated "to amend the law to prohibit the Quadiani group, Lahori group and Ahmadis from indulging in anti-Islamic activities" (Ordinance No. XX of 1984, 26 April 1984). According to the UK Home Office, under Articles 298B and 298C of the Penal Code

> "[…] Ahmadis are prevented by law from:
>
> • calling themselves Muslims, either directly or indirectly;
> • referring to their faith as Islam;
> • preaching or propagating their religious beliefs;
> • inviting others to accept Ahmadiyya teachings by words, either written or spoken, or by visible representations;
> • insulting the religious feelings of Muslims;
> • calling their places of worship 'mosques' or 'masjid';
> • worshipping in non-Ahmadi mosques or public prayer rooms;
> • performing the Muslim call to prayer;
> • using the traditional Islamic greeting in public;
> • publicly quoting from the Qur'an; or
> • displaying the basic affirmation of the Muslim faith.
>
> The punishment for violation of these provisions is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine." (UK Home Office, March 2019, p. 16)

The full text of Ordinance No. XX can be accessed via the following link:

- Ordinance No. XX of 1984, 26 April 1984 https://www.refworld.org/docid/5485673d4.html

A full text version of the Pakistan Penal Code with amendments up to 16 February 2017 can be accessed via the following link:

- PPC - Pakistan Penal Code, 6 October 1860, as amended on 16 February 2017 https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/64050/88951/F1412088581/PAK64050%202017.pdf

The two mentioned articles of the Penal Code apply only to Ahmadis and restrict freedom of religion as protected by the constitution (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, December 2020, p. 83). Matthew Nelson, Professor in Politics at the School of Oriental and African Studies

(SOAS), in a meeting of Pakistan experts organised by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and held in Rome in October 2017 stated that "[t]he amendments in the Pakistan penal code basically made the Ahmadi peaceful practice of their religion a crime". He went on to explain:

> "Finally, in 1993 there is a landmark judgment, a Supreme Court judgment in the case Zaheeruddin. Zaheeruddin is a case that upheld the constitutionality of these penal code amendments. And they were upheld because the amendments were said to protect public order. And therefore, criminalizing the peaceful practice of the Ahmadis was not a violation of a fundamental right to religious freedom because a fundamental right to religious freedom is protected only subject to public order. So if the law privileges public order, it is not inconsistent with the right to religious freedom. So in order to protect public order, the Ahmadiyya practice 'must be restricted.'" (EASO, February 2018, p. 30)

The HRCP notes in a June 2020 report on freedom of religion or belief in Pakistan that Ordinance No. XX "laid out the most draconian and stringent rules of discrimination and persecution […]" against Ahmadis what "meant that members of the community could be jailed for 'posing' as Muslims i.e. practicing their beliefs." (HRCP, June 2020, p. 3)

HRW states in a May 2020 article that "authorities routinely arrest, jail, and charge Ahmadis for blasphemy and other offenses because of their religious beliefs" (HRW, 8 May 2020; see also USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; HRW, 13 January 2021). USCIRF elaborates in a brief October 2019 report on Pakistan's blasphemy laws noting that "[u]nder sections 295 and 298 of Pakistan's Penal Code, individuals are prohibited from verbal and nonverbal actions deemed insulting to religious belief and practice." The report further explains that "[t]hese provisions extend to protect physical documents such as copies of the Qur'an and other religious texts, places of worship, the reputation of the Prophet Muhammad, and other religious symbols" (USCIRF, October 2019, p. 1). With regard to section 295 of the Penal Code, CSW notes in a December 2019 report that "[t]he [blasphemy] laws criminalise anyone who insults Islam and include: Sections 295(A), outraging religious feeling; 295(B), defiling the Qur'an; and 295(C), defiling the name of the Prophet Mohammed, which carries the death penalty or life imprisonment" (CSW, December 2019, p. 13). HRW mentions in a June 2018 article that under section 295-C of the Penal Code "the Ahmadi belief in the prophethood of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is considered blasphemous insofar as it 'defiles the name of Prophet Muhammad.'" (HRW, 28 June 2018)

CSW explains in the above-mentioned December 2019 report:

> "The law itself is poorly defined and has low standards for evidence, as it does not require specific proof of intent to commit blasphemy; as a result spurious accusations are commonplace. It is clear that the blasphemy laws are not a deterrent – they are indiscriminately used as a weapon of revenge against both Muslims and non-Muslims to settle personal scores or to resolve disputes over money, property or business, under the guise of insults to religion." (CSW, December 2019, p. 13; see also USCIRF, October 2019, p. 1)

Regarding the election law DFAT explains in its February 2019 report:

> "In October 2017, the government passed an amendment to the Elections Act, changing the language of the electoral oath by replacing the words 'I solemnly swear' with 'I believe' in a proclamation of Muhammad as the religion's last prophet. This facilitated Ahmadis' ability to vote. The law removed the requirement for Ahmadis to register separately and placed them on joint lists prepared by NADRA. The change caused public outcry, and prompted large demonstrations and accusations the government was weakening its stance on Ahmadis. Protesters, led by the conservative Tehreek-e-Laibbak Pakistan (TLP), protested in Islamabad stating the change was blasphemous and anti-Ahmadi material circulated in the media. Following community pressure, the government cited clerical error and quickly restored the earlier wording to the oath in the Elections Act, 2017, and revised the electoral law to reincorporate Ahmadi registration requirements." (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 40; see also IRB, 16 December 2020)

For general information on the constitutional provisions mentioned, the blasphemy laws and the Anti-Ahmadi laws, please refer to section 2 of this compilation.

4.1.2 Treatment by state actors

For general information on the treatment of religious minorities by state actors, please refer to section 3.1 and section 3.2 of this compilation.

According to the USCIRF April 2020 report covering 2019, Ahmadis, "with their faith essentially criminalized, continued to face severe persecution from authorities". The report further notes that authorities target houses of worship of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32), referring to an example in October 2019 when police partially demolished a mosque belonging to the Ahmadis in Punjab (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32; see also AP, 28 October 2019). AI, HRW and ICJ in a February 2021 article call on the authorities to "end their ongoing persecution of the Ahmadiyya religious minority" (AI/HRW/ICJ, 3 February 2021).
As mentioned above, HRW, AI and ICJ note in 2020 that the authorities arrest, detain, and charge Ahmadis because of their religious beliefs and that police have been complicit in harassing them and bringing false charges against them (HRW, 8 May 2020; AI/HRW/ICJ, 26 November 2020).

Referring to blasphemy cases, USDOS states in its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 that of the 84 persons imprisoned for blasphemy, 16 were Ahmadis. The same source adds that since 2001 there were 28 convictions of Ahmadis on blasphemy charges (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The report adds that "[a]uthorities charged 11 Ahmadis in connection with practicing their faith during the year, according to Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders. Among these, six Ahmadis were arrested and charged with blasphemy, although three were released." The report further provides information on the following two examples of faith-based charges:

> "Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders stated that due to arrests and criminal charges for offering a sacrifice at Eid al-Adha in previous years, Ahmadis carried out the ritual sacrifice in private to avoid exposure and arrest. On March 18, a judge released elderly Ahmadi

> bookseller Abdul Shakoor from prison after reducing his sentence to the three years he had already served. Shakoor had been convicted of propagating the Ahmadiyya faith and 'inciting hatred.'" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

CSW states in its December 2019 report that according to figures from the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) 505 Ahmadis were accused under various provisions on offences related to religion between 1987 and 2018 (CSW, December 2019, p. 13). CSJ examined data of 1,572 people accused of having committed blasphemy in the period 1987 to 2018 in Pakistan, 516 of whom were Ahmadis (CSJ, December 2019, p. 29).

The author of the report published by CREID in December 2020 provides information based on a report published in February 2020 on the website Persecutionofahmadis.org. This report is no longer accessible, neither on the internet nor via the internet archive. The information provided by CREID reads:

> "Statistics from 1984 to 2019 reported by the AMC [Ahmadi Muslim Community] in its annual report (TPA 2019) confirm an upward trend of AM persecution during the current Government of Pakistan. […] Statistics of police cases registered against Ahmadis on religious grounds show that 765 Ahmadis were booked for displaying Kalima [the formal content of declaration of the Islamic faith], 38 Ahmadis were arrested for making the Islamic call to prayer (azan), 453 Ahmadis were arrested for 'posing' as Muslims, 161 Ahmadis were booked for using Islamic epithets, 93 Ahmadis were charged for saying namaz (a mandatory prayer which Muslims offer five times a day), 825 Ahmadis were booked for preaching, 49 Ahmadis were booked for allegedly defiling the Holy Qur'an, 1,222 Ahmadis were charged in other religious cases, and 315 Ahmadis were charged under the 'blasphemy law', i.e. PPC 295-C." (CREID, December 2020a, pp, 9-10)

USDOS mentions official discrimination against Ahmadis in its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). DFAT assesses in its February 2019 report that "Ahmadis face high levels of official discrimination in Pakistan and are not able to practise their religion freely" (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 39). AI, HRW and ICJ notes in a November 2020 article that "[t]he Pakistani government also promotes discriminatory practices against Ahmadis", adding that "[f]or example, all Pakistani Muslim citizens applying for passports are obliged to sign a statement explicitly stating that they consider the founder of the Ahmadi community an 'imposter,' and consider Ahmadis to be non-Muslims" (AI/HRW/ICJ, 26 November 2020; HRW, 28 June 2018). USDOS in its June 2020 report provides more detailed information on the topic:

> "The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) designates religious affiliation on passports and requires religious information in national identity card and passport applications. Those wishing to be listed as Muslims must swear they believe the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet, and must denounce the Ahmadiyya movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslim. There is no option to state 'no religion.' National identity cards are required for all citizens upon reaching the age of 18. Identification cards are used for voting, pension disbursement, social and financial inclusion programs, and other services. […] Community leaders continued to report the

> government hindered Ahmadis from obtaining legal documents and pressured community members to deny their beliefs by requiring individuals wishing to be listed as Muslim on identity cards and passports to swear the Prophet Muhammad was the final prophet of Islam and the Ahmadiyya movement's founder was a false prophet. Ahmadiyya community representatives reported the word 'Ahmadi' was written on their passports if they identified themselves as such. In 2018 the Islamabad High Court (IHC) issued a judgment requiring citizens to declare an affidavit of faith to join the army, judiciary, and civil services and directed parliament to amend laws to ensure Ahmadis did not use 'Islamic' terms or have names associated with Islam. Neither the National Assembly nor the Senate had acted on the 2018 judgment by year's end, but Ahmadiyya community representatives said that NADRA required Ahmadis to declare in an affidavit that they are non-Muslims to obtain a national identification card, another requirement of the IHC judgment." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 2d; see also USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33)

Concerning the judgement of the Islamabad High Court, the HRCP explains in its June 2020 report:

> "in 2018, Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui of the Islamabad High Court […] stated, 'Every citizen of the country has [the] right to know that the persons holding the key posts belong to which religious community.' The judge, who has since been removed from service over a separate matter, had also ordered that an affidavit declaring belief in the finality of Prophethood must be sworn by applicants seeking CNICs [Computerised National Identity Card], passports, birth certificates, induction in electoral rolls, and appointments in government and semi-government institutions, especially the judiciary, armed forces and civil services." (HRCP, June 2020, pp. 4-5)

DFAT writes in its February 2019 report that Ahmadis who register for a Computerised National Identity Card (CNIC) sign as Muslim by default on the application form. DFAT goes on to explain that "after marriage Ahmadis must update their marital status on their CNIC, requiring presentation of a marriage certificate" and that "presentation of the Ahmadi marriage certificate by a person registered as Muslim on a CNIC can lead to claims of apostasy" (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 40).

HRW notes in a June 2018 article that the requirement to declare one's religion "effectively mandates Ahmadis to renounce a tenet of their faith to obtain basic travel documents. One consequence of the passport declaration has been to bar Ahmadis from performing the Hajj, the Islamic pilgrimage that Ahmadis believe to be a religious duty." (HRW, 28 June 2018; USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also CREID, December 2020a, p. 62)

Concerning voting rights of Ahmadis, USDOS explains in June 2020:

> "According to Ahmadiyya leaders, the government effectively disenfranchised their community by requiring voters to swear an oath affirming the 'finality of prophethood,' something which they stated was against Ahmadi belief, in order to register as Muslims. Since voters who registered as Ahmadis were kept on a separate voter list, they said they

> were more exposed to threats and physical intimidation, and many Ahmadis continued their longstanding practice of boycotting elections." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 3 and HRCP, March 2019, p. 114)

The anonymised author of the report published by CREID in December 2020 states on this issue:

> "There are two electoral lists in Pakistan: the main list is for Muslims and 'non-Muslims' and the other is a separate list for Ahmadis. To register as voters, AMs [Ahmadis] are required to either deny or hide their faith or agree to be placed on the separate AM electoral list. As the basis of AM belief is to identify as Muslim, AMs are thus unable to vote. The national identity card must be shown to cast a vote and those Ahmadis who have 'Islam' stated on it also never go to polling stations due to fear that someone might complain or even shout that he/she is Ahmadi and registered as Muslim." (CREID, December 2020a, pp. 71-72)

USDOS mentions in June 2020 that "[t]he requirement that Muslim elected officials swear an oath affirming their belief that the Prophet Muhammed is the final prophet of Islam continued to discourage Ahmadi Muslims from seeking public office" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The Pulitzer Center, which "raises awareness of underreported global issues" (Pulitzer Center, undated), notes in an April 2020 article that Ahmadis "cannot hold governmental positions without publicly denouncing Mirza Ghulam Ahmad" (Pulitzer Center, 7 April 2020). The author of the December 2020 report published by CREID explains on the same topic:

> "People applying for government jobs must declare their faith, and most private jobs require employees to do so. Jobs in the private sector are not offered to AMs [Ahmadis] mainly to avoid a potential backlash from other employees. Although the government has a 5 per cent quota reserved for minorities in government jobs, no Ahmadi has been offered a job as part of it. As previously explained, for Ahmadi people to be included in the quota for minorities, they would have to accept a 'non-Muslim' status; and even when Ahmadi people have disclosed their status on identity documents, automatically placing themselves in the 'minority' category, none of them have been offered a job under this quota." (CREID, December 2020a, p. 46)

> "There are special minority seats in each provincial and national assembly. However, unlike other religious minorities, such as Christians and Hindus, AMs have no representation in the assemblies. Neither are they included on any government committee. Even the National Commission for Minorities (NCM), whose members include all the other minorities, is not represented by an AM. For the Ahmadi people to access these special minority seats they would have to accept their 'minority' status, which would mean stating they are non-Muslim." (CREID, December 2020a, p. 28)

HRW reports that in May 2020 a National Commission for Minorities (NCM) was established, but Ahmadis were not included among its members. According to HRW, media reports indicated that the Religious Affairs Ministry initially had recommended to include Ahmadis in the commission, "an unprecedented proposal since Ahmadis remain unrepresented in most government institutions" (HRW, 8 May 2020; see also Qantara, 10 July 2020). Qantara, a project funded by the German Foreign Office which is run by Germany's international

broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) and the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, in a July 2020 article describes the following incident:

> "Imran Khan took his first U-turn in late 2018 shortly after his inauguration. He had appointed a number of renowned experts to his Economic Advisory Council (EAC), among them the world-famous economist and Princeton University professor Atif Mian, an Ahmadi. The IMF ranks Atif Mian among the world's top 25 economists. The news of Mian's appointment soon attracted the attention of religious hardliners who demanded his immediate removal. Khan bowed to pressure at the time and forced the economist to stand down from the EAC." (Qantara, 10 July 2020; see also PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 60 and HRCP, March 2019, p. 114)

Concerning civil marriage registration, USDOS quotes information provided by Ahmadi Muslim community representatives, according to whom "Ahmadi families were unable to register their marriages with local administrative bodies, known as union councils, as those councils considered Ahmadis to be outside the authority of the Muslim Family Law of 1961" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its December 2020 report mentions that the National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA) has introduced a civil registry management system at the local government level, which allows the government to register births, marriages and deaths of citizens. However, in order to apply for a marriage certificate, an Islamic marriage contract (nikah), among other things, must be presented, which apparently makes the registration of non-Islamic marriages impossible. However, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs states in a footnote that this information could not be confirmed. (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, December 2020, p. 100)

Regarding discrimination of Ahmadis in education, USDOS in June 2020 provides the following information:

> "Minority religious leaders stated members of their communities continued to experience discrimination in admission to colleges and universities. Ahmadi representatives said the wording of the declaration students were required to sign on their applications for admission to universities continued to prevent Ahmadis from declaring themselves as Muslims. Their refusal to sign the statement meant they were automatically disqualified from fulfilling the admissions requirements. The government said Ahmadis could qualify for admission as long as they did not claim to be Muslims." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

In the report on Ahmadi women living in poverty published in December 2020 by CREID the anonymised author writes on this topic:

> "Poor AM [Ahmadi] women face many problems while seeking admission to government schools, colleges, and universities in Pakistan, and problems continue after they have been admitted. Local schools deny admission due to pressures from local clerics. Some schools offer admission but do not take any responsibility for the safety and rights of Ahmadi students at their institutes. Ahmadi students face hatred, insults, and torture from teachers and fellow students. Teachers discriminate them from non-Ahmadi students. Asif explained how difficult it is for Ahmadis to apply for admission via an online registration

> form, which was introduced in 2009. This form requires applicants to mention their religious identity by choosing between 'Muslim' and 'non-Muslim'. This is a complicated situation for Ahmadi applicants as they believe themselves to be Muslims. Contrarily, the Pakistan constitution declares Ahmadis as non-Muslims. In cases where an Ahmadi selects the option 'Islam', he/she can be charged for a criminal offence under the blasphemy laws. This kind of form is designed to force Ahmadis to declare themselves as non-Muslims. In the past, educational institutes in Rabwah placed Ahmadis in the 'Muslim' category. Since the introduction of the oppressive online registration system, institutes in Rabwah affiliated with the Agha Khan University Board, which does not require applicants to state their religious identity. However, institutes outside of Rabwah that are not affiliated with the Agha Khan University Board create serious problems for thousands of AMs just due to their faith. Their refusal to sign the declaration leads to their automatic disqualification for not fulfilling the admission requirements." (CREID, December 2020a, p. 42)

The USDOS June 2020 report also contains information on denied construction permits for places of worship of Ahmadis as well as on the closure of existing places of worship and on police preventing Ahmadis from praying:

> "Although there continued to be no official restriction on the construction of Ahmadiyya places of worship, according to Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders, local authorities regularly denied requisite construction permits, and Ahmadis remained forbidden to call them mosques. […]
>
> Throughout the year [2019], police closed down two Ahmadi prayer centers in Rawalpindi, citing law and order concerns, and another prayer center in Lahore. In June police in Sheikhapura District, Punjab Province, denied Ahmadis access to a mosque they used for prayer and forced them to sign a declaration they would no longer pray in the mosque. In September police also prevented Ahmadis from praying in a private home in Gujranwala, Punjab Province, and in a newly-built prayer center in Nankana, also in Punjab. In all these cases, Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders cited complaints from Muslim clerics as prompting police to prevent their worship." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

In its December 2020 report the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs presents data on types and frequency of violent incidents against Ahmadis between 1984 and 1 December 2019, citing the same report as the author of the CREID December 2020 report published in February 2020 on the website Persecutionofahmadis.org. This report is no longer accessible, neither on the internet nor via the internet archive. According to the data, 40 Ahmadi mosques were closed or sealed by the government in that period, furthermore the construction of 59 Ahmadi mosques was stopped by the government. (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, December 2020, p. 39)

Concerning proselytising, the UK Home Office in its March 2019 report on Ahmadis cites information provided in April 2018 by the International Human Rights Committee (IHRC), according to which not only preaching and other forms of proselytising are prohibited by law, but also other elements of manifesting religious belief are restricted, for example holding open discourse about religion with non-Ahmadis (UK Home Office, March 2019, p. 59; see also USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II).

The USDOS March 2020 report on human rights practices in 2019 further mentions that "[a]uthorities generally prohibited Ahmadi Muslims from holding conferences or gatherings" (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 2b). The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (APPG) in the United Kingdom which describes itself as "parliamentarians from all parties who are keen to support the work of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community" seeking "to make all parliamentarians aware of the extensive positive work carried out by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and to speak up on issues of persecution and extremism that Ahmadi Muslims face both abroad and in the UK" in July 2020 published a report on the persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan. The report notes that Ahmadis in Pakistan are "banned from congregating for religious purposes" and adds that the restrictions are not limited to faith-based events (APPG, July 2020, p. 41).

The APPG report further mentions that "[a]nti-terror legislation has been used to ban Ahmadi literature" (APPG, July 2020, p. 15), the USDOS June 2020 report notes that the sale of Ahmadi religious literature is prohibited by law (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The HRCP in its annual report on human rights in 2019 states in the chapter on Punjab that Ahmadis cannot publish or distribute their own literature (HRCP, 2020, p. 32).

4.1.3 Treatment by non-state actors

According to the above-mentioned April 2020 article by Pulitzer Center the "anti-Ahmadi legislation influences societal attitudes, leaving Ahmadis shunned by many mainstream Muslims and vulnerable to extremist violence" (Pulitzer Center, 7 April 2020). In its June 2020 report USDOS states that "Ahmadis continued to report widespread societal harassment and discrimination against community members" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III; see also CSW, 6 October 2020; APPG, July 2020, p. 16). AI, HRW and ICJ in November 2020 cite Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch speaking of a "social exclusion faced by the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan" (AI/HRW/ICJ, 26 November 2020).
The USDOS June 2020 report goes on to say that societal abuses of religious freedom included targeted killings of Ahmadi Muslims as well as violence against them. According to the report, during 2019 unidentified individuals assaulted and killed Ahmadis in attacks sources considered to be religiously motivated. The relationship between the attackers and terrorist groups was often unclear (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III). The same source further provides the following information on targeted killings of Ahmadis in 2019:

> "According to Ahmadiyya community representatives, three incidents of what appeared to be targeted killings of Ahmadiyya community members by unknown individuals took place. On January 3 [2019], in Mandi Bahauddin District, Punjab, Ahmadi Mahdi Khan was shot and killed by unknown assailants. According to community representatives, his family was the only Ahmadi family in their village, and Khan had received threats from TLP [Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan] members before the killing. His family relocated after the killing out of fear of further violence. On March 14, two Ahmadi men were killed in Koh Fateh Jang in what the Ahmadi community said it believed was a targeted killing, but other sources said may have been a land dispute." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III)

PIPS and FES state in its December 2020 report that Ahmadis are frequent victims of targeted attacks. The report goes on to say:

> "Ahmadi believed that in recent months they have been the target of an organized hate campaign in Peshawar and there had been an increase in faith-based attacks on Ahmadis. A spate of recent attacks against Ahmadis in Peshawar — usually drive-by shooting carried out by unidentified motorcycle riders — caused the death of an Ahmadi professor on October 5 [2020], and of an Ahmadi trader in a busy market of the city on August 12. On July 29, an elderly Ahmadi man, who was standing trial on blasphemy charges, was shot and killed inside a courtroom in Peshawar. A lawyer was said to have provided the murder weapon to the killer. On November 9, 2020, gunmen shot and killed an 82-year-old Ahmadi man on the outskirts of Peshawar." (PIPS/FES, December 2020, pp. 47-48)

AI, HRW and ICJ note in November 2020 that between July and November 2020 five targeted killings of Ahmadis took place (AI/HRW/ICJ, 26 November 2020). CRSS writes in its annual Security report 2020 published in February 2021 that four Ahmadis were killed during the reporting period, three of them in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (excluding ex-FATA). The report adds that three Ahmadis were injured in 2020 (CRSS, 10 February 2021, pp. 28-30). The anonymised author of the report published by CREID in December 2020 provides information on violence against Ahmadis based on the above-mentioned report published in February 2020 on the website Persecutionofahmadis.org, which is no longer accessible. According to the data, between 1984 and 1 December 2019, 265 Ahmadis were killed (CREID, December 2020a, p. 9).

The March 2020 human rights report published by USDOS mentions that "[s]ocietal violence due to religious intolerance remained a serious problem. There were occasionally reports of mob violence against religious minorities, including Christians, Ahmadi Muslims, and Hindus" (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 6). The APPG explains in its July 2020 report that the "vigilante culture in Pakistan is deeply entrenched, with clerics giving mobs the religious legitimisation to carry out acts of violence against minority religious communities" (APPG, July 2020, p. 51).

In its June 2020 report USDOS states that societal harassment and discrimination against Ahmadis included "physical attacks on Ahmadi individuals, destruction of homes and personal property, and threats intended to force Ahmadis to abandon their jobs or towns" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III). The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in December 2020 also presents data provided in the above-mentioned February 2020 report published on the website Persecutionofahmadis.org which is no longer accessible. According to the data, 29 Ahmadi mosques were destroyed between 1984 and 1 December 2019, 25 mosques set on fire or damaged and 17 illegally occupied (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, December 2020, p. 39). The anonymised author of the report published by CREID in December 2020 provides the following information based on the report published in February 2020 on Persecutionofahmadis.org:

> "[…] 393 [Ahmadis] were assaulted for their faith, there were 70 instances of Ahmadis denied burial in a common cemetery, 39 Ahmadi bodies were exhumed, and there were 44 incidents of removing Kalima (the formal content of declaration of the Islamic faith)

from Ahmadi homes and shops and on 103 occasions Kalima were removed from Ahmadi mosques." (CREID, December 2020a, p. 9)

APPG in its July 2020 report provides the following information:

> "The APPG Inquiry heard that Ahmadi Muslims are denied the right to rest in peace after death. Ahmadi families are routinely barred by local extremist clerics from burying their loved ones at the local cemetery. As a result, many families are forced to travel long distances to put their loved ones to rest. There have also been reports of deceased bodies being exhumed — sometimes under police orders — from their graves on grounds that the burial was in a 'Muslim' graveyard. A number of reports also suggest that the police actively assist extremist clerics in destroying Ahmadi gravestones." (APPG, July 2020, p. 40)

Qantara in the above-mentioned July 2020 article mentions that "[m]any shops and bazaars publicly display posters with the words 'Qadianis keep out' or 'Qadianis should first enter Islam, and then my shop'." The article adds that "[t]here are warnings against 'qadiani' products such as the popular Shezan mango juice, as though mango juices also follow a religion." (Qantara, 10 July 2020). The report published by CREID in December 2020 states:

> "Anti-Ahmadiyya stickers, posters, banners, and wall chalking can be seen everywhere in Pakistan. Hate slogans are displayed in all public places, including bus terminals, railway stations, small and big markets, grocery shops, cloth shops, and restaurants. Sadly, anti-Ahmadiyya stickers are also sold and displayed in various bookstores. Some anti-Ahmadiyya slogans are 'Qadiani [a derogatory term for AM] are not allowed to enter', 'No business with Qadianis', 'First enter Islam then enter the shop', 'A smile to a Qadiani hurts Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) in heavens'." (CREID, December 2020a, p. 64)

With regard to anti-Ahmadi rhetoric USDOS notes in June 2020

> "Throughout the year, Islamic organizations with varying degrees of political affiliation held conferences and rallies to support the doctrine of Khatm-e-Nabuwat [Finality of Prophethood]. The events were often covered by English and vernacular media and featured anti-Ahmadiyya rhetoric, including language that could incite violence against Ahmadis." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III)

APPG explains on the Khatm-e-Nabuwat:

> "This inquiry noted that one of the main organisations that has been at the forefront of the anti-Ahmadi hatred and violence is Khatme Nabuwwat. It was founded to explicitly target the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community to eradicate it from Pakistan. It promotes the view that Ahmadis should be given the death sentence if they do not leave their faith. It is named after its claim to promote the concept of 'Finality of Prophethood' which it takes to mean that no prophet can appear after the Holy Prophet of Islam, even if such a prophet claimed to revive the teachings of Islam. The organisation is also known by other names in Pakistan including Majlise Tahaffuz Khatme Nabuwwat (meaning 'The Group for the Protection of the Finality of Prophethood') and Alami Majlis Tahaffuz Khatme Nabuwwat (meaning 'The International Group for the Protection of the Finality of Prophethood'). While these names in Pakistan may seem harmless, the disturbing fact is that this organisation seeks to enforce

> its ideology through violence and hate. It has been courted by politicians over decades due to its street power to rouse mobs. It has also led many campaigns against the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community through rallies, adverts, call for boycotts and it routinely preaches the call for Ahmadis to be killed, having labelled them Wajib-ul-Qatl (liable to be killed)." (APPG, July 2020, p. 61)

On anti-Ahmadi rhetoric in the media the USDOS June 2020 report contains the following information:

> "Print and broadcast media outlets continued to occasionally publish and broadcast anti-Ahmadi rhetoric. […]. Ahmadiyya Muslim community representatives stated that the Urdu-language press frequently printed hate speech in news stories and op-eds, estimating nearly 3,000 instances of hate speech were printed during the year, some of which could be considered inciting anti-Ahmadi violence. Inflammatory anti-Ahmadi rhetoric continued to exist on social media." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

Concerning anti-Ahmadi rhetoric in the field of education USDOS states in its June 2020 report:

> "Ahmadiyya community representatives said local associations of clerics frequently distributed anti-Ahmadi stickers to school districts to place on textbooks, and the school boards usually accepted them. These stickers contained phrases such as, 'It is strictly prohibited in Sharia to speak to or do any business with Qadianis,' 'The first sign of love of the Prophet is total boycott of Qadianis,' and 'If your teacher is a Qadiani, refuse learning from him.' […] Also in Peshawar, the children of one Ahmadi family were expelled from a private school for their faith." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III)

APPG writes in its July 2020 report that "[y]oung Ahmadi Muslims face a constant risk of being denied access to education and those who secure a place are routinely targeted and stigmatised through physical and emotional abuse at the hands of teachers and fellow pupils" (APPG, July 2020, p. 49). DFAT writes in February 2019 that "[n]on-Ahmadi parents discriminate against Ahmadi teachers and pupils in schools" (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 41)

Regarding societal discrimination in employment the USDOS June 2020 report states:

> "In Toba Tek Singh District, Punjab Province, local residents organized a khatm-e-nabuwat procession, forced a young Ahmadi man to abandon his job and leave the town, and attacked the home of a recent convert to Ahmadiyya Islam. According to media reports, in August the Islamabad Bar Association made membership for anyone identifying as Muslim contingent on swearing an oath to the finality of prophethood." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III)

According to DFAT "Ahmadis claim to face significant employment discrimination." The report published in February 2019 adds that "[m]ost Ahmadis do not declare their religion in the workplace, as those discovered face hostility and discrimination, including dismissal." (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 41)

4.1.4 State protection

For general information on state protection, please refer to section 3.3 of this compilation.

AI, HRW and ICJ in a November 2020 article report on an increase in targeted killings of Ahmadis, adding that "[i]n] only two of the cases have the police taken a suspect into custody". The article goes on to say that "Pakistani authorities have long downplayed, and at times even encouraged, violence against Ahmadis". The article also cites Omar Waraich, head of South Asia at Amnesty International, as saying: "The recent wave of killings tragically underscores not just the seriousness of the threats they face, but also the callous indifference of the authorities, who have failed to protect the community or punish the perpetrators" (AI/HRW/ICJ, 26 November 2020). HRW writes in a May 2020 article that "[i]n several instances, the police […] stood by in the face of anti-Ahmadi violence" (HRW, 8 May 2020; AI/HRW/ICJ, 26 November 2020). USDOS notes in its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 that "[c]ivil society members also reported authorities took no action to prevent attacks on Ahmadi mosques or punish assailants who demolished, damaged, forcibly occupied, or set on fire Ahmadi mosques" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The Diplomat notes in a March 2020 article that "Ahmadiyya places of worships remained under attack" and refers to an example in February 2020 when "a group of people stormed and forcibly occupied a 100-year-old Ahmadiyya mosque in Kasur, Punjab. Succumbing to pressure, the local authorities deprived Ahmadis and handed the mosque over to hardliners" (The Diplomat, 16 March 2020).

Concerning the safety of Ahmadis in prisons, representatives of the community claimed according to the USDOS March 2020 report that prison inmates often subjected them to abuse and violence (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 1c).

The USDOS report also states that "[a]ccording to Ahmadi civil society organizations, the government failed to restrict advertisements or speeches inciting anti-Ahmadi violence, despite this responsibility being a component of the NAP [National Action Plan]" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, executive summary). Qantara mentions in the above-mentioned July 2020 article that "[d]aily calls issued by scholars such as 'qadiani wajib ul qatal hen' (the Qadianis must be punished by death) pass by without any legal action (Qantara, 10 July 2020). HRCP notes in its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 that "the Ahmadiyya community is frequently targeted in the mainstream media by the Muslim majority - often involving those holding public offices - without any fear of consequences" (HRCP, June 2020, p. 4).
USDOS in June 2020 provides the following information on anti-Ahmadi rhetoric and the government response:

> "On November 9, PTI [Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf] politician and former minister for science and technology Azam Swati said in a live talk show broadcast that he and PM Khan both 'sent curses' upon Ahmadis, responding to Islamist politicians' accusations that PM Khan was sympathetic to the Amhadiyya community. Ministry of Human Rights officials stated the government ordered PEMRA [Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority] to monitor television broadcasts and take action against any broadcaster airing hate speech against Ahmadis." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

The same report further describes the following incident involving the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Syed Zulfiqar Bukhari:

> "Government officials and politicians attended and spoke at multiple Khatm-e-Nabuwat (Finality of Prophethood) conferences held in major cities and at religious sites around the country. These conferences were organized by groups saying they were defending the teaching that the Prophet Muhammad is the last prophet but were often characterized by hate speech against Ahmadi Muslims. On January 6, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Syed Zulfiqar Bukhari spoke at a Khatm-e-Nabuwat conference hosted by the Golra Sharif Shrine in Islamabad. According to media reports, Bukhari said that Pakistan would be the first to counter any propaganda against the finality of prophethood and that anyone working against the theological conviction 'is not a human.' Bukhari later denied making anti-Ahmadi statements and tweeted on March 26, 'Pakistan belongs to ALL Pakistanis.'" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

The HRCP in its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 also provides information on an incident involving Assistant Commissioner of Attock, Jannat Hussain Nekokara:

> "In December 2019, Attock Assistant Commissioner Jannat Hussain Nekokara, while delivering a speech at an event marking the International Human Rights Day, called for promoting unity by ending internal differences, and named the prominent sects of Islam along with the Ahmadiyyas to highlight the various kinds of divisions that exist in society. A few hours later, a group of protesters, mostly students, gathered outside the district administration office chanting slogans against her for the 'pro-Ahmadi' statement. Instead of defending one of their own and letting the law deal with agitators, the district administration, led by the deputy commissioner, welcomed the students so Nekokara could 'clarify' her stance directly. A video of Nekokara being verbally assaulted and forced to apologise for her comments went viral on social media. In the video, one of her own colleagues seeks an explanation from Nekokara, saying that since she mentioned Ahmadis alongside Shias and Sunnis it appears that she equated them as an Islamic sect and should thus clarify her stance. Repeatedly denying the charges in front of the raging students, who could not grasp the concept of any kind of unity with Ahmadis citing their status in the Constitution as 'enemies' and not just non-Muslims, the video concludes with the assistant commissioner declaring that 'Qadiyanis are Kafirs' (Ahmadis are infidels)" (HRCP, June 2020, p. 8)

As mentioned above, MRG in a May 2020 statement expresses its concern over an anti-Ahmadi social media campaign which began after reports spread that the government would include Ahmadis in its proposed National Commission for Minorities (NCM). According to MRG, "the material which is of gravest concern is a tweet made by the State Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Mr. Ali Muhammad Khan in the late evening of 29 April 2020. The tweet endorses beheading as an acceptable form of punishment for blasphemers". MRG states that it is completely clear from the context that the minister was referring to Ahmadis and his tweet incites violence against persons based on their beliefs or faith (MRG, 1 May 2020).

Qantara in July 2020 provides the following information on pressure exerted on the government in connection with the establishment of the NCM:

> "The government recently tasked the Ministry of Religious Affairs with the job of setting up a forum along similar lines, whereupon the Minister for Religious Affairs presented the cabinet with a panel with representatives of all religious minorities – apart from Ahmadi Muslims. When several cabinet members voiced their displeasure at this omission and demanded that the Ahmadis be assigned representation on the panel, it triggered fierce controversy. Islamist parties, politicians, scholars, government ministers and members of the public unleashed their anger and hatred over the participation of 'qadianis' – a pejorative term for Ahmadis – in a government body. Calls for murder and boycotts circulated on social media and the hashtags 'qadianis the world's worst infidels' and 'qadianis the worst traitors' were trending for several days. In a television interview a few days later, the Minister for Religious Affairs Noor-ul-Haq Qadri said: 'Anyone showing sympathy or compassion for qadianis cannot be loyal to Islam and Pakistan.' Khan's government caved in under the pressure and categorically ruled out any Ahmadi participation in the commission, remarking that the Ahmadiyya question was a 'religiously and historically sensitive' matter." (Qantara, 10 July 2020)

4.2 Baha'is

For general information on the treatment of religious minorities by state actors, please refer to section 3.1 and section 3.2 of this compilation. For general information on state protection, please refer to section 3.3 of this compilation.

Sources on Baha'is in Pakistan are scarce. Encyclopaedia Britannica describes the Baha'i faith as follows:

> "Bahāʾī Faith, religion founded in Iraq in the mid-19th century by Mīrzā Ḥosayn ʿAlī Nūrī, who is known as Bahāʾ Allāh (Arabic: 'Glory of God'). The cornerstone of Bahāʾī belief is the conviction that Bahāʾ Allāh and his forerunner, who was known as the Bāb (Persian: 'Gateway'), were manifestations of God, who in his essence is unknowable." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 19 November 2020)

According to the Constitution, Baha'is belong to the non-Muslims (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, April 1973, as amended on 31 May 2018, Article 260).

In its May 2018 human rights report covering 2017, USDOS mentions that according to the results of a census conducted in 1998, 95 per cent of the population (207.8 million according to the 2017 census (ÖAW, June 2019, p. 4)) is Muslim, Baha'is belong to the remaining five per cent. The report further refers to media sources, according to which government registration documents in 2014 showed that there are approximately 34,000 Baha'is in the country (USDOS, 29 May 2018, section I). The South Asia Collective in a report on the situation of minorities in 2019 mentions that according to statistics, as recorded by the National Identity Card (NIC) registrations, there are 33,000 followers of the Baha'i faith in Pakistan (The South Asia Collective, 2020, p. xli; see also The Express Tribune, 1 September 2012). A report by the EU Election Observation Mission(EU EOM) published in October 2018 mentions in a footnote that

"Sikh and Bahai communities, living mainly in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, are said to each number 30,000." (EU EOM, 26 October 2018, p. 39, footnote 188). A July 2018 TNS article quotes a senior Bahai community member as saying that the Baha'i population of Pakistan is between 3,000 and 4,000 (TNS, 22 July 2018). According to the USDOS June 2020 report the Baha'i World Centre, the spiritual and administrative centre of the community, is located in Haifa (Israel) (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II).

The Lahore-based Centre for Law and Justice (CLJ) in 2020 published a study on religious minorities in Pakistan conducted by journalist, researcher and Christian advocate Asif Aqeel. The report gives the following short introduction to the Baha'is in Pakistan:

> "The Baha'i faith has no clergy. They have a solar calendar of 19 months with 19 days. They do not have any worship place in Pakistan but only community centres where they meet and train their youth on morality and ethics. Baha'is believe 'that spiritual life goes hand in hand with the practical life'. They see socioeconomic development projects as 'an expression of faith in action'. They integrate 'spiritual principles into community development … promote self-reliance and safeguard human dignity. In this way, patterns of dependency are avoided and conditions of inequality are progressively eliminated.'
>
> Baha'is in Pakistan do not come from any particular ethnicity or caste. Several young Baha'is work in high positions in government and private sector. They do not participate in politics or look for employment in the armed forces. They do not have their personal laws." (CLJ, 2020, pp. 47-48)

The study by Asif Aqeel which was conducted mainly in Lahore asked 100 representatives of several religious communities, among them six Baha'is, on different topics. Based on their answers the report notes that the Baha'is live in urban and rural areas, most of them do not live in specific neighbourhoods (CLJ, 2020, p. 56). They are "not looking to build new worship places" (CLJ, 2020, p. 58) and do not have their own institutions (CLJ, 2020, p. 59). The English-language Pakistani newspaper Daily Times mentions in a May 2020 article that "[a]fter opening of Kartarpur Corridor for Sikh pilgrims of India, the Bahai community members in Pakistan were also hoping for easy access to their religious centre in New Delhi, Mashriqul Azkar[13], but it did not happen" The article goes on to say that "now the Bahai community has decided to establish Mashriqul Azkar for them in Pakistan and land for this purpose has also been purchased." The article further notes that "[t]he centre will be set up in Islamabad with donations of the community members" (Daily Times, 12 May 2020).

The CLJ 2020 report further states that Baha'i respondents said they can freely publish their religious literature and have access to their scriptures (CLJ, 2020, p. 70). The Baha'i respondents explained that "they preferred business even if they become doctors or engineers, which is why

[13] According to Encyclopaedia Britannica mashriq al-adhkār is a "temple or house of worship in the Bahāʾī faith" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 2 July 2015). In New Delhi there is a mashriq al-adhkār called Lotus Temple. In the early 21st century it was one of only nine mashriqs in the world. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 3 June 2020)

they had smaller numbers in government services" (CLJ, 2020, p. 76). They stated that they "desire to have their personal laws but so far, no development has been made on this front" (CLJ, 2020, p. 83). They further mentioned that a pilgrimage to Israel is not possible for them, since Pakistan does not have diplomatic relations with Israel (CLJ, 2020, p. 72; see also USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II).

The CLJ 2020 report goes on to state that according to the six Baha'i respondents, there have been no attacks on their places of worship (CLJ, 2020, p. 60) and they have not suffered from terrorism (CLJ, 2020, p. 62). The Baha'is further stated that there have been no forced conversions of their women (CLJ, 2020, p. 64) and between 1987 and 2017 no case was filed under the blasphemy laws against Baha'is (CLJ, 2020, p. 72). They further stated that Baha'is do not face caste-based name calling, are neither associated with a menial or degrading occupation nor with certain facial features or a skin colour (CLJ, 2020, p. 80). They further added that they never faced any social media bashing" (CLJ, 2020, p. 86).

4.3 Christians

MRG notes that according to the 1998 Census, Christians constitute around 1.6 per cent of the total population, but that the exact number is unknown. Estimates range from less than 2 million to up to 3 million (MRG, updated June 2018h). According to the Christian support group, Open Doors, there are more than 4 million Christians living in Pakistan (Open Doors, undated). CSW notes in December 2019 that "[a]ccording to the census conducted in 2018 there are under four million Christians in Pakistan, comprising around 1.6% of the population" (CSW, December 2019, p. 19). Relying on provisional 2017 census data, the RFI states that Christians constitute around 1.3 per cent of the total Pakistani population, a significant decline compared to the 1.6 per cent of the 1998 census (RFI, 2020, p. 16).

The UK Home Office in a February 2021 report on Christians and Christian converts in Pakistan cites a letter from the British High Commission (BHC) in Islamabad to the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT) drafted in December 2013 and updated in February 2021. According to the information provided "[t]he 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." (UK Home Office, February 2021, p. 52). However, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken) in a December 2020 thematic report on the situation of Ahmadis and Christians (covering March 2017 to September 2020) states based on various sources that the proportions of the various denominations constituting the overall Christian minority are unclear with sources giving widely varying percentages. Open Doors reports that 26.5%, of the Christian population are Catholics and 61.2% are Protestants. The Protestants belong to the Church of Pakistan, an umbrella group consisting of Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans and Presbyterians. There are virtually no Orthodox Christians. Other sources report that there are about as many Catholics as Protestants, with the latter divided into 25% belonging to the Church of Pakistan, 10-15% to the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, and the rest belonging to numerous very small denominations and house churches. (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, December 2020, p. 10).

Referring to the location of Christians in Pakistan MRG notes that "[t]here are Christian communities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, including around 70,000 in Peshawar, but the bulk of Pakistani Christians live in Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad and numerous small communities in Punjab" (MRG, updated June 2018h). UK Home Office provides the following information on the same topic based on various sources :

> "The WCC [World Council of Churches] noted there were 8 dioceses in the Church of Pakistan: Faisalabad, Hyderabad, Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar, Raiwind and Sialkot. 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 Quetta. […]
>
> A 2019 report by the CLJ [Centre for Law and Justice] indicated the population of Lahore city was over 11 million and that Christians accounted for around 5% (550,000) of the population. In 2021, an official at the British High Commission (BHC), Islamabad, noted that the majority of Christians resided in Punjab – the 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). […]
>
> The largest Christian neighbourhood in Pakistan was reported to be the Lahore district of Youhanabad." (UK Home Office, February 2021, pp. 17-18)

The above-mentioned December 2020 study published by the Lahore-based Centre for Law and Justice (CLJ) provides the following information on the background of the Christian community:

> "The Pakistani Christian community is a mosaic of Goans, Anglo-Indians, westerns, 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 did not succeed. The success mainly came among an untouchable tribe of Scheduled Caste Hindus, then called in missionary reports and census as 'Churha' (now a pejorative term). These people en masse converted to Christianity in Sialkot, Gujranwala, Narowal, Sheikhupura and Kasur from 1870s to 1920." (CLJ, 2020, p. 43; see also CSW, December 2019, p. 19)

CSW notes in May 2020 that "[a] large proportion of the Christian community comes from lower socio-economic backgrounds, is poorly educated, and takes up low-paid manual labour such as in brick kilns or the sanitation sector." (CSW, May 2020, p. 1; see also RFI, 2020, p. 25)

4.3.1 Legal framework

The UK Home Office in its February 2021 report on Christians and Christian converts in Pakistan notes that "[t]here 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." (UK Home Office, February 2021, p. 21)

For information on laws governing Christian marriages, please refer also to section 2.4 of this compilation.

4.3.2 Treatment by state actors

For general information on the treatment of religious minorities by state actors, please refer to section 3.1 and section 3.2 of this compilation.

USDOS states in its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 that of the 84 persons imprisoned for blasphemy, 31 were Christian. The same source adds that since 2001 there were 16 convictions of Christians on blasphemy charges (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). CSW states in its December 2019 report that according to figures from the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) 229 Christians were accused under various provisions of offences related to religion between 1987 and 2018 (CSW, December 2019, p. 13). CSJ examined data of 1,572 people accused of having committed blasphemy in the period 1987 to 2018 in Pakistan, 253 of whom were Christians (CSJ, December 2019, p. 29). The Diplomat in March 2020 published an article by researcher and columnist Jaffer A. Mirza, according to whom nine blasphemy cases were filed against Christians since August 2018 (The Diplomat, 16 March 2020). The Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre Landinfo writes in the summary of a Norwegian report on Christians in Pakistan that "[o]n average per year, fewer than ten cases involving Christians are prosecuted under the country's blasphemy laws" (Landinfo, 19 February 2020, p. 4). International Christian Concern (ICC), a Christian advocacy organisation based in Washington, DC, notes in a March 2021 article that ICC "has documented an alarming rise in blasphemy accusations against Pakistan's Christian community", stating that at least 9 Christians have been accused of committing blasphemy between December 2020 and February 2021. The article further cites information provided by the Center for Social Justice (CSJ), according to which at least 200 people were accused of committing blasphemy in 2020, among them 3.5 per cent Christians (ICC, 4 March 2021).

UK Home Office in February 2021 reports on the case of a Christian man who was sentenced to death by a Lahore court in September 2020. He had been in custody since his conviction for blasphemy in 2013 (UK Home Office, February 2021, p. 34; see also CSW, 10 September 2020). AI in March 2021 reports on the case of a Christian couple on death row for blasphemy after being convicted and sentenced to death in April 2014. According to AI "[t]heir appeal was due to be heard in April 2020 […], but it was postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak." AI adds that "[a]t their last two hearings in 2021, the judges left the court as they were due to hear the appeal against their death sentences, citing court hours having concluded for the day." (AI, 4 March 2021, p. 1)

Referring to police mistreatment of and discrimination against Christians, USDOS notes in June 2020:

> "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. According to multiple media reports, police in Lahore arrested Masih after he was accused of theft and held him for four days before notifying his family to pick him up. Closed-circuit television showed policemen bringing Masih out of the hospital in a wheelchair, and he died a few hours later. Media reported that a post-mortem examination found signs of torture, including burn

> marks and broken ribs. According to some media reports, Masih's brother said that one of the policemen made derogatory comments about Christians, including, 'I know how to deal with these infidels.' The Punjab Inspector General of Police removed the investigation officer and arrested five others, but there were no further reports of investigation or prosecution of the officers involved. 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; some police agencies took steps to curb abuses by incorporating human rights curricula in training programs." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also CSW, 16 September 2019)

In its June 2020 report USDOS mentions that according to members of religious minority communities, official discrimination against Christians persisted (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The report further notes the following referring to discrimination in government employment:

> "Minority rights activists said most government employment advertisements for janitorial staff still listed being non-Muslim as a requirement. Minority rights activists criticized these advertisements as discriminatory and insulting. In June civil rights activists from many faiths raised concerns over a Pakistan Army advertisement specifying only Christians could apply for the job of sanitation worker in the army's Mujahid Force. On June 28, the director-general of the military's Inter-Services Public Relations Agency responded that the advertisement had been reposted with no discriminatory qualifications." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also NYT, 4 May 2020)

CSW in December 2019 provides similar information on this topic:

> "Christians are severely inhibited in employment particularly by the government itself, which advertises for jobs in the sanitation sector which explicitly request non-Muslim applicants. A number of provincial advertisements specifically advertise for Christian or non-Muslim sanitation workers. Civil society has consistently raised this issue with the Punjab government, and CSW has come to learn that the government service rules, namely the Punjab Health Department, Miscellaneous Posts Service Rules 2003, state that 'only non-Muslims/persons who belong to minorities will be accommodated'. The government of Punjab issued a notification in November 2015 that the rules needed to be amended due to their discriminatory nature and violation of Article 27 of the Constitution. The former government was slow to make any amendments. The issue has been raised with the present Federal Minister for Human Rights, Dr Shireen Mazari, who agreed to look into the specific adverts; but so far no action has been taken." (CSW, December 2019, p. 20)

USDOS in June 2020 further notes that Christians, according to some community representatives, 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" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). In a July 2019 query response IRB states that "[s]ources indicate that the Supreme Court issued a decision in January 2019 ordering Union Councils across the country to register Christian marriages […], and that prior to the decision, Christian marriages were 'only' registered by churches […] or 'solemnised' by clergy […]" (IRB, 17 July 2019). Dawn in December 2020

published an article citing Ali Nawaz Awan, the Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Capital Development Authority Affairs, according to which the union councils in Islamabad will start registering marriages of religious minorities. The article notes:

> "Talking to Dawn, Mr Awan, who is also MNA [member of the National Assembly] from Islamabad, said religious minorities in Islamabad had been facing issues as their marriages were not registered in union councils due to which they could not prepare family trees. He said earlier there was no mechanism to issue marriage and divorce certificates and this issue has been creating problems particularly for the Christian community. The arbitration council under the capital administration is functioning in accordance with Muslim Family Law 1961, which only deals with arbitration and registration of Nikah and divorce of Muslims. He said tens of thousands of people belonging to the religious minorities, mostly Christians, live in various slums, sectors and rural area of the capital and they had been facing issues related to their documentations. […] Asked when the union councils would start registration of marriages of minorities, the SAPM [Special Assistant to Prime Minister] said: 'The issue is resolved. The notification has been issued and after publishing registers the UCs [union councils] will start registering the marriages. I will ensure that they start the process after 15 days,' he said. In the absence of any mechanism, Christian couples were required to register their marriages with the marriage registrar appointed under the Christian Marriage Act 1872. Hence, different marriage registrars had been appointed in churches of Islamabad." (Dawn, 19 December 2020)

The USDOS June 2020 report also contains information on consultations held with representatives of religious minorities in a review of textbooks for derogatory material. According to USDOS, "[s]ome minority faith representatives said their inclusion in the review process was minimal, however, and stated they feared problematic content would remain in curricula" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The report further notes:

> "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." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

Agenzia Fides in an August 2020 quotes Sabir Michael, "a Catholic, former president of the 'Research Advocacy and Social Training Institute' in Karachi, lecturer committed to human rights and the protection of religious minorities". According to him, "there is a lot of work to be done to remove the hateful narrative present in the textbooks used in Pakistani schools: they inculcate hatred and contempt in the minds of children, defining Hindus and Christians as infidels". He adds that "[t]hese books also teach that Christians are 'agents of the Western world' and Hindus are 'spies for India'"(Agenzia Fides, 25 August 2020).

4.3.3 Treatment by non-state actors

USDOS mentions in June 2020 that societal abuses of religious freedom in 2019 included violence against Christians (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III). Agenzia Fides reports in June 2020 that violence against Christian continues to cause concern in Pakistan, adding that most

violence against Christians occurs in Punjab (Agenzia Fides, 1 June 2020). CSW explains in May 2020 that "Christians are perceived to be sympathetic to the 'West' and are targeted by Islamist groups as a result" (CSW, May 2020, p. 1). According to USDOS, "[i]n a change from previous years, there were no reports of Christians being targeted by armed sectarian groups during the year [2019]" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The CRSS Annual Security Report 2020 published in February 2021 notes that two Christians were killed in the reporting period, both in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (excluding ex-FATA). The report further mentions that three Christians were injured in 2020, all of them in Punjab (CRSS, 10 February 2021, pp. 28-30)

Considering attacks on Christian churches and cemeteries, an article by researcher and columnist Jaffer A. Mirza, published by The Diplomat in March 2020, states that there has been at least one attack on a Christian church since August 2018 (The Diplomat, 16 March 2020). USDOS in June 2020 mentions a case in which unknown individuals vandalised a Christian cemetery in Punjab in May 2019 (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III). Agenzia Fides in June 2020 reports on an attack on a Christian cemetery in Punjab. (Agenzia Fides, 1 June 2020)

Referring to blasphemy cases, Landinfo notes in February 2020 that "[c]riminal provisions, particularly the blasphemy sections of the Penal Code, are used by militant organizations and/or members of the Sunni majority against Christians, often to settle land and business disputes" (Landinfo, 19 February 2020, p. 4). The UK Home Office in a February 2021 report on Christians and Christian converts in Pakistan cites a letter from the British High Commission (BHC) in Islamabad to the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT) drafted in December 2013 and updated in February 2021. The letter provides the following information on blasphemy cases against Christians:

> "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 […]" (UK Home Office, February 2021, p. 53)

A March 2020 article by The Diplomat provides information on the following examples of misuse of blasphemy laws in cases involving Christians:

> "In Bahawalnagar, Punjab, a 19-year-old boy named Sunny Waqas was accused of committing blasphemy and possessing 'blasphemous' material about the Prophet Muhammad. In June 2019 he was booked for violating the blasphemy law (formally, article 295-C of the Pakistani Penal Code). However, his family claimed that Waqas had had a quarrel with Muslim friends during a cricket match. Nouman Asghar Masif, who happens to be Sunny Waqas' cousin, was also booked under 295-C in August 2019 in Bahawalpur for showing 'blasphemous' pictures to his friend on his phone.
>
> In March 2019, a 42-year-old Christian, Stephen Masih, was booked for making 'derogatory' remarks against the Prophet Muhammad. His nephew later revealed that Stephen has been mentally disabled since birth and insists he was wrongly accused.

> Saleem Masih, a resident of Shanti Nagar, Punjab, was booked under false blasphemy charges on June 14, 2019. According to a news report, a group of people pushed the blasphemy accusation as an excuse to seize land that belonged to Masih. Not just Masih, his family was being accused of the blasphemy charges." (The Diplomat, 16 March 2020)

Sources report on violence, including mob violence in connection with blasphemy charges against Christians. USCIRF in its April 2020 report mentions the following case:

> "A mob also attacked a Christian community in Punjab after a mosque claimed over its loudspeaker that the community had insulted Islam. In another incident, nearly 200 Christian families in Karachi were forced to flee their homes due to mob attacks after false blasphemy accusations against four Christian women." (USCIRF, 13 April 2020, p. 32; see also HRCP, 2020, p. 47)

The Diplomat in the above-mentioned March 2020 article provides details on the following examples:

> "Pakistan Christian Post reported that in May 2019, a 35-year-old Christian rickshaw driver, Sagheer Masih, was mugged and forced to drink poison. He later died. In another incident, a mob attacked a local church in Sheikhupura, Punjab, during prayer services. […]
>
> On February 25, 2020, a 22-year-old Christian laborer, Saleem Masih, was beaten and tortured in Chunian, Kasur District, Punjab, for 'polluting' a tube-well. Masih died on February 28 in a hospital in Lahore. According to Pakistan Today, after finishing his work, Masih was bathing in a tube-well when some local Muslims dragged him out and started beating him with an iron rod. The local police stood by as spectators when Masih was being abused and cursed for being 'filthy' and 'polluting' the tube-well." (The Diplomat, 16 March 2020)

ICC in the above-mentioned article reports on the following examples:

> "On December 14, 2020, Arshad Masih, a 32-year-old Christian, was stabbed to death by Atif Ali, his Muslim coworker in Sheikhupura. Masih's wife reported that Ali murdered her husband due to a promotion Masih received and his refusal to convert to Islam. When police arrested Ali, he claimed that he killed Masih because he had blasphemed. When he was arrested, Ali asked the arresting officers if he could wash his hands as 'he did not want the blood of a blasphemer on his hands anymore.'
>
> On December 27, 2020, Pastor Raja Waris was arrested for committing blasphemy in Lahore. Pastor Waris was accused of posting an insulting image against Islam to social media. Hundreds of Christian families were forced to flee from their homes after a mob threatened to set fire to the Christian neighborhood where Pastor Waris resided.
>
> On January 28, 2021, Tabitha Nazir Gill, a Christian nurse, was falsely accused of committing blasphemy while working at a hospital in Karachi. According to a local ICC source, the head nurse at Sobhraj Maternity Hospital issued orders that medical staff may not receive tips or deal with patients' money. Gill reportedly reminded a Muslim coworker of these orders when she saw the coworker collect money from a patient.

> In response, the Muslim coworker falsely accused Gill of committing blasphemy and incited violence against her colleague. Videos of hospital staff beating Gill surfaced on social media, and Gill was reportedly tied up with ropes, tortured, and locked in a room before being taken into police custody.
>
> Police released Gill, handing her over to her family after a short investigation did not find any evidence that Gill had committed blasphemy. Gill and her family have since moved to an unknown location, fearing vigilante violence.
>
> On February 3, 2021, a Christian tutor was accused of committing blasphemy against Islam in Quetta. The Christian tutor was accused after she refused to remove Christian images from her house, where mostly Muslim students were attending tutoring sessions. The tutor fled to another part of the country after a mob began making threats against her." (ICC, 4 March 2021)

On the topic of discrimination against Christians, CSW explains that it is deeply rooted and historic. The same source goes on to explain: "The legacy of the caste system means that Christians continue to face endemic discrimination and are often perceived as unclean by the Muslim majority, who describe them using derogatory terms such as 'chura' or 'kafir,' which means infidel" (CSW, May 2020, p. 1). DFAT notes in February 2019 that "[…] Christians are the most economically vulnerable group in Pakistan and face significant social prejudice and class discrimination" (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 42). USDOS also mentions in June 2020 that societal abuses of religious freedom in 2019 included discrimination against Christians (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III). The same source further refers discrimination against Christians in private employment providing the following information:

> "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." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III)

When it comes to the situation of Christian women and girls, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in its March 2020 concluding observations notes with concern the "persistence of discriminatory stereotypes" faced by Christian women and girls, among others, who are sometimes abducted and forcibly converted (CEDAW, 10 March 2020, p. 13). Sources report that forced conversions of Christians and members of other religious minority groups continue to be an issue (USDOS, 10 June 2020, executive summary; USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32). Some sources speak of an estimated 700 Christian girls and women falling victim to forced conversions to Islam each year (Dawn, 8 April

2014), but these numbers are disputed (see section 3.3.6 of this compilation). The Pakistani NGO Centre for Social Justice together with the Peoples Commission for Minorities' Rights was able to compile data of 162 forced conversions during the period of 2013 to 2019 (CSJ, presumably 2020, p. 6). Referring to CSJ data, Dawn in a November 2020 article writes that 44.4 per cent of the girls and women who were allegedly victims of forced conversions belonged to the Christian community (Dawn, 29 November 2020). CSW states in May 2020 that "[c]ases of abduction, forced marriage and forced conversion of Christian and Hindu girls has […] increased in recent years, particularly in Punjab and Sindh" (CSW, May 2020, p. 1; see also Agenzia Fides, 25 August 2020).
USDOS in its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 provides the following information on forced conversions of Christian women and girls:

> "Christian activists […] stated young women from their communities were vulnerable to forced conversions. CLAAS reported at least 15 young Christian women were kidnapped and forcibly converted during the year. Of these cases, three women were returned to their families by orders of the court." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III)

The report goes on to provide details on the case of a 14-year-old Christian girl who was harassed on her way to school by a Muslim man. She withdrew from school, but was kidnapped by the man, forcibly married and converted. According to USDOS, "Christian activists reported that this case and others affected entire communities, because many young women withdrew from school as a result" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III).

The USDOS June 2020 report further provides information on young Christian and Hindu women being abducted and raped by Muslim men:

> "Civil society activists and media reported young Christian and Hindu women being abducted and raped by Muslim men. Victims said their attackers singled them out as vulnerable due to their religious minority identity. […] CLAAS [Center for Legal Aid, Assistance, and Settlement] reported numerous cases of rapes of Christian women […]" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III)

Concerning the situation of Christians during the Covid-19 pandemic, USCIRF in April 2020 expresses concern over reports that food aid was denied to Christians. USCIRF notes:

> "In Karachi, for example, there have been reports that the Saylani Welfare International Trust, a non-government organization established to assist the homeless and seasonal workers, has been refusing food assistance to Hindus and Christians, arguing that the aid is reserved for Muslims alone." (USCIRF, 13 April 2020)

The Diplomat in an April 2020 article provides similar information:

> "In Pakistan, even during a global pandemic, discrimination on the basis of religion continues. From referring to the virus as 'the Shia virus' to requiring Christians to recite the kalima to receive aid to denying ration bags to the Hindu community in Lyari after seeing their national identity cards (CNIC) — these are only a few examples of faith-based discrimination in Pakistan, where so far more than 14,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported and over 300 deaths. […]

> In another incident involving the same organization, Christians were denied food rations. A video circulating on Facebook shows a Muslim man, named Adnan, informing a news reporter that Christians have been barred from receiving food in Karachi's Korangi area. According to a report, a cleric named Abid Qadri, who ostensibly heads SWT's [Saylani Welfare Trust] operation in Korangi, instructed workers to give rations to Muslims only. In another video, a Christian woman confirmed that an organization, which she didn't name, refused to give food to Christians until they recite the kalima, a declaration of Islamic faith.
>
> Chaudhry [executive director of the National Commission for Justice and Peace] confirmed that 'there have been reports of such incidents taking place where minorities, specifically Christians and Hindus, are facing discrimination. At most places where relief is being provided by private foundations and trusts or religious welfare organizations, they often do not give relief to non-Muslims, stating that this fund is from zakat [charitable donations as a religious duty in Islam] so thus only Muslims qualify for it.'
>
> A similar incident occurred in Sandha village in Kasur district of Punjab where an estimated 100 Christian families were denied food due to their religious identity. Later, however, a Muslim man arranged to distribute food among the community." (The Diplomat, 28 April 2020; see also Vatican News, 30 May 2020)

For detailed information on the situation of Christian converts, please refer to the following report:

- UK Home Office: Country Policy and Information Note Pakistan: Christians and Christian converts, February 2021
  https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2046017/Country_information_and_guidance_Christian_and_Christian_converts__Pakistan__February_2021.pdf

4.3.4 State protection

For general information on state protection, please refer to section 3.3 of this compilation.

CSW mentions in December 2019 that "[t]he government has repeatedly failed to bring to justice the perpetrators of violence on the Christian community, creating a culture of impunity which has led to an increase in attacks on minorities" (CSW, December 2019, p. 23). USDOS mentions in June 2020 that "[i]n May the Lahore High Court upheld the death sentences of three of the five men convicted of murder in the 2014 killings of Christian couple Shahzad Masih and Shama Bibi, but it overturned the convictions of two others" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). USDOS further notes that "[o]n February 20, police arrested LeJ [Lashkar-e-Jhangvi] members Furqan Bungalzai and Ali Akbar on charges of involvement in the February 16, 2017 Sehwan Shrine attack, which killed 82 and injured 383, and for targeted killings of Shia Hazaras and Christians in Balochistan." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

According to USDOS, in 2019 "courts overturned some blasphemy convictions upon appeal and acquitted others of their charges after the accused had spent years in prison." The report further mentions that the Christian labourer Pervaiz Masih was acquitted of blasphemy in

Punjab Province in January 2019 after a three-year trial (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). USDOS also provides the following details on the acquittal of Asia Bibi in January 2019:

> "On January 29, the Supreme Court upheld its 2018 acquittal of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. Bibi left the country on May 7; numerous sources stated that death threats from anti-blasphemy political party Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) and others made it unsafe for her and her family to remain. On November 13, an ATC [Anti-Terrorism Court] indicted TLP leader Khadim Hussein Rizvi, TLP's religious patron-in-chief Pir Afzal Qadri, and 24 others with sedition and terrorism. The formal charges came approximately one year after police took Rizvi and Qadri into custody for their roles in leading nationwide protests and calling for the assassination of public officials at the time of Bibi's acquittal. On May 15, the Lahore High Court ordered Rizvi and Qadri to be released on bail for health reasons, and they remained free at year's end." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also The Diplomat, 16 March 2020 and HRCP, June 2020, pp. 5-6)

UK Home Office in February 2021 reports on the case of 2 Christian men "acquitted by appeals courts in October 2020 and December 2020, though both had spent many years in prison (7 and 11 years respectively) under sentence of death and life imprisonment for blasphemy" (UK Home Office, February 2021, pp. 34-35). Al Jazeera in March 2021 provides information on the case of a Christian man granted bail in a blasphemy case after having been convicted in 2018 at the age of 16 (Al Jazeera, 2 March 2021).

USDOS in June 2020 report further provides information on a case in which police convinced clerics to drop charges of blasphemy against a Christian:

> "In another case, however, police in Yousafabad, Punjab Province on October 28 intervened and convinced clerics to drop charges of blasphemy against a Christian sanitation worker who found a bag containing pages from the Bible and the Quran. When he brought the pages to a Muslim shopkeeper to ascertain how to best handle the pages, the shopkeeper reportedly accused him of blasphemy and took him to a mosque, where the imam called for attacks on Christian homes." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

When looking at security measures for Christian places of worship, the USDOS June 2020 report notes:

> "Authorities also provided enhanced security for Christian and Hindu places of worship at various times throughout the year. After an attack on a mosque in New Zealand that killed 51 on March 15, 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." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

A June 2020 article by the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) on violence and other faith-based incidence contains similar information:

> "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." (PIPS, 16 June 2020, p. 1)

USDOS in its June 2020 report provides information on a case of conversion of a Christian girl and the state response in the case:

> "On September 4, Punjab police removed a 15-year-old Christian girl from a madrassah and took her to a women's shelter in Sheikhupura after her parents filed an abduction complaint with the Punjab Ministry of Human Rights and Minority Affairs. According to civil society and media reports, the girl's parents became alarmed when she did not come home from school and learned the school principal had taken her to a madrassah. After visiting three madrassahs, the parents found their daughter, but they were barred from bringing her home. The girl's principal reportedly told her she had automatically become a Muslim by reading Arabic and offered to financially compensate her parents if they would convert to Islam." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

The same source further notes that according to the Center for Legal Aid, Assistance, and Settlement (CLAAS) in 2019 at least 15 Christian women were kidnapped and forcibly converted and that three of these women were returned to their families by court orders. USDOS also provides information on the case of a 14-year-old Christian girl who was kidnapped, forcibly married and converted in February 2019 in Punjab Province, noting that by the end of the year 2019 no charges had been filed and the girl was believed to still be held by her abductor. (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III)

The December 2020 report by PIPS and FES provides the following details on the case of a 13-year-old Christian girl who was kidnapped, converted and married to her abductor:

> "In mid-October 2020, the reported kidnapping of 13-year-old Christian girl Arzo Raja, her conversion to Islam and marriage to her alleged abductor led to protests in many parts of the country by the minority communities and civil society. The family registered a kidnapping case at the local police station. On 15 October, the police summoned the family to the police station ad showed them marriage documents which claimed that Arzo was 18 and had willingly converted to Islam and married a 44-year-old man. There was much hue and cry that the court had overlooked that underage marriage was a crime under Pakistani law. On October 27, a bench of the Sindh High Court (SHC) had restrained police from making any arrest in connection with a case lodged against the 44-year-old man. On November 2, police recovered Arzo and placed her in a shelter home after an SHC division bench order to ensure recovery of the girl. Earlier the same day, the SHC division bench, on a petition filed by the Sindh government, sought clarification from the SHC single bench over the October 27." (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 49; see also IPS, 4 November 2020)

Agenzia Fides in the above-mentioned article on the case of a 17-year-old girl who was kidnapped in Rawalpindi states that the father accuses the police of "deliberately delaying the recovery of his daughter because he is a Christian" (Agenzia Fides, 28 January 2021).

The Guardian in the above-mentioned February 2021 article on the case of a 12-year-old Christian girl who was allegedly kidnapped and forced to marry her abductor provides the following details on the state response:

> "The family of a 12-year-old girl in Pakistan who was chained up in a cattle pen for more than six months, after allegedly being kidnapped and forced to marry her abductor, have attacked the authorities for refusing to act. The case is among those now being examined by a government inquiry into the forced conversions of religious minority women and girls, after police released the man, saying they believed the girl had married him of her own free will. The child was taken from her home in Faisalabad last June and had been held at the home of 29-year-old Khizer Hayat, where she was made to work clearing animal dung. Her family are angry that no further action has been taken against the man. Police investigators initially held Hayat but then released him, saying there was no evidence the girl had not consented to the marriage and that a medical report said she was 16. 'The case has been taken up by the parliamentary committee of human rights in the Senate of Pakistan and police are attending the committee's hearings. She confessed before the magistrate … that she married Khizer Hayat of her own free will and she wants to live with him,' said Musaddiq Riaz, a detective with Faisalabad police.
>
> The father of the girl – who is not being named to protect her identity – told the Guardian that the police had discovered his daughter at a house in Hafizabad, 110km (68 miles) from her home. 'They repeatedly raped my daughter. She was in trauma after being subjected to physical and mental torture. They had forcibly converted her to Islam. She was kept as a slave and forced to work having a chain attached to her ankles. Police were not registering my complaint and threatened me [for] being a minority Christian and used discriminatory remarks,' he said. 'She was brought to the police station after negotiations with her abductors and she was bandaged at the police station,' he said. 'She was traumatised and I still can't believe she testified in favour of her kidnappers.' He disputed the court report and showed his daughter's birth certificate along with photographs of deep cuts and sores on her ankles." (The Guardian, 10 February 2021)

BBC News in March 2021 in an article that probably refers to the same case provides further details:

> "On 5 December, her case came before Faisalabad's District and Sessions Courts and the magistrate sent her to a shelter for women and children, while further investigations were carried out. But once again there was bad news. While the family waited for a final decision from the courts, police told Farah's father they were dropping their investigation - because Farah said that she had agreed to both the marriage and the conversion. Farah then repeated this in court on 23 January. But court officials were suspicious that she may have been coerced into making the statement - and Farah says this was indeed the case. 'I said this because the abductor told me that if I didn't he'd first kill me, then murder my father,

> followed by my brothers and sisters. My whole family. I was really afraid that he'd do this, so I agreed to say what he told me.' Three weeks later on 16 February, nearly eight months after she was taken from her home, judges ruled that Farah's marriage had not been registered properly and was therefore invalid. She was saved thanks to a technicality - and reunited with her family." (BBC News, 10 March 2021)

With regard to state protection in cases of rape of Christian women and girls, USDOS refers to the Center for Legal Aid, Assistance, and Settlement (CLAAS) and the Pak Center For Law and Justice (PCLJ), explaining that although reports were filed with the police, "cases rarely went to trial or received a verdict due to threats from the accused party's family, lack of witnesses, or lack of interest from police". USDOS in this context mentions the case of a 17-year-old girl who was abducted and raped by a Muslim man, but as reported by CLAAS, police did not arrest the suspect until Christians drew attention to the case (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III).

When it comes to bonded labour in Pakistan, the NYT states in August 2020 that bonded labour was outlawed in 1992 but continues to be prevalent practice in Pakistan with an estimated three million Pakistanis living in debt servitude (NYT, 4 August 2020; see also DW, 25 December 2019 and USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 7b).
USDOS notes on this topic in its March 2020 human rights report that "forced and bonded labor was widespread and common in several industries" adding that a "large proportion of bonded laborers were low-caste Hindus as well as Christians and Muslims with lower socioeconomic backgrounds" (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 7b). USDOS further explains:

> "Ties among landowners, industry owners, and influential politicians hampered effective elimination of the problem. For example, some local police did not pursue landowners or brick kiln owners effectively because they believed higher-ranking police, pressured by politicians or the owners themselves, would not support their efforts to carry out legal investigations. Some bonded laborers returned to their former status after authorities freed them, due to a lack of alternative employment options. In Sindh the landmark Bonded Labor Act of 2015 has no accompanying civil procedure to implement the law. Of the 27 district vigilance committees charged with overseeing bonded labor practices, only seven had held meetings as of July." (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 7b)

In its June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 USDOS notes that "[c]ommunity leaders continued to state the government did not take adequate action to protect its poorest citizens, including religious minorities, from bonded labor practices" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II).

4.4 Hindus

With 1.7 per cent of Pakistan's total population, according to 2017 provisional census data, Hindus account for the largest religious minority in Pakistan (RFI 2020, p. 15). As mentioned above in section 1.2 of this compilation, an accurate number of Hindus living in Pakistan is not available and data given ranges from 3.6 million (RFI, 2020, p. 15) to 8 million (The Express Tribune, 27 August 2019). Most Hindus live in the province Sindh (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 43; CLJ, 2020, p. 40), largely in self-contained communities (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 43). In Tharpaker and Umarkot, both situated in lower Sindh, the share of Hindus in the population is an estimated 70 and 80 per cent respectively (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 43). Small pockets

of Hindus are also found in interior Balochistan and Punjab (MRG, updated June 2018g), but, as the Pakistan-based human rights NGO Centre for Law and Justice (CLJ) puts it: "[o]utside Sindh, most Pakistanis have not met Hindus and continue to interchangeably use the word Hindu with the word Indian" (CLJ, 2020, p. 40). The Australian DFAT in its February 2020 Country Information Report on Pakistan describes that Hindus "are also affected by prevailing community attitudes to India and the state of the bilateral relationship" (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 43).

The 1998 census divides its Hindu-population in "Jati" and "Scheduled Castes" (see Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, updated 5 March 2021). The Scheduled Caste Hindus, who sometimes are still known as "Untouchables" (see MRG, updated June 2018g; USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II), define the large majority of Pakistani Hindus (MRG, updated June 2018g; CLJ, 2020, p. 42). While the often rich upper-caste Jati Hindus are much better positioned in Pakistan (Scroll.in, 10 December 2015) and dominate politics and businesses (CLJ, 2020, p. 42), Scheduled Caste Hindus are often victims of bonded labour (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; MRG, updated June 2018g) and suffer prejudicial treatment (CLJ, 2020, p. 42). Bonded labour was in 1992 outlawed but continues to be prevalent practice in Pakistan with an estimated three million Pakistanis living in debt servitude (NYT, 4 August 2020; see also MRG, updated June 2018g). The HRCP describes the situation of Hindus in Sindh in its State of Human Rights report in 2019 as follows:

> "The sizeable Hindu population in the Sindh province have generally enjoyed the freedom to practise their religion according to their faith. Sindh has in the past been considered a province of religious tolerance, where people from different religions, faiths and sects can live in harmony. In recent years, however, the people from minority religions have been facing persecution, and the Hindu community is feeling insecure and vulnerable as they face antagonism and mob attacks over allegations of blasphemy. Kidnapping and forced conversion of Hindu girls are the main complaints of the Hindu community in Sindh and a number of cases were widely reported in the media." (HRCP, 2020, p. 84)

The New York Times (NYT) in August 2020 reported on conversions of Hindus to Islam due to discrimination and economic reasons. In June 2020 more than 100 Hindus converted to Islam in a mass ceremony, according to the NYT because of hope for a better social status and incentives of jobs or land, offered by charity groups in case of conversion (NYT, 4 August 2020).

4.4.1 Legal framework

For information on the Hindu Marriage Act and Sindh Hindu Marriage Act and other legal provisions affecting all religious minorities please refer to section 2 of this compilation.

4.4.2 Treatment by state actors

For general information on the treatment of religious minorities by state actors, please refer to section 3.1 and section 3.2 of this compilation.

As already mentioned above (see section 2 of this compilation), blasphemy laws affect members of religious minority groups disproportionately (see also USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The USDOS reports that in 2019 of 84 individuals imprisoned for blasphemy, 5 were Hindus (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). CSW states in its December 2019 report that

according to figures from the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) 30 Hindus were accused under various provisions of offences related to religion between 1987 and 2018 (CSW, December 2019, p. 13). CSJ examined data of 1,572 people accused of having committed blasphemy in the period 1987 to 2018 in Pakistan, 31 of whom were Hindus (CSJ, December 2019, p. 29).

According to Freedom House "Pakistani authorities have a long history of using the education system to portray Hindus and other non-Muslims negatively" (Freedom House, 4 March 2020, section D3). Agenzia Fides, the news agency of the Vatican, in August 2020 published an article that cited a Catholic former president of a research advocacy in Karachi who said that there is a hateful narrative present in textbooks used in Pakistani schools: "they inculcate hatred and contempt in the minds of children, defining Hindus and Christians as infidels". He further notes that the books teach that "Hindus are 'spies for India'" and therefore cannot be trusted (Agenzia Fides, 25 August 2020).

MRG reports on structural discrimination suffered by Hindus:

> "Hindus generally lack equal access to education, employment and social advancement. The tiny minority of Hindus that remains in the truncated Pakistan of today, continues to find itself vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. […] Hindu activists argue that 'secret files are kept on them and their integrity is always in question. They are not allowed into the armed forces, the judiciary or responsible positions in the civil service'. These allegations are substantiated by the facts, which reflect an almost negligible Hindu presence in the higher echelons of the administration, bureaucracy and armed forces. […] Discrimination and prejudice against the Hindus is reinforced by the religious orthodoxy, within educational institutions as well as by the state-controlled media. As a consequence of the oppression and discrimination, the last two decades have seen a steady exodus of Hindus from Pakistan. […] With overt, state-sponsored discrimination and repression, the Hindus of Pakistan remain deprived of their fundamental human rights. The Hindus are 'unwanted' and 'unwelcome' and continue to be associated with India." (MRG, updated June 2018g)

The New York Times in an October 2020 article describes Hindus in Pakistan as being treated as second-class citizens, who are "often systemically discriminated against in every walk of life — housing, jobs, access to government welfare" (NYT, 4 August 2020).

Government's plans to construct a Hindu Temple in Islamabad, which would be the first newly constructed Hindu temple since partition, were stalled, reportedly due to uproar from Islamist groups (The Diplomat, 8 July 2020). An article in the US-based international online news magazine The Diplomat on the uneven application of Pakistan's blasphemy laws reports:

> "[…] Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) chief Siraj-ul-Haq reiterated that 'Muslim money' can't be used to build a Hindu place of worship. The JI chief's statement has reignited the controversy that has stalled the construction of Shri Krishna Mandir in Islamabad since last year.

> The resistance against the construction of Islamabad's first ever Hindu temple is rooted in the institutionalized anti-Hindu bigotry in the country, which continues to be preached through school curricula and mosque sermons." (The Diplomat, 4 March 2021)

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in its State of Human Rights Report 2019 refers to a positive event that took place in 2019:

> "Ms Suman Kumari became the country's first Hindu woman to be appointed a civil judge after passing an examination for induction of judicial officers in Sindh. It is quite uncommon for Hindus to be appointed to key government positions as religious parties often oppose the decisions." (HRCP, 2020, p. 86)

4.4.3 Treatment by non-state actors

The MRG discusses the impact of the rise in religious extremism within South Asia as problematic for Hindus in Pakistan and states that "with periods of tense political relations between India and Pakistan, [it] has led to greater violence and physical attacks on Hindus. Thus the Hindus of Pakistan frequently suffer from outbursts of anti-Hindu sentiments generated through a backlash of violations against the rights of Muslims in India" (MRG, updated June 2018g). USCIRF in April 2020 expressed concern about accounts that Hindus and other minority groups are denied food aid in the context of NGO-provided Covid-19 assistance:

> "The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is troubled by the reports of food aid being denied to Hindus and Christians amid the spread of COVID-19 in Pakistan. […] In Karachi, for example, there have been reports that the Saylani Welfare International Trust, a non-government organization established to assist the homeless and seasonal workers, has been refusing food assistance to Hindus and Christians, arguing that the aid is reserved for Muslims alone." (USCIRF, 13 April 2020)

The Diplomat in an April 2020 article provides similar information:

> "Chaudhry [executive director of the National Commission for Justice and Peace] confirmed that 'there have been reports of such incidents taking place where minorities, specifically Christians and Hindus, are facing discrimination. At most places where relief is being provided by private foundations and trusts or religious welfare organizations, they often do not give relief to non-Muslims, stating that this fund is from zakat [charitable donations as a religious duty in Islam] so thus only Muslims qualify for it.'" (The Diplomat, 28 April 2020)

The Diplomat in a March 2021 article already mentioned above writes:

> "[Mosque sermons] […], coupled with the ubiquitous glorification of temple vandalizers in Pakistani history, folklore, and literature, often rile up mobs to desecrate Hindu places of worship. Over 95 percent of pre-Partition Hindu temples in Pakistan no longer exist." (The Diplomat, 4 March 2021)

The HRCP reports at least three incidents of blasphemy accusations directed against Hindus in 2019, all in the province Sindh, resulting in mob violence against homes, businesses and

worship places of Hindus (HRCP, 2020, p. 73). The report gives a description of two of these incidents:

> "An enraged mob in a small town in the Mirpurkhas district attacked the shops and homes of the Hindu community in May after a Hindu veterinarian was accused of blasphemy. A local man alleged that the doctor provided medicines wrapped in paper that he claimed had Quranic verses printed on them. The local police registered a first information report (FIR) against the doctor but, despite this, the mob attacked and burnt down his shop, as well as other shops belonging to Hindus. Later, the mob also tried to attack the police station where the accused had been locked up. Six suspects were taken into custody for rioting and damaging the vet's property. In September, a mob in Ghotki attacked the Sindh Public School following an allegation by a student that its owner had committed blasphemy. At least three Hindu temples and some houses of other Hindu families were also attacked and the mob surrounded the Hindu populated area spreading terror throughout the community." (HRCP, 2020, p. 73)

Several sources report that forced conversions of Hindus and members of other religious minority groups continue to be an issue (USDOS, 10 June 2020, executive summary; USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32; DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 43; HRCP, 2020, p. 84). Some sources speak of an estimated 300 Hindu girls and women falling victim to forced conversions to Islam each year (Dawn, 8 April 2014), but these numbers are disputed (see section 3.3.6 of this compilation). The Pakistani NGO Centre for Social Justice together with the Peoples Commission for Minorities' Rights was able to compile data of 162 forced conversions during the period of 2013 to 2019 (CSJ, presumably 2020, p. 6). Referring to CSJ data, Dawn in a November 2020 article writes that 54.3 per cent of the girls and women who were allegedly victims of forced conversions belonged to the Hindu community (Dawn, 29 November 2020). HRCP notes that among Pakistani Hindus underreporting of cases of forced conversion is an issue, as only cases involving financially better off Hindu communities tend to be reported (HRCP, June 2020, p. 21). The HRCP in connection with social awareness and forced conversions observes:

> "At present, forced conversions are too easily — and too often — disguised as voluntary conversions, leaving minor girls especially vulnerable. The ugly reality of forced conversions is that they are not seen as a crime, much less a problem that should concern the majority Muslim population of Pakistan." (HRCP, June 2020, p. 20)

For more information on forced conversions please refer to section 3.3.6 of this compilation.

Another issue threatening Hindu girls and women in Pakistan, as raised by civil society activists and media reports, is abduction and rape. The USDOS report on religious freedom 2019 states that victims relate being singled out as "vulnerable due to their religious minority identity" by their Muslim-attackers (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III).
A CREID publication about poor Hindu Women in Pakistan of December 2020 describes the multifaceted discrimination women of the Hindu community are facing in Pakistan:

> "They [women belonging to the Scheduled Castes] face multiple and intersectional discrimination, sexual harassment, violence, and threats of forced conversions and forced marriages. They find themselves in a particularly dire situation because of the customs and

culture of both their community and wider society, and this affects their lives, creating gaps between men and women in mobility, education, health, economics, and politics." (CREID, December 2020b, p. 73)

4.4.4 State protection

For general information on state protection please refer to section 3.3 of this compilation.

About police intervention with regard to the two blasphemy incidents concerning Hindus mentioned above in section 4.4.3, the USDOS in its annual report on religious freedom 2019 writes:

> "On May 27, police in Mirpurkhas, Sindh Province, arrested Hindu veterinarian Ramesh Kumar after a prayer leader from a local mosque said he had desecrated the Quran by wrapping medicines in pages of Quranic verse. As word spread, a mob burned Kumar's clinic and attacked the police station. In addition to arresting Kumar, which media reported police said was for his own protection, local police arrested six suspects on charges of rioting and attempted murder. Police also provided security at Kumar's residence. Media reports quoted a senior district police official who described the rioters as 'miscreants' who neither loved Islam nor their neighbors." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

On other incidents involving Hindus and Pakistani police, the same USDOS publication provides the following information:

> "On September 15, police in Ghotki, Sindh Province, arrested Hindu teacher Notan Lal after a student accused him of blasphemy in an Islamic studies class. Local religious leaders led a mob that vandalized a Hindu temple and looted other Hindu-owned properties. Police, supported by paramilitary officers, dispersed the crowd and moved Lal to an undisclosed location for his own protection, according to a senior police official." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

> "In March three assailants killed Hindu laborer Ghansam Bheel in a village near Umerkot, Sindh Province. The killing sparked protests by Hindus in many Sindh towns against alleged police apathy. According to some reports, police began an investigation only after senior government officials intervened." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

> "On May 31, a Hindu woman testified in court that men kidnapped her from Tando Bago, Sindh, took her to another village, assaulted her, and forced her to convert to Islam. Police recovered the woman within a few days of her husband's reporting the kidnapping. The court ruled the woman should return to her family but did not order any legal action against the suspects." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

> "On March 20, in a case that received wide media coverage, Hindu sisters Reena and Raveena Meghwar disappeared from their home in Ghotki District, Sindh. Their father and brother said they had been abducted, and that they were underage. Local police did not file a case immediately and reportedly dismissed the family's claims." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

On security measures for Hindu and Christian places of worship, the USDOS June 2020 report notes:

> "Authorities also provided enhanced security for Christian and Hindu places of worship at various times throughout the year. After an attack on a mosque in New Zealand that killed 51 on March 15, 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." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

In December 2020 police failed to prevent a mob of more than 1,000 people from attacking and setting on fire a century-old Hindu shrine in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The mob was led by leaders of a religious party (ORF, 26 January 2021; see also BBC News, 12 January 2021). In a January 2021 article the Observer Research Foundation, an independent Delhi-based think tank, reports:

> "The administration and police remained silent spectators as the mob went about vandalising and setting fire to the premises. The police arrested 24 people for the arson only after outcry from human rights activists and the minority Hindu community." (ORF, 26 January 2021)

4.5 Shia Muslims

IRB in a December 2020 query response provides the following information on the number of Shia Muslims in Pakistan obtained from various sources:

> "According to sources, there is no official figure on the number of Shia Muslims in Pakistan (Lecturer 23 Nov. 2020; Senior Fellow 19 Nov. 2020). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a lecturer in Islamic and Middle East Studies at the University of Freiburg in Germany, who specializes in modern Islam with a focus on Shi'ism in South Asia and the Middle East, stated that 'there is widespread agreement that Shia Muslims make up about 15 to 20 percent of Pakistan's population' (Lecturer 23 Nov. 2020). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a senior fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) who has written on Sunni-Shia relations in Pakistan indicated that according to the Oxford Dictionary of Islam, between 10 and 15 percent of Muslims in Pakistan are Shia (Senior Fellow 19 Nov. 2020). Similarly, a February 2019 country report by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) indicates that according to the provisional results of the 2017 national census, 10 to 15 percent of Muslims in Pakistan are Shia (Australia 20 Feb. 2019, para. 3.72)." (IRB, 4 December 2020)

The same source reports on a "vast diversity" among Shia Muslims in Pakistan:

> "The Lecturer in Islamic and Middle East studies stated that […] 'especially in Pakistan, there is a vast diversity among the Shia' (Lecturer 23 Nov. 2020). Australia's DFAT notes

> that '[m]ost Shi'a in Pakistan follow the Twelver (*athna ashariya*) school, with smaller numbers of Nizari Ismailis, Daudi Bohras and Sulemani Bohras. Most of Pakistan's ethnic, linguistic and tribal groups include followers of Shi'a Islam' (Australia 20 Feb. 2019, para. 3.74, italics in original)." (IRB, 4 December 2020)

For detailed information on differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims please refer to the above-cited December 2020 query response by IRB which is accessible under the following link:

- IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: Pakistan: Differences between Shia [Shi'a, Shi'i] and Sunni Muslims; procedure to convert to Shi'ism; the situation and treatment of Shia Muslims by society and authorities, particularly in major cities (Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, Hyderabad); state response (2018–November 2020) [PAK200384.E], 4 December 2020
  https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2043469.html

DFAT states in its February 2019 report that "Pakistani Shi'a live throughout the country in urban centres, including Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Peshawar, Multan, Jhang and Sargodha." The report goes on to say that "Shi'a are not a majority in any of Pakistan's four provinces, [but] they are a majority in the autonomous region of Gilgit-Baltistan." The same source explains that "[s]ignificant numbers of Shi'a live in Peshawar, Kohat, Hangu and Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; in Kurram and Orakzai districts in the former FATA; in and around Quetta and the Makran coastline in Balochistan; in parts of southern and central Punjab; and throughout Sindh". According to the report, some Shia Muslims live in enclaves in these cities, but generally communities of Shia and Sunni Muslims are well integrated. (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 35)

An IRB January 2020 query response provides the following information from various sources on the size of the Hazara community, which is Shia, in Pakistan and the places in which they predominantly live:

> "According to MRG, Hazaras are 'an ethnic group predominantly based in Afghanistan, but also with a large population in Pakistan'; population estimates range from 650,000 to 900,000, with the majority of Pakistani Hazaras, approximately 500,000, living in the city of Quetta (MRG June 2018). According to a report on Hazaras by Pakistan's National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), citing other sources, Hazaras reside in different areas of Pakistan, 'including, Parachanar, Karachi, Sanghar, Nawabshah, Hyderabad, different parts of Punjab and Gilgit Baltistan,' as well as in Quetta, Sanjawi, Much, Zhob, Harnai, Loralai, and Dukki in Balochistan (Pakistan Feb. 2018, 4). According to the same source, citing the World Hazara Council, the population of Hazaras is 'approximately between' 400,000 and 500,000 in Balochistan (Pakistan Feb. 2018, 4).
>
> According to MRG, Hazaras have 'clearly identifiable features' (MRG June 2018). The report on Hazaras by the NCHR similarly notes that Hazara people have 'unique facial features [that] distinguish them from others' (Pakistan Feb. 2018, 3)." (IRB, 15 January 2020)

For information on the Turi, a Shia Pashtun tribe, please refer to the above-cited January 2020 IRB query response:

- IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: Pakistan: Situation and treatment of Shia [Shi'a, Shi'i, Shiite] Muslims, including Hazaras and Turi, particularly in Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, and Hyderabad; state response to violence against Shias (2017-January 2020) [PAK106393.E], 15 January 2020
  https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2025210.html

4.5.1 Treatment by state actors

For general information on the treatment of religious minorities by state actors, please refer to section 3.1 and section 3.2 of this compilation.

With regard to the general situation of Shia Muslims in Pakistan MRG notes that they "are represented in all walks of life, but in many cases have succeeded in playing prominent roles in Pakistan's cultural sphere and attaining influential, high-profile positions." The same source explains that "as Muslims they are free from certain restrictions affecting other religious groups" (MRG, updated June 2018e). DFAT notes in February 2019:

> "Sunni and Shi'a students attend the same public and private education institutions. Students must declare their religious affiliation for entry into both public and private institutions, including universities. Religious bias in public education predominantly affects non-Muslims, but Shi'a groups have raised concerns that the public school syllabus and prescribed textbooks contain depictions of Sunni prayer rituals, and omit prominent historical Shi'a figures. […]
>
> Shi'a are well represented in parliament and regularly contest elections for mainstream political parties." (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 36)

According to the USDOS March 2020 human rights report covering 2019, Hazaras alleged government agencies discriminated against them in issuing identification cards and passports. (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 6)

The Guardian in an October 2020 article provides information on a bill passed in July 2020 in Punjab which supports only the Sunni interpretation of Islam:

> "Shia Muslims […] fear their religious freedom is being legislated away. In July, Tahaffuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam [protection of foundation of Islam bill] was passed by the Punjab assembly, which supported only the Sunni interpretation of Islam, provoking a huge backlash from the Shia community. 'Persecution seems to be waiting for the Shia minority,' said Hamza Baloch, a founding member of Secular Shia Voices, an advocacy group. 'At first, they used hashtags, then killed us and rallied against us. Now they're coming up with legislation to eliminate the Shia minority.'" (The Guardian, 21 October 2020; see also The Diplomat, 17 September 2020 and The Diplomat, 28 September 2020)

The HRCP in a September 2020 press release expresses concern over a surge in blasphemy cases, particularly against Shia Muslims. According to the HRCP, "[a]necdotal evidence suggests that over 40 such cases may have been registered under the blasphemy laws in the last month

alone" (HRCP, 5 September 2020; see also VOA, 28 October 2020 and MRG/Al Khoei Foundation, 20 October 2020). The Guardian notes in the above-mentioned October 2020 article that over 50 Shia Muslims were charged under the blasphemy laws in the course of a month. The article cites a Shia rights activist in Punjab who filed a police report for anti-Shia hate speech which was ignored. But according to her, "even the baseless and fake cases from the other side are being entertained by police". The same source mentions that "in Punjab, police beat up and arrested 22 Shia Muslims, including seven women, who were taking part in a ceremony to mark a Shia martyr" (The Guardian, 21 October 2020).

BBC News reports in May 2018 that 140 Shia Muslims disappeared in two years and that their families believe they were detained by the intelligence services. The article cites the head of the Shia Missing Persons Committee in Karachi, according to whom most of the Shia men were detained after returning from pilgrimage to the Middle East. He further told BBC News that the intelligence services thought the men went to Syria to fight against IS and al-Qaeda. BBC notes that a "handful of the Shia men who were picked up have subsequently been let go" (BBC News, 31 May 2018). AI mentions in an appeal published in February 2021 that members of the Shia community are targeted in enforced disappearances (AI, 9 February 2021, p. 2). The Diplomat notes in a March article that "Shias are […] the first religious minority to witness the enforced disappearances of their community members". The article further explains:

> "The issue of enforced disappearance, which has spread all over Pakistan, is not a new phenomenon. Political activists, mainly from the Baloch, Pashtun, Sindhi, and Muhajir ethnic groups, have been victims of abduction, but now for the first time members of a religious minority are being subjected to this form of violence. According to one report, an estimated 144 of Shias are missing across Pakistan. The abducted Shias are accused of 'fighting for Iran in Syria and Iraq.' However, the authorities have failed to produce any evidence in courts." (The Diplomat, 16 March 2020)

The USDOS March 2020 report reports on the abduction and disappearance of two journalists from Karachi's Shia community. According to the report, in May 2019 police claimed they had arrested one of the journalists together with other persons for alleged involvement in sectarian killings. USDOS notes that the "Shia Missing Persons Relatives Committee rejected these claims and stated the suspects had been missing for months without formal charges". USDOS adds that the whereabouts of both journalists remained unknown (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 1b).

4.5.2 Treatment by non-state actors

According to MRG, "Shi'a are still regarded as apostates by some extremist Sunni groups and individuals" adding that "[a]s a result, many face regular hostility from extremists and public calls for members to be killed" (MRG, updated June 2018e; see also CREID, December 2020c, p. 2). DFAT in February 2019 provides the following information on sectarian violence targeting Shia Muslims and on the militant groups involved:

> "Sectarian violence in Pakistan has historically targeted individuals, places of worship, shrines and religious schools, however Shi'a traditionally represented a higher proportion of the casualties […]. Shi'a continue to face a threat from anti-Shi'a militant groups,

> including LeJ [Lashkar-i-Jhangvi], Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), also known as Ahl-e-Sunnat-Wal-Jamaat (ASWJ), LeJ al-Alami, and other factions of the TTP [Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan]. The LeJ's objective is to establish an Islamist Sunni state in Pakistan and seeks to have Shi'a declared 'non-believers' or apostates, and to eliminate other religious groups such as Jews, Christians and Hindus. The LeJ […] has claimed several attacks on Shi'a in recent years, particularly Hazaras in Quetta […] and other Shi'a groups in the former FATA and Karachi. In an open letter released in June 2011, LeJ leaders declared their intention to 'abolish the impure sect' of 'Shi'a and Hazara Shi'a.'" (DFAT, 20 February 2019, p. 36; see also USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33 and USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

According to the USDOS June 2020 report on religious freedom in 2019 "[t]hroughout the year, unidentified individuals assaulted and killed Shia, including predominantly Shia Hazaras, and Ahmadis in attacks sources believed to be religiously motivated. The attackers' relationship to organized terrorist groups was often unclear" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section III; see also USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 6). The same source explains that, according to civil society and media, violence and abuses were committed by "armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government, including LeJ [Lashkar-i-Jhangvi], Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and SSP [Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan], as well as abuses by individuals and groups, such as ISIS" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The Diplomat in a September 2020 article describes a changing landscape of anti-Shia groups:

> "Historically, the anti-Shia violence was predominantly occupied by Deobandi[14] and Ahl-i Hadith[15] groups until the emergence of Barelvis, who constitute the majority in Pakistan. Barelvis are often called 'Sufi' and elements of Sufism are core characteristics of the movement. Barelvis and Shias enjoy an amicable relationship as both share some common attributes such as mysticism, veneration of imams and saints, and intercession — all of which Deobandi, Wahhabis and Ahl-i Hadith do not approve of. Both have been victims of Deobandi and Salafist violence. Therefore, this makes them natural allies to an extent. But recently, Barelvis, with the help of the Pakistani military, particularly under the platform of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) party, which is known for violence against Christian and the Ahmadiyya community, on the basis of blasphemy, is now turning its ire against Shias too." (The Diplomat, 28 September 2020)

USDOS notes in June 2020 that in 2019"[a]ccording to the SATP [South Asia Terrorism Portal], the number of sectarian attacks by armed groups continued to decrease, corresponding with an overall decline in terrorist attacks" adding that "[d]ata on sectarian attacks varied because no standardized definition existed of what constituted a sectarian attack among reporting organizations." USDOS continues that "[a]ccording to the SATP, at least 27 persons were killed

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[14] "In Pakistan, prominent Sunni sub-groups include: […] the Deobandis: an anti-imperialist, socially conservative and religiously dogmatic movement that emerged in colonial India in the nineteenth century to 'purify' Islam" (Qantara, 17 April 2015).

[15] "The Ahl-e-Hadith / Salafi is one of the smaller and the most puritanical Sunni sub-sect in Pakistan" (Globalsecurity.org, 23 December 2019).

and 68 injured in four incidents of sectarian violence by extremist groups during the year. All of these attacks targeted gatherings of Shia individuals" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II).
Referring to the situation of the Hazara community in Balochistan, PIPS and FES state in December 2020:

> "The threat of sectarian violence against the Shia Hazara community in Balochistan remained omnipresent. Even with 10 check posts and 19 FC [Frontier Corps] platoons in the two main Shia Hazara settlements of Quetta, more than 500 Hazaras had been killed and 627 injured in just five years. In April 2019 an explosion in a vegetable market frequented by Hazaras killed 20 people, including 10 Hazaras. A report released by National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) in March 2018 stated that 509 members of the Hazara community had been killed and 627 injured in various targeted incidents of terrorism in Quetta over the previous five years. Security measures for Hazara areas have recently been referred to as extreme ghettoization of the community. The ghettoization appeared to be cost of relative safety for the Hazaras. Between 75,000 and 100,000 Hazaras were said to have been forced to relocate elsewhere in the country or abroad in search of safety." (PIPS/FES, December 2020, p. 47)

For detailed information on violence against Shia, including Hazara Muslims, between 2017 and January 2020, please refer to the following IRB query response published in January 2020:

- IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: Pakistan: Situation and treatment of Shia [Shi'a, Shi'i, Shiite] Muslims, including Hazaras and Turi, particularly in Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, and Hyderabad; state response to violence against Shias (2017-January 2020) [PAK106393.E], 15 January 2020
  https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2025210.html

The full version of the 2019 security report published by PIPS can be accessed via the following link:

- PIPS - Pak Institute for Peace Studies: Pakistan Security Report 2019, 2020
  https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/sr2019full.pdf

In the above-cited December 2020 query response IRB provides the following information from various sources on attacks on and violence against Shia in Pakistan (covering 2018 – November 2020):

> "The Jinnah Institute representative stated that there have been targeted killings and attacks on mosques and shrines in southern Punjab province, the North, Balochistan province, and Karachi (Jinnah Institute 19 Nov. 2020). The same source indicated that there has been renewed violence by militant groups and that sectarian groups that were previously quiet have become violent again (Jinnah Institute 19 Nov. 2020). The Professor of Islamic studies noted that while 'there is undeniably persecution of Shias on the ground in Pakistan,' it is not the same everywhere and that 'persecution does not exist in all regions of Pakistan' (Professor of Islamic studies 19 Nov. 2020). The same source stated that 'the experience of Shias varies from one individual to another' (Professor of Islamic studies 19 Nov. 2020). The Senior Fellow stated that 'there is no city-specific violence that you can isolate, other than recent surge in attacks on Hazara Shias in Balochistan, mostly around

> the city of Quetta' (Senior Fellow 19 Nov. 2020). The same source noted that incidents of violence 'can happen at any place in any province' and that 'there have been incidents [in Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, and Hyderabad] with Karachi topping the list for incidents of violence against the Shias' (Senior Fellow 19 Nov. 2020)." (IRB, 4 December 2020)

Referring especially to the situation of Shia Muslims in Karachi, IRB in December 2020 notes:

> "The Professor of Islamic studies indicated that Karachi is one of the cities with the 'worst persecution' of Shia Muslims (Professor of Islamic studies 19 Nov. 2020). The same source noted that 'Shias in Karachi come from all ethnic groups; this has been a hotbed for Sunni Islam, and some groups have become focused on anti-Shia violence. Karachi has more crime as well' (Professor of Islamic studies 19 Nov. 2020). Similarly, the Australian DFAT report states that 'Karachi has historically experienced high levels of violence due to rival ethnic, sectarian, political, business and criminal interests' (Australia 20 Feb. 2019, para. 3.105). The same source reports that the government's 2014 National Action Plan (NAP) and the visible presence of the paramilitary rangers 'have led to a significant decrease in violence, including sectarian violence' in Karachi (Australia 20 Feb. 2019, para. 2.36, 3.105). In contrast, the Professor of Islam and politics indicated that Karachi has 'been worse' in the past two to three years (Professor of Islam and politics 19 Nov. 2020). The Jinnah Institute representative stated that although it has dense communities of Shias, Karachi is among the 'worst' cities for Shias because of the presence of militant groups (Jinnah Institute 19 Nov. 2020). Sources report that in Karachi, over 30,000 anti-Shia protesters held rallies over two days in September 2020 (AFP 12 Sept. 2020; *The Guardian* 21 Oct. 2020)." (IRB, 4 December 2020)

The query response also contains - albeit limited- information on the situation and treatment of Shia Muslims in the cities Lahore, Islamabad and Hyderabad:

- IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: Pakistan: Differences between Shia [Shi'a, Shi'i] and Sunni Muslims; procedure to convert to Shi'ism; the situation and treatment of Shia Muslims by society and authorities, particularly in major cities (Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, Hyderabad); state response (2018–November 2020) [PAK200384.E], 4 December 2020
  https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2043469.html

PIPS states in the summary of its Pakistan Security Report 2020 that seven of the 146 reported terrorist attacks in 2020 were sectarian-related and that "[a] combined total of eight attacks targeted Shia and Sunni community members, claiming 18 lives, and another three attacks hit worship places and madrassas killing 24 people" (PIPS, 2021, pp. 11-12). According to the CRSS security report 2020, seven Shia Muslims were killed in 2020 (CRSS, 10 February 2021, p. 28). BBC News in January 2021 reports on the kidnapping and killing of eleven coal miners in Balochistan (BBC News, 3 January 2021). According to France 24, the attack was claimed by the Islamic State group (France 24, 6 January 2021).

MRG and the Al Khoei Foundation in an October 2020 statement report on a wave of anti-Shia rhetoric and violence in August and September 2020:

> "The current wave of anti-Shi'a rhetoric and violence began with the advent of the Islamic sacred month of Muharram, when an elderly Shi'a man was arrested on the 30th of August over allegations that he had recited Ziarat-e-Ashura, an essential part of Shi'a practice in which they proclaim their allegiance to the third holy imam, Husayn ibn Ali. Deemed un-Islamic or blasphemous by banned militant organisations, the act led to pressure on the police to arrest the man on the evening of that same day. This episode paved the way for further blasphemy allegations, arrests and ultimately violence across the country. In early September, a Shi'a man, Qaiser Abbas, was shot dead in broad daylight at his shop in Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Then, on the 13th of September, Malik Alamdar Hussain, the license holder of a Shi'a procession, was gunned down in Heelan area of Mandi Bahauddin, Punjab. On the 15th of September, two more Shi'a men, Syed Mir Hassan Jan and Irtiza Hassan, were shot dead in Kohat.
>
> In the midst of these 4 killings, in a single week, three public rallies were organised by some mainstream religious groups, as well as proscribed militant outfits, in Karachi and Islamabad with slogans referring to Shi'as as 'infidels'. Consecutively, on the 11th, 12th and 13th of September, three massive rallies were held under the slogan 'Azmat-e-Sahaba' ('Honour of the Companions'). These marches were organised by Sunni religious and religio-political organisations including Jamiat-e-Ulama Islam and Tahreek-e-Labbaik Party, a far-right organisation known for anti-minority hatred and misuse of the blasphemy laws, Ahl-e-Hadith Action Committee and proscribed organisations including ASWJ-SSP. Thousands of participants and supporters of these rallies were heard openly calling Shi'as 'infidels' and were seen pelting stones at the Imambargah, a Shi'a mosque and community centre. Demands were made to ban Muharram processions, other essential Shi'a rituals and practices, and implement across the country the controversial Tahaffuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam bill which, having recently been passed in the Assembly of Punjab, is a direct attack on the freedom of religion of Shi'as and other minorities." (MRG/Al Khoei Foundation, 20 October 2020; see also The Diplomat, 17 September 2020 and The Diplomat, 28 September 2020)

The Diplomat mentions in a September 2020 article that since 30 August of the same year, at least five Shias were killed. The article adds that further "at least one religious congregation was attacked and several videos appeared in which Shias were forced to accept the Sunni historical account on the caliphs" (The Diplomat, 28 September 2020).

MRG in June 2018 refers to various forms of hate speech against Shia Muslims, "most commonly as campaigns in mosques, schools, public spaces and increasingly on social media" (MRG, updated June 2018e). HRCP reports in July 2020 that the first confirmed cases of Covid-19 were concentrated disproportionately among pilgrims from Iran, among them many Shia Hazaras. This "led to an outpouring of hate speech and discrimination against them. Social media sites such as Twitter were inundated with messages targeting the Shia community in general, and Hazaras in particular. Even federal ministers and advisors were not immune" (HRCP, July 2020, p. 26). MRG and the Al Khoei Foundation in the above-mentioned October

2020 statement also mention "a massive wave of anti-Shi'a hate speech online specifically between the 26th of August and the 20th of September 2020" (MRG/Al Khoei Foundation, 20 October 2020; see also The Diplomat, 28 September 2020).

The above-cited article published by The Diplomat in March 2020 further refers to other forms of discrimination against Shia Muslims:

> "In early December, a group of hardliners held a demonstration in Charsadda, a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, to demand the removal of Bacha Khan University's vice chancellor, Saqlain Naqvi, invoking his Shia identity. In another incident in the same month, a Shia boy died in a road accident in Kharian, a city located in Gujrat district, Punjab. A cleric belonging to the Sunni sect refused to officiate his funeral just because of the Shia identity of the deceased." (The Diplomat, 16 March 2020)

Concerning the situation of Hazaras, USDOS notes in March 2020:

> "Members of the Hazara ethnic minority, who are Shia Muslim, continued to face discrimination and threats of violence in Quetta, Balochistan. According to press reports and other sources, Hazara were unable to move freely outside of Quetta's two Hazara-populated enclaves. Community members complained that increased security measures had turned their neighborhoods into ghettos, resulting in economic exploitation. Consumer goods in those enclaves were available only at inflated prices, and Hazaras reported an inability to find employment or pursue higher education." (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 6)

4.5.3 State protection

For general information on state protection, please refer to section 3.3 of this compilation.

According to the USDOS March 2020 human rights report "[a]uthorities provided enhanced security for Shia religious processions but confined the public observances to the Hazara enclaves" (USDOS, 11 March 2020, section 6). The same source states in its June 2020 religious freedom report:

> "From September 1-10, leading to and during the Shia commemoration of Ashura, the ninth and tenth days of Muharram, the government emphasized unity among Muslims around the Ashura holiday. Prime Minister Khan, President Arif Alvi, and Foreign Minister Qureshi used the Ashura story to exhort Muslims to be ready to lay down their lives for the cause of good against evil. Law enforcement again deployed extra security around Shia processions in major cities throughout Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan Provinces, including for Hazara Shia communities in Quetta. According to civil society sources, authorities again restricted the movement and public sermons of both Sunni and Shia clerics accused of provoking sectarian violence. The government placed some clerics on Schedule 4, a list of proscribed persons based on reasonable suspicion of terrorism or sectarian violence, and temporarily detained others under the Maintenance of Public Order Act." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

USDOS further reports that "[a]ccording to the SATP [South Asia Terrorism Portal] and media reports, ATCs [Anti-Terrorism Courts] convicted and sentenced several individuals affiliated with terrorist organizations and involved in past sectarian attacks and targeted killings", among them people involved in targeted killings of Shia Hazaras and the killing of a Shia lawyer. (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II)

CSW notes in December 2019 that the government "is failing to effectively counter the influence of extremists and bring an end to violence against the community" (CSW, December 2019, p. 24). The Guardian in an October 2020 article provides the following information on concessions given to extremist Sunni Muslim groups by the government:

> "At the forefront of anti-Shia campaign in Pakistan are two hardline Sunni Muslim groups, Ahl-e-Sunnat-Wal-Jamaat (ASWJ) and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). ASWJ had previously been banned in Pakistan under the Anti-Terrorism Act before it was lifted in 2018 but is still globally considered a terrorist organisation. […]
>
> However, the vehement sectarian resurgence began in 2017 when the Pakistani government began making concessions to the extremist Sunni Muslim groups. In 2017, TLP was responsible for forcing a law minister to quit over a perceived softening in the blasphemy laws. Then, in the 2018 election, ASWJ and TLP were allowed to run in the election, winning seats in parliament. In the same election, ASWJ also threw its influential backing behind 70 candidates from Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, which won and formed the government. Despite their well-documented extremist positions, over the past two years TLP and ASWJ have been allowed to assemble, make public anti-Shia speeches, carry out rallies, run for political office and mobilise against the Shia community, ensuring their power and influence in Pakistan has gone from strength to strength. The Khan government, meanwhile, has been accused of both turning a blind eye to rising sectarianism from hardline Sunni groups, which reportedly enjoy patronage from state and military officials, and also using their support for political gain at a time when the government is weak and the economy is collapsing." (The Guardian, 21 October 2020)

MRG and the Al Khoei Foundation state in October 2020 that "proscribed anti-Shi'a organisations […] still operate with impunity". The two organisations call on the government to "protect the rights of its Shi'a Muslim citizens […] by acting to protect their lives, prosecuting those who carry out violence or incite violence against the Shi'a or any other religious community" (MRG/Al Khoei Foundation, 20 October 2020). The Diplomat in a September 2020 article notes:

> "For Shias in Karachi, the three big anti-Shia rallies are once again a confirmation that the Pakistani state will be a party to the persecution of Shias. Asad Gokal, a young Shia activist, was disappointed by the indifferent attitude of the authorities over the blatantly malicious and violent campaign against Shias across Pakistan. 'We have seen officials doing nothing to stop them. Seeing all this makes the Shias of Pakistan feel betrayed, feel hopeless,' Gokal shared in an interview." (The Diplomat, 28 September 2020)

Al Jazeera similarly states in a January 2021 article that after the anti-Shia rallies in August 2020 "many Pakistanis denounced the ASWJ [Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat] supporters' hate speech and

said the government had not taken the demonstrators to task" (Al Jazeera, 6 January 2021). The article goes on to say:

> "Journalist Bilal Farooqi was one of the few who spoke out publicly. A Sunni, Farooqi was arrested in October 2020 on charges of having spread 'religious hatred' and 'anti-state sentiment'. He had tweeted criticisms of the ASWJ march and questioned the authorities over their allowing an organisation that had been designated as 'terrorist' to organise the march. 'Most of my posts, on the basis of which [a police case] was filed against me, were about the ASWJ's involvement in anti-Shia activities,' said Farooqi. Later released from police custody, he is still facing the same court charges. He has called on Sunni Muslim activists to speak up against police inaction towards groups involved in Shia Muslim attacks." (Al Jazeera, 6 January 2021)

Referring to the situation of Hazaras, HRCP in June 2020 provides the following information on state protection available:

> "The plight of Quetta's Hazara community continued in 2019, though with lesser intensity than previous years, with one major attack against the distinct Shia community. […] The relentless attacks on the community and the state's failure to stem them has forced the majority of Hazaras into two enclaves inside the provincial capital, from where they mostly move out under the protection of law enforcement agencies in a convoy just to get groceries. It was members of this convoy that became the target of a bomb attack in April 2019, killing 20 people and injuring over 40, including several Hazaras. Following the attack in Hazar Ganji's fruit and vegetable market, members of the beleaguered community staged a sit-in against the government for failing to protect them despite repeated attacks and called for the true implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP). After several days of protest, Prime Minister Imran Khan visited the protesters, assuring them of justice and NAP's complete implementation." (HRCP, June 2020, p. 10; see also Reuters, 14 April 2019)

France 24 reports in January 2021 that after an attack claimed by the Islamic State group in which eleven coal miners from the Hazara community were killed, up to 2,500 Hazara blocked a road on the outskirts of Quetta refusing to bury the dead and demanding better protection. France 24 quotes an activist as saying that "[t]his is systematic ethnic cleansing of Hazaras in Balochistan and our security forces are behaving like lame ducks, doing nothing" (France 24, 6 January 2021).

4.6 Sikhs

Together with other religious minorities the community of Sikhs in Pakistan constitutes less than one per cent of the total population (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32; USDOS, 10 June 2020, section I). The size of the Sikh community in Pakistan is - similarly to other minority communities - not clear and diverging figures can be found: A Dawn article of April 2015 speaks of 20,000 Sikhs living in Pakistan (Dawn, 17 April 2015). The Express Tribune in 2019 cites unofficial 2017 census data which reveals that the total number of Sikhs in Pakistan is approximately 16,000 (The Express Tribune, 27 August 2019). More deviant from these numbers are earlier results of 2010 by the Sikh Resource and Study Centre (SRSC), an NGO that seeks to facilitate training and

development of Sikh youth. According to a 2011 article of the Times of India (TOI) the SRSC found in 2010 that about 50,000 Sikhs live in Pakistan (TOI, 29 January 2011).
Sikhism is a monotheistic tradition (CLJ, 2020, p. 42) that was founded in the 15th century by Guru Nanak, who was born 65 kilometres from Lahore in Punjab (CLJ, 2020, p. 42; see also Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 1 June 2020, Introduction). The majority of the worldwide Sikh community of almost 25 million, lives in the part of Punjab which since partition in 1947 belongs to India (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 1 June 2020, Introduction). On partition and the Sikh community Encyclopaedia Britannica notes:

> "The partition between India and Pakistan in 1947 produced deep dissatisfaction among the Sikhs, who saw the Punjab divided between the two new states. Almost all Sikhs in the western Punjab migrated to the portion retained by India." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 1 June 2020, The Punjabi suba)

On the distribution of Sikhs worldwide and in Pakistan the Center for Law and Justice (CLJ) explains the following:

> "Majority of Sikhs live in India while a number of Sikhs also live in the UK, Canada and the US. In Pakistan, Sikhs are settled in Nankana Sahib, Peshawar, Hasan Abdal, Dhairki, Kashmor, Ghotki, Mardan, erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Swat, Jacobabad, Karachi, Quetta, and Jhatpat (Balochistan). Sikhs are mainly Pashtoon and Punjabi by ethnicity." (CLJ, 2020, p. 43)

The April 2015 article by Dawn, already mentioned above, observes that most of the community in Pakistan lives in the country's northwest, where "they have set up businesses and often work as traders, their men instantly recognisable by the distinctive untrimmed beards and high turbans that distinguish them from their Muslim counterparts" (Dawn, 17 April 2015).

4.6.1 Legal Framework

For information on the Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act, the Hindu Marriage Act, the Sindh Hindu Marriage Act and other legal provisions affecting all religious minorities please refer to section 2 of this compilation.

4.6.2 Treatment by state actors

For general information on the treatment of religious minorities by state actors, please refer to section 3.1 and section 3.2 of this compilation.

The HRCP in June 2020 reports that some representatives of minority communities claimed, "that there are no Hindu or Sikh schools in Sindh that might enable these communities to teach their children Hindi and Gurmukhi scripts which are important in understanding their religious scriptures" (HRCP, June 2020, pp. 16-17). In 2019 the HRCP was informed about the closure of a Sikh gurdwara in Quetta (HRCP, June 2020, p. 19). In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the Sikh community in 2018 filed a case in the Peshawar High Court against government officials for not creating space for a crematorium despite having the required budget (HRCP, March 2019, pp. 117-118).

The HRCP in its State of Human Rights in 2018 report informs that the Supreme Court in October 2018 ordered the category "Sikhism" as a distinct religion to be included into the population census. Before, on the census forms that were released in March 2017, Sikhism was subsumed under "others", which reportedly upset many members of the community (HRCP, March 2019, p. 118).

In November 2019 the government opened the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, a holy site for Sikhs, at the place where Guru Nanak is said to have died. Along with the opening of the gurdwara a visa-free transit corridor, the so called Kartarpur Corridor, was installed, for Sikh pilgrims coming from India (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; BBC News, 24 October 2019). This step was perceived as a symbol of peace and respect for the Sikh community (see MRG, 9 November 2019; see also DW, 8 November 2019; CNN, 8 November 2019).

USCIRF in April 2020 mentions the laying of the foundation stone by Prime Minister Imran Khan for Pakistan's first Sikh university as another positive development in 2019 (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 33).

The HRCP reports in 2020 that "[f]or the first time in the history of Governor House, a Sikh officer, Pawan Singh Arora, was appointed as public relations officer to the Punjab governor in January [2019]." (HRCP, 2020, p. 34)

Information on Sikhs being involved in blasphemy cases could not be found.

4.6.3 Treatment by non-state actors

USCIRF in April 2019 reports that extremist groups and societal actors continue to discriminate against and attack religious minorities, among them Sikhs. Sikhs are also said to face "continued threats to their security" and being subject to various forms of harassment and social exclusion (USCIRF, April 2019). In its State of Human Rights in 2018 report the HRCP reports on the following incidents concerning the Sikh community and prominent Sikh individuals:

> "Over the past few years, Sikhs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have often been targeted by militant groups who have been threatening them with dire consequences if they do not pay Islamic taxes. While several Sikhs have been kidnapped, some have lost their lives and Sikh properties expropriated.
>
> In a huge loss to the Sikh community, human rights activist and wellknown Sikh leader Sardar Charanjeet Singh was shot dead by unidentified assailants in the outskirts of Peshawar in May.
>
> After receiving threats and attacks on account of his struggle for human rights, Sikh activist and serving president KP's Pakistan Minorities' Alliance Radesh Singh Tony was forced to move from Peshawar." (HRCP, March 2019, p. 117)

In a June 2020 publication HRCP relates that after being forced to move from Peshawar to Lahore in early 2019, the Sikh rights Activist Radesh Singh Tony still suffered harassment and intimidation. On this matter HRCP continues:

> "In December 2019, Singh says he and his son were beaten up by unidentified goons in Lahore. The police disputes the claim, alleging that he fabricated the incident to apply for asylum. Nevertheless, citing threats from religious extremists to him and his family, and widespread discrimination in finding a residence, jobs and pursuing education of his

children, Singh says he had no other choice but to settle out of the country." (HRCP, June 2020, p. 8; see also Gandhara, 24 January 2020)

USCIRF in April 2020 and BBC News in March 2021 report that together with women and girls from the Hindu and Christian communities, Sikh women and girls fall victim to forced conversions as well (USCIRF, April 2020, p. 32; BBC, 10 March 2021). According to CSJ data on forced conversions cited by Dawn, of the 162 questionable conversions documented between 2013 and 2020 by CSJ 0.62 per cent belonged to the Sikh and Kalash[16] communities (Dawn, 29 November 2020).

4.6.4 State protection

The USDOS 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom notes that the Pakistani government "was inconsistent in safeguarding against societal discrimination and neglect" towards religious minorities, including Sikhs, and that official discrimination against minorities persisted to varying degrees (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II). The same USDOS publication also reports a case of an alleged forced conversion of a Sikh woman and describes how the authorities dealt with it:

> "On August 28 [2019], a community dispute arose when a 19-year-old Sikh woman married a Muslim man in Nankana Sahib, Punjab. According to media reports, Jagjit Kaur, a Sikh and the daughter of a prominent Sikh religious leader, converted to Islam to marry for love, but her family accused the Muslim family of kidnapping and forcibly converting her. Kaur's family filed charges and threatened to immolate themselves if police did not bring her home. Kaur stated in court that she was of legal age to marry and converted of her own free will, and a judge ordered her to remain in a women's shelter while the Punjab government met with representatives of each side. On September 3, Punjab Governor Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar met with representatives of each family and stated the situation had been amicably resolved, although Sikh sources stated Kaur remained in the women's shelter at year's end." (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section II; see also The Diplomat, 16 March 2020)

Concerning the above-mentioned case of the Sikh activist Radesh Singh Tony, Gandhara in a January 2020 article cites Radesh Tony Singh, who was reportedly attacked together with his 16-year-old son in Lahore in December 2019:

> "'We were on our way home when four young men attacked us. They slapped us and kicked us,' he said in a Pashto-language video sent to Radio Mashaal on January 22. 'We kept asking why they were beating us, and they said they wanted to expel us from the city.' […]" (Gandhara, 24 January 2020)

[16] The Kalash are an animist tribe, consisting of about 3,000 members living in the Hindu Kush mountains of Pakistan (The Guardian, 17 April 2011).

The article continues:

> "He later went back to Lahore to lodge a formal complaint with the Kot Lakhpat police station in Lahore on January 10. But he claims the police didn't investigate the incident and refused to provide him security. Speaking from an undisclosed location, Tony said that 'relentless threat' from Islamist groups recently forced him to leave Pakistan with his wife and their three sons.
>
> But Muhammad Munawar, head of the police station in Kot Lakhpat, said Tony failed to cooperate with them in 'verifying' his complaint. Munawar said he believes Tony 'fabricated' the attack to claim asylum outside Pakistan. 'We could not establish that any such incident took place in the Kot Lakhpat police station's jurisdiction against Radesh Singh Tony,' he told Radio Mashaal on January 23.
>
> Tony, however, rejects the police's view and claims it was the job of the police to investigate the attack." (Gandhara, 24 January 2020)

4.7 Zikris

Sources on Zikris in Pakistan are scarce. In a chapter on Zikris in Balochistan published in 2010 in the book *Islam and Society in Pakistan - Anthropological Perspectives,* historian Inayatullah Baloch provides the following background information on the sect:

> "The Zikris claim to be the followers of Syed Muhammad, who they consider to be the Mahdi[17]. […] In the fifteenth century, Syed Mohammad Jaunpuri claimed to be the last Mahdi, and scholars generally agree that he or one of his disciples was the founder of the Zikri sect […]. Syed Mohammad Mahdi was born in 1443 in Jaunpur (in present-day Uttar Pradesh) to a family of Syeds, descendants of the Prophet of Islam […]. […] He converted hundreds of Muslims (including some prominent rulers) and Hindus to his belief system, but he faced considerable opposition from the ulama because of his revolutionary teachings. […] Some followers of the Mahdi of Jaunpur live in India, where they are known as Mahdawi […], and some Mahdawi migrated to Pakistan in 1947 […]. […] Zikri doctrines deviate from orthodox Muslim belief but Zikris consider themselves to be true Muslims." (Baloch, 2010, pp. 260-262)

The article further states:

> "Most Zikris live in southern Pakistan, primarily in Makran and Las Bela in the province of Balochistan and in Karachi in the province of Sindh. Small populations are also found in Iran as well as in the Arab Gulf states. […] The city of Turbat in Kech (Kej) Makran is holy to Zikris. There they have constructed the Koh-e-Murad, which Zikris assert is a shrine but which

[17] "Mahdī, (Arabic: 'guided one') in Islamic eschatology, a messianic deliverer who will fill earth with justice and equity, restore true religion, and usher in a short golden age lasting seven, eight, or nine years before the end of the world." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, updated 15 March 2019)

some orthodox Muslims charge they consider to be a Kaaba akin to the one in Makkah." (Baloch, 2010, pp. 259-260)

A July 2019 article published in Dawn newspaper notes on the same topic:

> "In Turbat, in Kech district, Zikris have prayed for centuries at Koh-e-Murad. Every year, on the 27th of Ramazan, members of the small Muslim sect hold a mystical gathering at the shrine. Mainly based in the Makran region, the Zikris also inhabit in large numbers the Mashkay and Gresha areas of Khuzdar district, the entire Awaran district and many parts of Lasbela district. Many historians believe that Zikris were the native Baloch. Some claim they came from Fatimid Egypt and, travelling through Iran, they arrived on the Makran coast centuries ago. However, Zikris have a strong affiliation with Balochistan and have nationalist thoughts. Derived from the Arabic dikr — meaning 'pronouncement' or 'remembrance' — the term Zikri denotes the prayers which Zikris perform in place of the daily Muslim prayers." (Dawn, 14 July 2019)

The USDOS mentions in its June 2020 religious freedom report that "[e]stimates of the Zikri Muslim community, located in Balochistan, range between 500,000 and 800,000 individuals" (USDOS, 10 June 2020, section I). The above-cited Dawn article notes that "[t]he exact number of Zikris is unknown but it is estimated at around 600,000 to 700,000, with more than 100,000 living in Karachi, and a considerable number present in interior Sindh as well" (Dawn, 14 July 2019).

The Dawn article further explains the roots of the religious persecution of the Zikris and provides also information on their current situation:

> "The predominantly Baloch community lived peacefully side by side with the 'Namazi Baloch' (Sunni Baloch) until religious persecution reared its ugly head. When the government allowed Salafi clerics to settle in the Makran region, it triggered a discourse of hatred against the Zikris. Later, Deobandi clerics from Karachi and sectarian groups from Punjab also joined the campaign against them. In 1978, Ziaul Haq himself visited the region and had a long consultation with the local religious leaders, which has been documented by Maulana Abdul Haq in his booklet Zikri Masla. He claims that the 'ulema' demanded that Zikris be declared non-Muslim and Zia promised in the meeting that he would send the case to a superior court to resolve the issue permanently. Zia encouraged the clerics to sensitise people about the issue. The mullahs also tried to incite other Muslims in Makran and Balochistan against the Zikris in order to force them to the margins of society. A religious group Majlis Tahafuz Khatm-e-Nabuwwat, in collaboration with the Sipah-e-Sahaba, organised an annual congregation in Turbat at the same time as the Zikris' annual gathering at Koh-e-Murad near the city. These religious groups invited thousands of their followers from across Pakistan to stop the Zikris from performing their rituals.
>
> Over the last few years, the local administration has stopped the religious groups from intervening in the Zikris' rituals, but this action comes too late. A wide sectarian rift has already been created among the Baloch. Zikris are still the target of terrorist groups and religious zealots. In 2014, six Zikris were shot dead in a Zikr khana in Awaran district. In the

> same year, Zikri passengers of a bus were attacked in Khuzdar district of Balochistan. Seven of them were injured. In 2016, a Zikri spiritual leader was killed in Kech.
>
> The Zikris claim that they are targeted because of their political views — they have strong nationalist inclinations and they support nationalist parties in the province. Maulana Abdul Haq, in his booklet, also endorsed that the Zikris' secular and nationalist credentials were a cause for concern for the government. In retaliation, many young Zikris have joined insurgent groups, mainly the BLA [Balochistan Liberation Army] and the BLF [Balochistan Liberation Front]. […] the number of Zikris among insurgent groups is significant. Most of the important commanders of the BLF and the BLA belong to the sect." (Dawn, 14 July 2019)

According to an October 2019 article published by the Washington-based think tank Middle East Institute (MEI), many senior members of the Balochistan Liberation Army are Zikris as they feel "that the group protects them against Sunni extremism and state repression" (MEI, 21 October 2019).

The HRCP in its 2020 report on the state of human rights in 2019 notes:

> "Over the years, members of the Zikri community in southern Balochistan, especially around Gwadar, have experienced discrimination from the majoritarian Sunni community, finding it difficult to worship in their traditional ways. There are many indications that the local Sunni clerics were promoting hate speech against them." (HRCP, 2020, p. 177)

In a report on a fact-finding mission conducted in August 2019, the HRCP describes more detailed the discrimination faced by the community:

> "HRCP's mission met with representatives of the Zikri community in Gwadar. Over the years, there has been an increase in discrimination against the community both by mainstream society and certain state institutions. A Zikri respondent to whom HRCP spoke alleged that some of the community's youth had joined the military. However, after a few months, they returned home, claiming they had left because they were not allowed to worship according to their own faith and had been forced to offer their prayers according to the practices of the majority sect who served with them. Representatives of the community also said that some non-Zikri individuals and local clerics were engaged in promoting hate against the Zikri community – to the extent that locals had begun to avoid carrying out economic and social transactions with them because of their faith. The practice of zabeeha [the Zikri method of slaughtering animals for meat] for example by Zikri butchers, had been declared haram (unlawful)." (HRCP, 28 October 2019, p. 9)

Dawn in April 2019 published a letter to the editor written by a Zikri student complaining about teachers who use offensive words against Zikris and the inaction of the headmaster he asked for help. The student further mentions that "[e]lsewhere in Turbat some people manhandle Zikris and force them to offer prayers the way they want." (Dawn, 7 April 2019)

4.8 Atheists

Sources on atheists in Pakistan are scarce. A 2017 BBC News article on atheists in Pakistan observes that atheism is not illegal. However, being an atheist can still be life-threatening. Apostasy is in some interpretations of Islam an act punishable by death and as a result speaking one's mind on atheistic positions in public can be life-threatening (BBC News, 12 July 2017). According to some, "departure from Islam is defilement of the holy name of Muhammad and therefore an act of blasphemy, which brings apostates under the purview of Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws" (RFI, 2020, p. 32) says the Religious Freedom Institute (RFI) and explains that expressing disbelief or questioning the existence of god can be interpreted as an insult to Islam, Allah or the Prophet (RFI, 2020, p. 32). CSJ data on blasphemy accusations between 1987 and 2018 does not mention atheists being affected, although CSJ was not able to determine the religious identity of 44 cases (see CSJ, December 2019, p. 29).

USCIRF in a Policy Update on Pakistan's blasphemy law in October 2019 lists the following incident under blasphemy cases:

> "Ayaz Nizami and Rana Noman: On March 24, 2017, authorities in Karachi arrested Ayaz Nizami, vice president of the Atheist & Agnostic Alliance Pakistan, along with blogger Rana Noman, for allegedly translating literature critical of Islam into Urdu and posting it online. The case is ongoing, but the bloggers face the death penalty if convicted. The hashtag #HangAyazNizami was trending on social media within Pakistan following their arrest." (USCIRF, October 2019, p. 3)

In a 2019 article The Diplomat refers to Gallup Polls carried out in 2012 which found that the proportion of atheists among Pakistanis was two per cent, but mentions that the sample size consisted only of a few thousand (The Diplomat, 22 August 2019). There was no category included for atheists or non-believers in the 1998 population census (see Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, updated 5 March 2021). Atheists in Pakistan are a minority and keep a low public profile (DW, 14 December 2012). The 2019 article by The Diplomat cites an atheist who explains that "many of the Pakistani atheists remain closeted" and have to pretend to be Muslim (The Diplomat, 22 August 2019).

The above-mentioned BBC News article of July 2017 reports on atheists meeting in secret:

> "At these meet-ups, atheists are predominantly affluent, English-speaking city-dwellers. Money does grant a degree of privilege and protection from those who are hostile towards godlessness. But many self-identified atheists also live in Pakistan's villages." (BBC News, 12 July 2017)

The article also reports that in 2017 six atheist activists were reportedly abducted after posting on pro-atheist and anti-government forums. BBC News refers to an activist who expressed his view that the government is trying to enforce the notion that a good citizen must be a good Muslim. A journalist confirmed this statement, he believes "online atheist activists are being abducted by the government because challenging religion and challenging the state often go hand-in-hand". (BBC News, 12 July 2017)

The Diplomat in August 2019 reports that "secular bloggers were abducted under the unsubstantiated pretext of running pages that posted 'blasphemous content.' The kidnappings were part of a broader crackdown on anonymity", and Facebook pages and websites of atheist

groups were shut down by the government (The Diplomat, 22 August 2019). The article continues that while lots of atheist accounts disappeared from social media, safe spaces still exist:

> "Many of these spaces exist in educational institutes, ranging from closed groups to open debating societies, which have traditionally allowed room to discuss the philosophical aspects of irreligion as long as one steers clear of mocking Islamic personalities. […]
>
> […] Pakistani atheists say that the trend of abandoning religious orthodoxy has never been higher among the youth as it is today." (The Diplomat, 22 August 2019)

The 2017 BBC News article refers to atheists who describe that "the Islamic faith has become more visible in public life. Saudi-style dress codes are increasingly enforced. Television evangelists shape pop culture and to be Pakistani is increasingly linked to being a devout Muslim." (BBC News, 12 July 2017)

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