



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Pakistan: Christians and Christian converts

Version 3.0

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Preface

Purpose

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

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

Analysis

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

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

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

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation’s (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI’s relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

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

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

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion.

Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

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

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

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

Feedback

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

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

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

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

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

Contents

Analysis	6
1. Introduction	6
1.1 Basis of claim	6
1.2 Points to note	6
2. Consideration of issues	6
2.1 Credibility.....	6
2.2 Exclusion	7
2.3 Convention reason	7
2.4 Assessment of risk – Christians	7
2.5 Assessment of risk – Christian converts.....	10
2.6 Protection	11
2.7 Internal relocation.....	12
2.8 Certification	13
Country information.....	14
3. Background	14
4. Demography	14
4.1 Population	14
5. Legal context	16
5.1 Constitution	16
5.2 Blasphemy laws	17
5.3 Personal laws	18
5.4 Official festivals	18
6. Christian converts.....	19
6.1 Apostasy.....	19
6.2 Treatment of converts	20
6.3 Forced conversions	21
7. State treatment and attitudes.....	23
7.1 Discrimination.....	23
7.2 Security and support	24
7.3 Police and judiciary	25
8. Societal treatment and attitudes	29
8.1 Discrimination and harassment	29
8.2 Blasphemy allegations	31
8.3 Women.....	33
8.4 Communal and militant violence.....	34

9. Discrimination in education and employment	36
9.1 Education	36
9.2 Employment	38
Annex A.....	39
Letter to CPIT from the British High Commission (BHC), Islamabad	39
Annex B.....	40
Letter to CPIT from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)	40
Terms of Reference.....	43
Bibliography	44
Sources cited.....	44
Sources consulted but not cited.....	50
Version control.....	51

Analysis

Updated: 13 September 2018

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by state or non-state actors due to the person's religion, i.e. the person is a Christian.

1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 Decision makers should be aware that there are several Christian denominations, each with varying beliefs and practices. For a brief overview, see [BBC: Christianity](#).

1.2.2 Church networks in Pakistan include:

- **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome.
- **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics.
- **Independents:** Believers who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant).
- **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. Doubly-affiliated Christians: Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once.
- **Evangelicals:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls.
- **Renewalists:** Church members involved in the Pentecostal/Charismatic/Independent Charismatic renewal in the Holy Spirit (see [Demography](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

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

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

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

[Back to Contents](#)

2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.2 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instruction on Exclusion: Article 1F of the Refugee Convention](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Restricted Leave](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.3 Convention reason

- 2.3.1 Religion and/or, for Christian women, particular social group (PSG).
- 2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason alone is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed in each case is whether the particular person will face a real risk of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.
- 2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons and particular social groups, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.4 Assessment of risk – Christians

- 2.4.1 In the country guidance (CG) case [AK & SK \(Christians: risk\) Pakistan \(CG\) \[2014\] UKUT 569 \(IAC\) \(15 December 2014\)](#), heard on 16, 17, 19 and 20 June 2014 and 24 July 2014, the Upper Tribunal held that ‘Christians in Pakistan are a religious minority who, in general, suffer discrimination but this is not sufficient to amount to a real risk of persecution’ (paragraph 240). There are not ‘very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence’ to suggest a change in the situation for Christians in Pakistan since the evidence considered by the Upper Tribunal in [AK & SK](#) (Appx 14).

a. State treatment

- 2.4.2 In [AK & SK](#) the Upper Tribunal held that:
‘Evangelism by its very nature involves some obligation to proselytise. Someone who seeks to broadcast their faith to strangers so as to encourage them to convert, may find themselves facing a charge of blasphemy. In that way, evangelical Christians face a greater risk than those Christians who are not publicly active. It will be for the judicial fact-finder to assess on a case by case basis whether, notwithstanding attendance at an evangelical church, it is important to the individual to behave in evangelical ways that may lead to a real risk of persecution’ (paragraph 242).
- 2.4.3 In [AK & SK](#) the Upper Tribunal held that ‘Unlike the position of Ahmadis, Christians in general are permitted to practise their faith, can attend church, participate in religious activities and have their own schools and hospitals’ (paragraph 241).

- 2.4.4 There are no laws that discriminate against Christians in Pakistan, although comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation is lacking. Christians have their own personal laws regarding marriage and divorce; however, there are reports that some local administrations denied marriage registrations. Christian festivals are officially recognised (see [Legal context](#)).
- 2.4.5 In [AK & SK](#) the Upper Tribunal held that ‘Along with Christians, Sunnis, Shi’as, Ahmadis and Hindus may all be potentially charged with blasphemy. Those citizens who are more marginalised and occupy low standing social positions, may be less able to deal with the consequences of such proceedings’ (paragraph 243) (see [Blasphemy allegations](#)).
- 2.4.6 There have been reports of unlawful arrests and detention of Christians, and mistreatment of detainees whilst in police custody. There are reports of Christians being charged under the blasphemy laws and sentenced to death or life imprisonment. Courts have been reported to use the blasphemy laws discriminatorily against religious minorities. Blasphemy laws are disproportionately used against religious minorities, including Christians. The blasphemy laws apply to, and have been used against, all religious groups, including Muslims (see State treatment and attitudes – [Police and judiciary](#) and [Blasphemy allegations](#)).
- 2.4.7 Evangelising Christians may find themselves particularly affected by the blasphemy laws, which carry severe penalties, and may be able to demonstrate that use of the blasphemy laws against them while practising their religion could amount to persecution (see [Blasphemy laws](#)).
- 2.4.8 In comparison to the population of Christians in Pakistan against the number of reported incidents, in general, the level of state discrimination faced by Christians does not amount to a real risk of persecution and/or serious harm. Although there have been reported incidents of police harassment of some Christians, these are not sufficiently serious by their nature and repetition as to amount to persecution and/or serious harm and, in comparison to the population of Christians, the number of incidents is very low, indicating there is no real risk. However, decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors specific to the person which would place them at real risk. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they would be at real risk from the state authorities on return.
- 2.4.9 For the general situation of women in Pakistan see the country policy and information on [Pakistan: Women fearing gender-based harm/violence](#)).
- 2.4.10 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and, in regard to women, [Gender issues in the asylum claim](#).
- b. Societal treatment**
- 2.4.11 Both evangelical and non-evangelical Christians face discrimination and violence because of their faith. Discrimination against Christians exists in many aspects of employment and education. Christians from the lower classes may experience higher levels of discrimination than those from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Christians experience discrimination in employment and are generally expected to work in menial jobs. However,

some members of the Christian community in Faisalabad have become more socially and economically empowered and have integrated with the local Muslim community (see [Discrimination in education and employment](#) and [Discrimination and harassment](#)).

- 2.4.12 There are reports of harassment, threats and violence, including targeted attacks by militant groups – sometimes resulting in death – against Christians (see Societal treatment and attitudes – [Discrimination and harassment](#), [Blasphemy allegations](#) and [Communal and militant violence](#), and [Discrimination in education and employment](#)).
- 2.4.13 In [AK & SK](#) the Upper Tribunal held that:
‘The risk of becoming a victim of a blasphemy allegation will depend upon a number of factors and must be assessed on a case by case basis. Relevant factors will include the place of residence, whether it is an urban or rural area, and the individual’s level of education, financial and employment status and level of public religious activity such as preaching. These factors are not exhaustive’ (paragraph 244).
‘Non-state agents who use blasphemy laws against Christians, are often motivated by spite, personal or business disputes, arguments over land and property. Certain political events may also trigger such accusations. A blasphemy allegation, without more will not generally be enough to make out a claim for international protection under the Refugee Convention. It has to be actively followed either by the authorities in the form of charges being brought or by those making the complaint. If it is, or will be, actively pursued, then an applicant may be able to establish a real risk of harm in the home area and an insufficiency of state protection’ (paragraph 245).
- 2.4.14 Religious minorities are disproportionately affected by the misuse of the blasphemy laws, which are frequently used for personal or political gain. Whether or not a blasphemy charge is found to be true, the accused, their family and the whole community may be at risk of vigilante violence (see [Blasphemy allegations](#) and [Communal and militant violence](#)).
- 2.4.15 Regarding women, the Upper Tribunal, in [AK & SK](#), held that:
‘Like other women in Pakistan, Christian women, in general, face discrimination and may be at a heightened risk but this falls short of a generalised real risk. The need for a fact-sensitive analysis is crucial in their case. Factors such as their age, place of residence and socio- economic milieu are all relevant factors when assessing the risk of abduction, conversions and forced marriages’ (paragraph 246) (see [Women](#) and [Forced conversions](#)).
- For the general situation of women in Pakistan see the country policy and information on [Pakistan: Women fearing gender-based harm/violence](#)).
- 2.4.16 In respect of forced conversions from Christianity to Islam, The Upper Tribunal, in [AK & SK](#), held that:
‘Pakistani law strictly forbids forced conversions, as does Islam. The Supreme Court has actively pursued cases related to forced conversion and discouraged it. In such cases, the courts have ensured that concerned individuals have an opportunity to express their wishes to convert or

complain about any threat or pressure they may be facing in complete privacy and safety. The Supreme Court has also given them a period of reflection away from all sources that may influence their decision' (para 61).

- 2.4.17 Despite legal provisions to protect against forced conversion, Christian women and girls have been abducted, forced to convert to Islam and marry Muslim men. Government action to prevent forced conversions is reported to be inadequate (see [Forced conversions](#)).
- 2.4.18 In general, there is not a real risk of persecution and/or serious harm of Christians in Pakistan by non-state actors. Although there have outbreaks of communal violence, particularly in relation to blasphemy accusations, these are not sufficiently serious by their nature and repetition as to amount to persecution or serious harm. However, decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors relevant to the specific person which might make the treatment serious by its nature and repetition. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they would be at real risk from the state authorities on return.
- 2.4.19 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and, in regard to women, [Gender issues in the asylum claim](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.5 Assessment of risk – Christian converts

- 2.5.1 There is no law against conversion. However, a person who converts from Islam to another religion will be accused of apostasy and, as a result, may face accusations of blasphemy (see Christian converts – [Apostasy](#), [Blasphemy laws](#) and [Blasphemy allegations](#)).
- 2.5.2 The situation is far more difficult for a person who is known to have converted from Islam to Christianity, than for a person who was born Christian. It is rare, in Pakistan, for a person to openly convert to Christianity as it is likely that a person's conversion will become well-known within their community, with potential repercussions (see [Christian converts](#)).
- 2.5.3 It is difficult for those known to be Christian converts to live freely and openly in Pakistan. In general, society is extremely hostile towards converts to Christianity, with attacks on converts occurring even decades after they have changed religion. A Mullah may issue a fatwa calling for a death sentence against a convert who has been deemed an apostate. People who are known to have converted to Christianity suffer acts of violence, intimidation and serious discrimination from non-state actors, which can, in individual cases, amount to persecution and/or serious harm. Such treatment is prevalent throughout Pakistan.
- 2.5.4 There are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to suggest the situation has deteriorated for Christian converts – in relation to accusations of apostasy resulting in blasphemy charges, and the extreme hostility faced by society and Islamists. Therefore, decision makers must **no longer** follow the country guidance case of [AJ \(Risk, Christian Convert\) Pakistan CG \[2003\] UKIAT 00040 \(August 2003\)](#), which found that converts to Christianity

in general do not face a real risk of inhuman or degrading treatment (paragraph 36). However, each case must be considered on its facts.

- 2.5.5 A person who returns to Pakistan having converted from Islam to Christianity while abroad, who does not actively seek to proselytise or publicly express their faith, and/or considers their religion a personal matter, may be able to continue practising Christianity discreetly.
- 2.5.6 In cases where the person will be discreet about their religion on return, the reasons for such discretion need to be considered in the light of [HJ \(Iran\)](#). Decision makers should take account of how the person has practised their religion whilst in the UK. A person should not be expected to conceal their religion, their conversion or their activities relating to the conversion of others, if they are not willing to do so. However, if the person would conceal his or her religion or religious activities for reasons other than for a fear of persecution, then the person would have no basis for their claim for international protection. Each case must be considered on its facts.
- 2.5.7 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and, in regard to women, [Gender issues in the asylum claim](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.6 Protection

- 2.6.1 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by the state, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.6.2 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by non-state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.6.3 It is reported that police often fail to protect members of religious minorities, including Christians. However, there are also instances of local authorities protecting minorities from discrimination and communal violence. Since 2013, police have provided additional security – reducing, though not eliminating the risk – to major churches during religious services, as well as providing protection to Christian enclaves in major cities, to complement the community's own security arrangements. Officially registered churches are provided with police security on Sundays, and Christians are provided with protection during religious festivals or upon request. The government has taken steps – for example, the Zarb-e-Azb Operation launched by the military in 2014 – to limit the capability of terrorist groups that target the general public as well as religious minorities specifically. Despite these steps, religious minorities continue to be affected by terrorist attacks, extremist ideology and socio-political exclusion (see State treatment and attitudes – [Police and judiciary](#) and [Security and support](#), and Societal treatment and attitudes – [Communal and militant violence](#)).
- 2.6.4 However, in general, the state appears both willing and able to offer effective protection to Christians. A person's reluctance to seek protection does not necessarily mean that effective protection is not available. It should be noted that protection does not need to eliminate the risk of discrimination and violence. Decision makers must consider each case on its facts. The onus is

on the person to demonstrate why they would not be able to seek and obtain state protection.

- 2.6.5 People who are known to have converted to Christianity from Islam suffer serious societal discrimination and acts of violence, as well as discrimination by the authorities (see [Christian converts](#)).
- 2.6.6 As a result, the state appears both unwilling and unable to offer effective protection to Christian converts, who are targeted because of their conversion, and the person will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities. However, each case must be considered on its facts.
- 2.6.7 For general information on actors of protection see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Background information, including actors of protection, and internal relocation](#).
- 2.6.8 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and, in regard to women, [Gender issues in the asylum claim](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.7 Internal relocation

- 2.7.1 Where the person's fear is of persecution and/or serious harm by the state, they will not be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.7.2 Where the person's fear is of ill treatment/persecution at the hands of non-state actors, in general they will be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.7.3 In the case of Christians, relocation is normally a reasonable option, unless, as held by the Upper Tribunal in the CG case [AK & SK](#), a person is accused of blasphemy which is being seriously pursued (i.e. formal charges have been brought against the person); in that situation there is, in general, no internal relocation alternative (paragraph 247).
- 2.7.4 In analysing the evidence before it, the Upper Tribunal in [AK & SK](#) noted:

‘Figures of blasphemy charges, deaths and attacks on individuals, communities and churches are all of concern but they must be viewed against the size of the population and the fact that most take place in Punjab where radical Islamists have a strong presence. The option of internal relocation must be viewed against that background’ (paragraph 227) (see [Population](#) and [Blasphemy allegations](#)).

‘According to the UNHCR, internal relocation will generally not be an option in areas of FATA, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan which are all currently affected by security and military counter-insurgency operations and retaliatory attacks. In other areas, the availability of a viable relocation option needs to be assessed on an individual basis (paragraph 229) (see [Security and support](#)).

‘Individuals who are being seriously pursued by armed militant groups such as the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-i-Sahaba will generally not be safe in Punjab where these groups are based. They may also be unsafe elsewhere due to the wide geographical reach of these groups. The nature of the

threats received, the individual's personal circumstances and availability of support from influential connections are all relevant considerations. It is not likely that ordinary community members will have the resources or the inclination to pursue their victims outside the local area and so those facing harm from localised groups or individuals will generally be able to relocate to one of the many large cities. However, individuals subject to criminal prosecution under the blasphemy laws will not generally be able to relocate (paragraph 230) (See [Communal and militant violence](#)).

'Those against whom an FIR has been issued may in certain circumstances be able to relocate. The seriousness with which an FIR is lodged and pursued will need to be assessed along with the individual's personal circumstances, the existence of traditional support mechanisms such as the presence of friends and relatives in the area of prospective relocation and whether the individual would be readily identifiable there. Relocation to urban centres will generally be possible where the factors identified above do not come into play (paragraph 231) (see [Blasphemy allegations](#)).

- 2.7.5 Given that ill-treatment towards Christian converts is prevalent throughout Pakistan, internal relocation to escape such treatment is unlikely to be a reasonable option, particularly where the person is known to have converted to Christianity.
- 2.7.6 For general information on internal relocation see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Pakistan: Background information, including actors of protection, and internal relocation](#).
- 2.7.7 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) and, in regard to women, [Gender issues in the asylum claim](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.8 Certification

- 2.8.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.8.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Country information

Updated: 30 July 2018

3. Background

- 3.1.1 In its September 2017 report, the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) noted 'The majority of the Christian population are descended from low-caste Hindus who converted during the British era. While a small number of Christians are relatively prominent and prosperous, Christians are typically among the poorest in Pakistani society.'¹ As stated in a 2015 thesis by Sara Singha, 'Almost the entire Christian population of Pakistan are converts from Dalit communities.'²
- 3.1.2 BBC News reported in March 2016 that '... every cantonment city has an area known as Lal Kurti, traditionally the area where Christians reside', adding 'Christian communities remain in the poorest sector of society doing menial jobs. Entire villages in parts of Punjab are Christian with inhabitants working as labourers and farmhands. There are sections of the Christian community that are well off. They came over from Goa under the Raj, are more educated and mainly settled in Karachi.'³ (See also [Population](#)).
- 3.1.3 In presenting the findings of a fact-finding mission to Pakistan, undertaken in April 2017, Nathalie Boschman, a Country of Origin Information (COI) expert in Cedoca (the research desk at the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless persons, Belgium), stated at the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) conference on Pakistan, in October 2017, that:
'Christians living in Pakistan have traditionally been an underprivileged class. They live isolated and segregated from local communities. They like to live in their own restricted neighborhoods and they support their own relatives. In recent years, Pakistani Christian communities have been regularly targeted with violence. But also in mundane aspects of daily life, leave them feeling isolated and neglected. Many struggle to find jobs (most of them are employed as sanitary workers) and are discriminated in their educational life.'⁴ (See [Discrimination in education and employment](#)).
- 3.1.4 In its World Watch List (WWL) 2018, the Christian support group, Open Doors, ranked Pakistan 5th out of the 50 countries it deemed most difficult to be a Christian⁵.

[Back to Contents](#)

4. Demography

4.1 Population

- 4.1.1 The estimated number of Christians living in Pakistan varied greatly. Official estimates from the 1998 census (the most recent published official statistics)

¹ DFAT, 'Country Information Report Pakistan', (paragraph 3.83), September 2017, [url](#).

² Singha, S., 'Dalit Christians and Caste Consciousness in Pakistan', (page 85), 23 April 2015, [url](#).

³ BBC News, 'Who are Pakistan's Christians?' 28 March 2016, [url](#).

⁴ EASO, 'COI Meeting Report – Pakistan', (page 45), 16-17 October 2017, [url](#).

⁵ Open Doors, 'WWL 2018, Country profiles', nd, [url](#).

cited 1.59 per cent of the total population (132 million at that time) were Christian⁶. In 2018, an official at the British High Commission (BHC), Islamabad, estimated that there were 2.8 million Christians in Pakistan⁷. According to Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) 2018, there were 3.9 million Christians in Pakistan⁸. The US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted in its 2017 Annual Report 'After the 2017 census was released, non-Muslim leaders have complained that increases in their communities' population were not fully disclosed or reflected. Some activists have implied that the non-Muslim census figures have remained confidential because the non-Muslim population is likely entitled to more reserved seats in parliament based on its growth.'⁹

- 4.1.2 The BHC official noted that the majority of Christians resided in Punjab – the largest religious minority in the province – and estimated that 2 million Christians lived in and around Lahore and Faisalabad, and 0.5 million in the rest of Punjab¹⁰. In January 2013, the Christian news site, Christians in Pakistan, stated that the total Christian population of the district of Lahore was 368,089¹¹. The largest Christian neighbourhood in Pakistan was reportedly in the Lahore district of Youhanabad¹². There were Christian colonies in Lahore, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi¹³.
- 4.1.3 Many Christians were said to reside in Karachi, including the Goan Christian community¹⁴. In May 2015, Bishop Sadiq Daniel, leader of the Church of Pakistan in Sindh province, told The Washington Post that about 1 million of Karachi's 22 million inhabitants were Christian¹⁵. In December 2015, a reported 60,000 Christians lived in Islamabad¹⁶. Approximately 50,000 Christians were reported to live in Quetta¹⁷. According to the BBC News, reporting in March 2016, there was a 'sizeable population' of Christians living in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in Peshawar city¹⁸.
- 4.1.4 The Christian population was reported to be split equally between Catholics and Protestants¹⁹. Open Doors Norway cited the church networks operating in Pakistan and the number of adherents (in brackets), sourced by the World Christian Database (WCD) as of May 2017: Catholic (1,072,000); Protestant (2,412,000); Independent (686,000); Unaffiliated (20,500); Doubly-affiliated (-253,000); Evangelical (1,050,000); and Renewalist (778,000)²⁰.

⁶ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 1998 Census, Population by Religion, [url](#).

⁷ FCO, 'Letter to CPIT', 3 July 2018, [Annex B](#).

⁸ Open Doors, 'WWL 2018, Pakistan', nd, [url](#).

⁹ USCIRF, 'Annual Report 2017', (page 67), 26 April 2017, [url](#).

¹⁰ FCO, 'Letter to CPIT', 3 July 2018, [Annex B](#).

¹¹ Christians in Pakistan, 'Largest Christian Community of Pakistan', 2 January 2013, [url](#).

¹² Dawn, 'Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Ahmadi or 'other'', 22 May 2017, [url](#).

¹³ PIPS, 'Freedom of faith in Pakistan', (page 20), August 2018, [url](#).

¹⁴ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [Letter, Christians in Pakistan](#), updated 13 April 2016.

¹⁵ The Washington Post, 'A "bulletproof" cross rises in Karachi', 15 May 2015, [url](#).

¹⁶ AFP, 'Islamabad's largest Christian slum praying for survival', 25 December 2015, [url](#). available at

¹⁷ The Telegraph, 'Christians claim they are being forced out', 21 April 2018, [url](#).

¹⁸ BBC News, 'Who are Pakistan's Christians?' 28 March 2016, [url](#).

¹⁹ Writenet, 'Pakistan: The Situation of Religious Minorities', (page 17), May 2009, [url](#).

²⁰ Open Doors Norway, 'Church history and facts – Pakistan', nd, [url](#).

- 4.1.5 According to Open Doors, ‘The largest group of Christians belongs to the Church of Pakistan, an umbrella Protestant group consisting of four major Protestant denominations (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Lutheran) and is a member of the Anglican Communion. Other Protestant churches are various brands of Presbyterianism as well as many smaller denominations.’²¹ According to the World Council of Churches (WCC), there were 500,000 members of the Church of Pakistan, with 600 pastors²², and 400,000 members of the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, with 350 pastors²³.
- 4.1.6 The Christians in Pakistan news site reported that the mainstream churches of Lahore were Sacred Heart Cathedral, St. Andrew’s Church, St. Anthony’s Church and St. Joseph’s Church²⁴.

[Back to Contents](#)

5. Legal context

5.1 Constitution

- 5.1.1 Whilst there are no specific laws that discriminate against Christians in Pakistan, some Articles in the [Constitution](#) favour Islam over minority religions²⁵.
- 5.1.2 The Government of Pakistan’s response to the Expert Committee’s Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UN CERD), published on 26 November 2015, cited Articles 20, 21, 22, 26, 27 and 28 of the Constitution of Pakistan, which state minorities are equal citizens of Pakistan and are free to profess their religion and visit their places of worship. The Government’s response to the UN CERD added ‘We have a number of legislative measures and policies that translate constitutional principles into firm state action for promotion and protection of rights of minorities. [The] Government has recently strengthened [the] National Commission for Minorities (NCM) which works for the protection of minorities’ rights. The Commission comprises members representing all minority communities living in the country.’²⁶
- 5.1.3 The Government’s response to the UN CERD cited a Supreme Court judgement from 2012, which held that ‘a Church being a religious institution, its construction could not be halted as it was an expression of the right of the Christian citizens of Pakistan under the Constitution’s Article 20.’²⁷
- 5.1.4 The Government of Pakistan also cited a case heard at the Lahore High Court in 2005, noting:
- ‘In response to the plea that the Provincial Government [of Punjab] be directed to impose ban on the book “God’s Special Agents” and that the

²¹ Open Doors Norway, ‘Church history and facts – Pakistan’, nd, [url](#).

²² WCC, ‘Church of Pakistan’, nd, [url](#).

²³ WCC, ‘Presbyterian Church of Pakistan’, nd, [url](#).

²⁴ Christians in Pakistan, ‘Largest Christian Community of Pakistan’, 2 January 2013, [url](#).

²⁵ Constitution, [url](#).

²⁶ UN CERD, ‘Consideration of reports’, (paragraph 19), 26 November 2015, [url](#).

²⁷ UN CERD, ‘Consideration of reports’, (paragraph 61), 26 November 2015, [url](#).

respondent be restrained from preaching and projecting Christian faith in Pakistan, the court held that under Article 20 of the Constitution, every citizen enjoys Fundamental Right to profess, practice and propagate his religion and every religious denomination and every sect thereof has a right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions. The court was of the view that the Petitioner failed to point out and advance any argument as to how the actions of the respondent violated any particular law, public order or morality so as to exclude the application of Article 20 of the Constitution.²⁸

- 5.1.5 Despite some constitutional provisions, in its July 2017 report, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN CESCR) expressed concern at the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, whilst also noting concern that ‘... the legal provisions regarding non-discrimination within the State party, including articles 25-27 of the Constitution, only prohibit discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth in respect of access to places of public entertainment or resort and places not intended for religious purposes only, as well as in respect of appointment to positions of public service.’²⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

5.2 Blasphemy laws

- 5.2.1 Page 67 of the [European Asylum Support Office \(EASO\) Country of Origin Information Report: Pakistan Country Overview](#) shows the following tabulated summary of the blasphemy laws and penalties for breaching them.

Blasphemy laws

Tabulated summary (⁵⁷³) of the blasphemy laws (of the PPC, amended between 1927 and 1986) and the penalties for breaching them:

Penal Code	Description	Penalty
298a	Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of holy personages	Three years’ imprisonment, or fine, or both
298b	Misuse of epithets, descriptions and titles etc., reserved for certain holy personages or places, by Ahmadi	Three years’ imprisonment and fine
298c	An Ahmadi calling himself a Muslim, or preaching or propagating his faith, or outraging the religious feelings of Muslims, or posing himself as a Muslim	Three years’ imprisonment and fine
295	Injuring or defiling places of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class	Up to two years’ imprisonment or fine, or both
295a	Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs	Up to 10 years’ imprisonment, or fine, or both
295b	Defiling, etc., of Holy Qur’an	Imprisonment for life
295c	Use of derogatory remarks, etc; in respect of the Holy Prophet	Death and fine

- 5.2.2 The UN Human Rights Committee (UN HRC) stated in August 2017 that:

‘The Committee is concerned by the blasphemy laws, including sections 295 and 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code, that carry severe penalties, including the mandatory death penalty (sect. 295(C)), and reportedly have a discriminatory effect, particularly on Ahmadi persons (section 298 (B) and

²⁸ UN CERD, ‘Consideration of reports’, (paragraph 64), 26 November 2015, [url](#).

²⁹ UN CESCR, ‘Concluding observations’, (paragraph 19), 20 July 2017, [url](#).

(C)); by the very high number of blasphemy cases based on false accusations and by violence against those accused of blasphemy, as illustrated by the case of Mashal Khan [a university student murdered by a lynch mob, in April 2017, following accusations of blasphemy³⁰]; and by repeated reports that judges who hear blasphemy cases are frequently harassed and subjected to intimidation and threats. While noting the judgment of the [Supreme Court of 19 June 2014](#)^[31], the Committee regrets the absence of information on the implementation of that judgment.³²

See also [Blasphemy allegations](#) against Christians.

[Back to Contents](#)

5.3 Personal laws

5.3.1 The Christian Marriage Act, 1872, relates to the solemnisation of marriages for Christians in Pakistan³³. According to the USSD IRF Report 2017 some local administrative bodies continued to deny Christian marriage registrations³⁴. The dissolution of marriages for Christians is governed by the Divorce Act, 1869³⁵. The HRCP 2017 Report noted that, in 2017, the Lahore High Court ordered the restoration of a provision in the Divorce Act [Section 7 – revoked in 1981 by General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq³⁶], ruling that the ‘... repeal of the section was “unconstitutional and illegal being in violation of the minority rights guaranteed under the constitution to the petitioner and the Christians in Pakistan”.’ The restoration of the clause would allow Christians the right to divorce in cases where there was no adultery but the marriage had broken down³⁷. The HRCP Report added ‘Amendments to the Christian Marriage Act and Christian Divorce Act have been proposed as the provisions in both are outdated.’³⁸

[Back to Contents](#)

5.4 Official festivals

5.4.1 Christmas and Easter festivals are officially celebrated in Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan’s response to the Expert Committee’s Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UN CERD), dated 26 November 2015, noted that the President and/or Prime Minister of Pakistan hosted special functions on such occasions, and attended religious ceremonies in churches³⁹.

[Back to Contents](#)

³⁰ BBC News, ‘Mashal Khan case’, 7 February 2018, [url](#).

³¹ Supreme Court, ‘SMC No. 1/2014’, (paragraph 37i-viii), 19 June 2014, [url](#).

³² UN HRC, ‘Concluding observations’, (paragraph 33), 23 August 2017, [url](#).

³³ Christian Marriage Act, 1872, [url](#).

³⁴ USSD, ‘International Religious Freedom Report 2017’, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

³⁵ Divorce Act, 1869, [url](#).

³⁶ World Watch Monitor, ‘Divorce law for Pakistani Christians “modernised”’, 30 June 2017, [url](#).

³⁷ HRCP, ‘State of Human Rights in 2017’, (page 35), March 2018, [url](#).

³⁸ HRCP, ‘State of Human Rights in 2017’, (page 90), March 2018, [url](#).

³⁹ UN CERD, ‘Consideration of reports’, (paragraph 99), 26 November 2015, [url](#).

6. Christian converts

6.1 Apostasy

- 6.1.1 Professor of Law, Javaid Rehman, who investigated ‘the uses and abuses of certain interpretations of Sharia law and the Quran’, wrote in a 2010 publication:

‘Apostasy (also known as Ridda) occurs when a Muslim (by his words or actions) renounces and rejects Islam. Rejection or criticism of the All Mighty or His Prophet is perceived as an insult to Islam, offensive and routinely regarded as blasphemous... Blasphemy connotes the insult of God or Prophet Mohammad and other revered figures in Islam, and can be committed by believers and non-believers alike. Apostasy from Islam and blasphemy against Islam therefore remain (and have always remained) unacceptable.’⁴⁰ (see also [Blasphemy laws](#) and [Blasphemy allegations](#)).

- 6.1.2 Whilst there is no law against religious conversion, according to Shehryar Fazli, Senior Analyst and Regional Editor at the International Crisis Group (ICG), speaking at the EASO conference on Pakistan in October 2017, ‘A person who converts out of Islam will be accused of apostasy.’⁴¹ As stated in a letter to CPIT by the FCO, ‘... some scholars believe that the principle that “a lacuna in the statute law was to be filled with reference to Islamic law” could potentially apply to the crime of apostasy.’⁴²

- 6.1.3 Also speaking at an EASO conference on Pakistan, Matthew Nelson, Reader in Politics, PhD, at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, stated:

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

‘But what it means is that there is a space of informal engagement. The social persecution of converts from Islam to Christianity or something else is quite severe. But if you need to change your ID card, and you need to suddenly say, “I am not a Muslim,” informally you might be able to change your ID card. A little bit of negotiation. So, informal politics. This is not common, this is not easy, but this may be possible.’⁴³

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

‘Although no examples of anyone actually being criminally prosecuted for apostasy were found, conversion is not without consequence. It has been reported that if a married Muslim couple converts to another religion, the couple’s children become illegitimate and may become wards of the State. In addition, according to one report, though it is theoretically possible to change

⁴⁰ Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, ‘Freedom of expression...’, (page 4), March 2010, [url](#).

⁴¹ EASO, ‘COI Meeting Report – Pakistan’, (page 42), 16-17 October 2017, [url](#).

⁴² FCO, ‘Letter to CPIT’, 3 July 2018, [Annex B](#).

⁴³ EASO, ‘COI Meeting Report – Pakistan’, (page 34), 16-17 October 2017, [url](#).

one's religion from Islam, in practice, the state attempts to hinder the process. Converts from Islam and atheists may also be vulnerable to Pakistan's blasphemy law...'.⁴⁴

- 6.1.5 A person who converts to another faith or who is seen to renounce Islam in any other way can be targeted for blasphemy, which carries the death penalty and, according to sources consulted by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), once a Muslim decides to become a Christian and their conversion becomes known, their life is at risk⁴⁵; Pakistani society in general is extremely hostile to converts with reports of converts being harassed, attacked and 'tortured'⁴⁶.

[Back to Contents](#)

6.2 Treatment of converts

- 6.2.1 In a letter dated 17 March 2016, anecdotal evidence from the British High Commission's (BHC) external contacts in Pakistan reported that:
- '... it would be difficult for Christian converts to live freely and openly in Pakistan, as converts over and above being Christian. It is our view that people who are known to have converted to Christianity suffer serious discrimination, for example in the workplace or by the authorities. It is far more difficult for people in Pakistan who are known to have converted to Christianity, than it is for people who were born Christian. We understand that it would be rare for someone to convert to Christianity, or at least to do so openly, in Pakistan. It is therefore something of note for the community, with potential repercussions.'⁴⁷
- 6.2.2 There were reports of threats and attacks against Muslims who had converted to Christianity to get married. On 19 October 2015, Asia News reported on a family who had been forced into hiding for nearly ten years following threats they received due to their conversion to Christianity⁴⁸. See also the [Country Information and Guidance Pakistan: Interfaith marriage](#), for similar incidents against Christian converts.
- 6.2.3 In a November 2015 submission to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) stated 'Our sources have noted that once a Muslim makes a decision to become a Christian and if their conversion becomes public knowledge, their life is at risk. They are deemed an apostate and to have blasphemed the prophet Mohamed, which carries a death sentence. Our sources have informed us that usually a Mullah will be informed and he will issue a "Fatwah" and a male cousin or family member will attempt to kill or will kill the apostate.'⁴⁹
- 6.2.4 The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) cited the British Pakistani Christian Association (BPCA) as saying in December 2012 'In all

⁴⁴ FCO, 'Letter to CPIT', 3 July 2018, [Annex B](#).

⁴⁵ CSW, 'House of Lords Hearing', (pages 2-3), 10-11 November 2015, [url](#).

⁴⁶ IRB, 'Pakistan: Religious conversion', 14 January 2013, [url](#).

⁴⁷ BHC, 'Letter to CPIT', 17 March 2016, [Annex A](#).

⁴⁸ Asia News, 'A Pakistani family converted to Christianity is hounded', 19 October 2015, [url](#).

⁴⁹ CSW, 'House of Lords Hearing', (pages 2-3), 10-11 November 2015, [url](#).

mainstreams of Islamic jurisprudence abandoning Islam is considered a capital crime, particularly for men. Thus in general, families think and society thinks very poorly of converts to Christianity, and many deem it their duty to kill them. ... Pakistani society in general is extremely hostile to converts, and attacks on those who have converted can re-occur years or even decades after they have changed religion.' The IRB report provided examples of such attacks⁵⁰. According to the Jubilee Campaign, 'Converts to Christianity are often extremely vulnerable, finding police and local authorities on the side of those perpetrating violence against them.'⁵¹ The children of a Muslim man and a Muslim woman who both convert to another religious group are considered illegitimate, and the government may take custody of the children⁵². (See [Apostasy](#)).

6.2.5 The BHC noted:

'Our Political Section considered that internal relocation may be possible, in theory, as there were Christian communities in many urban areas such as Rawalpindi, and across Punjab and Sindh provinces. Due to the anonymity afforded by moving to an urban area, it may be feasible to relocate and not reveal the fact of the conversion. However, our view was also that the Christian communities were themselves becoming increasingly isolated from other communities. Therefore whilst it may be more difficult to socially exclude and harass a Christian who lives in a larger Christian community, it does not necessary preclude that harassment.'⁵³

6.2.6 According to Open Doors, whilst Christian converts may face risks from radical Islamic groups, their main source of danger was from their families as conversion from Islam was seen as shameful⁵⁴.

[Back to Contents](#)

6.3 Forced conversions

6.3.1 There were continued reports of forced conversion to Islam and forced marriage of Christian women and girls across Pakistan's provinces and the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT)^{55 56}. According to an April 2014 report by the Movement for Solidarity and Peace (MSP), statistics on forced conversions were either proximate or unavailable, partly due to a lack of reporting and monitoring⁵⁷.

6.3.2 According to MSP:

'Cases for forced marriages and conversions can be distinguished by a specific pattern or process: Christian girls – usually between the ages of 12 and 25 – are abducted, converted to Islam, and married to the abductor or third party. The victim's family usually files a First Information Report (FIR) for abduction or rape with the local police station. The abductor, on behalf of

⁵⁰ IRB, 'Pakistan: Religious conversion', 14 January 2013, [url](#).

⁵¹ Jubilee Campaign, 'Written statement' 7 June 2012, [url](#).

⁵² USSD, 'International Religious Freedom Report 2017', (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

⁵³ BHC, 'Letter to CPIT', 17 March 2016, [Annex A](#).

⁵⁴ Open Doors, 'Pakistan', nd, [url](#).

⁵⁵ HRCP, 'State of Human Rights in 2017', (page 165), March 2018, [url](#).

⁵⁶ USCIRF, 'Annual Report 2018', (page 66), April 2018, [url](#).

⁵⁷ MSP, 'Forced Marriages & Forced Conversions', (page 14), 7 April 2014, [url](#).

the victim girl, files a counter FIR, accusing the Christian family of harassing the willfully converted and married girl, and for conspiring to convert the girl back to Christianity. Upon production in the courts or before the magistrate, the victim girl is asked to testify whether she converted and married of her own free will or if she was abducted. In most cases, the girl remains in custody of the abductor while judicial proceedings are carried out. Upon the girl's pronouncement that she willfully converted and consented to the marriage, the case is settled without relief for the family. Once in the custody of the abductor, the victim girl may be subjected to sexual violence, rape, forced prostitution, human trafficking and sale, or other domestic abuse. These patterns of violence and miscarriages of justice are explored later in the report through an examination of illustrative cases.⁵⁸

6.3.3 In November 2016, the Sindh province criminalised forced conversions to provide protection for those who were victims of the practice⁵⁹. However, religious scholars objected to some of the clauses in the bill and it was returned to the Sindh Assembly for revision⁶⁰. The bill was still pending at the time of writing this CPIN⁶¹.

6.3.4 The US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted in its 2017 Annual Report:

'In 2014, Pakistan-based NGOs [non-governmental organisations], including the Aurat Foundation and the Movement for Solidarity and Peace in Pakistan, reported that more than 1,000 girls, many under the age of 18, are forcibly married and converted to Islam each year. Hindu and Christian women are particularly vulnerable to these crimes because of the societal marginalization of and lack of legal protections for religious minorities, combined with deeply patriarchal societal and cultural norms. Local police, particularly in Punjab province, are often accused of being complicit in forced marriage and conversion cases by failing to properly investigate them or by believing the male and his family over the female and her family. If such cases are investigated or adjudicated, reportedly the young woman or girl often is questioned in front of the man she was forced to marry, which creates pressure on her to deny any coercion.'⁶²

6.3.5 According to the USSD IRF Report 2017, 'Religious minorities said they remained concerned that government action to address coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam was inadequate.'⁶³ The FCO 2017 Human Rights and Democracy Report noted 'There were recurrent reports of forced conversions and forced marriages of Hindu and Christian women.'⁶⁴

6.3.6 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated:

'Rights activists reported victims of forced marriage and conversion were pressured and threatened into saying publicly they had entered into the

⁵⁸ MSP, 'Forced Marriages & Forced Conversions', (page 2), 7 April 2014, [url](#).

⁵⁹ The Express Tribune, 'Sindh Assembly passes bill', 24 November 2016, [url](#).

⁶⁰ Dawn, 'Sindh govt decides to review bill on forced conversion', 17 December 2016, [url](#).

⁶¹ The Express Tribune, 'Barbs fly, shoe waved during Sindh Assembly session', 20 May 2018, [url](#).

⁶² USCIRF, 'Annual Report 2017', (page 64), 26 April 2017, [url](#).

⁶³ USSD, 'International Religious Freedom Report 2017', (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

⁶⁴ FCO, 'Human Rights and Democracy Report 2017', (page 45), 16 July 2018, [url](#).

marriage of their own free will. Christian [...] organizations stated that girls from their communities were particularly vulnerable to forced conversions. In April [2017] according to Christian activist organizations, a 14-year-old Christian girl was abducted by a police officer, held for four months in Hafizabad, Punjab, and forcibly converted to Islam. With the assistance of civil society organizations, the family won back custody of her. A criminal case against the girl's abductor was pending at year's end.⁶⁵

- 6.3.7 According to the HRCP, '... in April [2017], Christian residents of Salik Town, a neighbourhood of Faisalabad, were told to leave the area or convert if they wished to continue living in the neighbourhood, following a communal dispute when a local Christian girl converted and eloped with a Muslim boy.'⁶⁶

[Back to Contents](#)

7. State treatment and attitudes

7.1 Discrimination

- 7.1.1 Writing on Christians in Pakistan in January 2017, Altaf Khan, a professor at the Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Peshawar, stated:

'In December 2015, the Capital Development Authority of Islamabad submitted a report suggesting that the Christian "ugly slums" of the capital be destroyed to keep the city clean. The CDA, in this unprecedentedly stupid move [...] argued that the campaign of destruction would preserve Islamabad's aesthetics and maintain its Muslim-majority demographic balance. The proposal was rightly contested by political parties, activists, and NGOs and thwarted by the Supreme Court, but it was a worrying sign of just how poorly Christians are thought of by the Pakistani elite.'⁶⁷

- 7.1.2 Despite constitutional provisions allowing citizens the freedom to profess their religion and to establish and manage their religious institutions⁶⁸, in October 2016, the Pakistan Christian Post reported that administrators in the city of Bahawalpur, southern Punjab, ordered the closure of house churches, often run by evangelical Christians who do not have the funds to build churches. According to the report, the order followed a complaint from Muslims who said they were disturbed by Christian prayers. The report added that permission to build new churches in Pakistan were not granted if the site was within 200 metres from a mosque or 100 metres from a Muslim residential area⁶⁹. In October 2017, the British Pakistani Christian Association (BPCA) cited a case in which 8 pastors were arrested for running house churches in Bahawalpur⁷⁰.

- 7.1.3 World Watch Monitor reported in June 2018 that 'Christians in a [Muslim-majority] village in Pakistan's Punjab province have been told to remove

⁶⁵ USSD, 'International Religious Freedom Report 2017', (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

⁶⁶ HRCP, 'State of Human Rights in 2017', (page 88), March 2018, [url](#).

⁶⁷ The Conversation, 'Breathing without living', 12 January 2017, [url](#).

⁶⁸ Constitution, Article 20, [url](#).

⁶⁹ Pakistan Christian Post, 'House Churches ordered to be closed in Pakistan', 20 October 2016, [url](#).

⁷⁰ BPCA, '8 Pastors Arrested', 9 October 2017, [url](#).

every visible sign of Christianity from their church, six months after being forced to sign a form pledging they would no longer hold services.’ According to the church land owner, local Muslims objected to the church. Local administrators said church services could not continue as the police could not provide security to an unregistered church. Deputy Superintendent Muhammad Tahir told World Watch Monitor he was trying to resolve the issue as the pledge to halt services was not legal⁷¹.

- 7.1.4 According to World Watch Monitor, church leaders have been arrested and fined for failing to put security measures in place at their churches⁷².

[Back to Contents](#)

7.2 Security and support

- 7.2.1 According to DFAT’s September 2017 report ‘Since 2013, police have provided additional security to major churches during religious services. This has reduced, but not eliminated, the risk of violence. Police also provide some protection to Christian enclaves in major cities, to complement the community’s own security arrangements.’⁷³ World Watch Monitor reported in June 2018 ‘Due to the rise of terrorism, all gatherings in Pakistan are provided police security. Churches [on an official list] are provided security on Sunday or any other given day that Christians request police protection.’⁷⁴ Speaking at an event in Lahore, in May 2017, Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan, chief spokesperson of the Punjab government, said the authorities were disturbed at ‘The intolerance, anger on religious matters and culture of lynching ...,’ adding ‘We have failed in protecting minorities from forced conversion.’⁷⁵ (see [Forced conversions](#)).
- 7.2.2 DFAT noted ‘In September 2016 four suicide bombers attempted to attack a Christian enclave on the outskirts of Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Security forces intervened and engaged the militants in a gun battle. The militants all detonated their suicide vests. One civilian security guard was killed in the attack, which was claimed by JuA [Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), a splinter group of Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)].’⁷⁶
- 7.2.3 The USCIRF Report 2018 noted ‘... in a positive development, Ehsanullah Ehsan – the spokesman for Jamaat-UI-Ahrar, the group that claimed responsibility for an attack in a public park against Christians on Easter in 2016 – turned himself in to authorities and is in custody.’⁷⁷
- 7.2.4 The same source stated:
‘The continued operation of terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), and Tehrik-e-Taliban (Pakistani Taliban) challenges the overall security of the country. These groups threaten not only members of religious minority

⁷¹ World Watch Monitor, ‘Pakistan: Christians told they can’t have a church’, 4 June 2018, [url](#).

⁷² World Watch Monitor, ‘Adding insult to injury’, 22 December 2017, [url](#).

⁷³ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.85), September 2017, [url](#).

⁷⁴ World Watch Monitor, ‘Pakistan: Christians told they can’t have a church’, 4 June 2018, [url](#).

⁷⁵ UCA News, ‘Pakistani official: “We have failed minorities”’, 16 May 2017, [url](#).

⁷⁶ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.85), September 2017, [url](#).

⁷⁷ USCIRF, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (page 66), April 2018, [url](#).

communities but also anyone who attempts to advocate on their behalf. This has resulted in politicians and judges avoiding the public promotion of rights for religious minorities, which has fostered the spread of an increasingly divisive and anti-minority narrative among the public.⁷⁸

- 7.2.5 However, the USCIRF Report 2018 also noted that the government of Pakistan took steps to limit the capability of terrorist groups that targeted the general public as well as religious minorities specifically. The report noted: ‘The Zarb-e-Azb Operation launched by the military in 2014 in the western border region targeted sectarian terrorist groups like the Pakistani Taliban and LeJ [Lashkar-e-Jhangvi], who have taken responsibility for several attacks against Christians, Shi’a Muslims, and Ahmadis. The impact of this operation continues to be felt today by terrorist groups who have a diminished capability to carry out attacks on vulnerable groups. The government has also provided additional security to religious minority groups, especially during religious festivals.’⁷⁹
- 7.2.6 The USCIRF Report 2018 also added that due to the poor implementation of the National Action Plan of 2014 (NAP), which laid down several strategies to deal with terrorism and address the spread of sectarianism and extremist ideology, religious minorities continued to be affected by terrorist attacks, incitements to violence against them, and socio-political exclusion⁸⁰. The DFAT report added that ‘... successful prosecutions of those responsible for politically motivated or sectarian violence are rare. This is due in part to the ineffectiveness of police investigations, and to the effect of threats against judges, lawyers and witnesses. The measures introduced by the NAP were intended to be temporary to allow time for improvements to civilian law and order institutions, but significant reform of the civilian justice system has still not eventuated.’⁸¹ (See Societal treatment and attitudes – [Blasphemy allegations](#) and [Communal and militant violence](#)).
- 7.2.7 The USSD IRF Report 2017 noted that ‘On December 25 [2017], Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa attended a Christmas celebration at a church in Rawalpindi and expressed appreciation for the role Christians played in the country’s public institutions and armed forces.’⁸²
- 7.2.8 According to the Vatican News, ‘Muslim politicians and activists in Pakistan have joined Christians in welcoming the news about Pope Francis nominating Archbishop Joseph Coutts of Karachi among 14 new cardinals he will elevate on June 29 [2018].’⁸³

[Back to Contents](#)

7.3 Police and judiciary

- 7.3.1 A 2016 Amnesty International (AI) report on the blasphemy laws in Pakistan noted ‘In cognizable blasphemy cases (other than Sections 295-A and 298)

⁷⁸ USCIRF, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (page 65), April 2018, [url](#).

⁷⁹ USCIRF, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (page 66), April 2018, [url](#).

⁸⁰ USCIRF, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (page 66), April 2018, [url](#).

⁸¹ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 5.2), September 2017, [url](#).

⁸² USSD, ‘International Religious Freedom Report 2017’, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

⁸³ Vatican News, ‘Pakistan’s Muslims, Christians welcome news’, 21 May 2018, [url](#).

the police are permitted to arrest the accused without a warrant. The relatives of individuals charged with blasphemy also risk arbitrary detention by the police.⁸⁴

- 7.3.2 According to the US Department of State's Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2017 (USSD HR Report 2017), police often failed to protect members of religious minorities, including Christians⁸⁵. Amnesty International stated in 2016 'There is a lack of a consistent, robust and timely response by the authorities to situations of such violence. The lack of response, and the failure to prosecute rigorously and promptly those responsible, leads to a climate of impunity for perpetrators of further such attacks.'⁸⁶ However, the USSD HR Report 2017 also noted that there were instances of local authorities protecting minorities from discrimination and communal violence and that police '... intervened on several occasions to interdict mob violence directed at individuals accused of blasphemy.'⁸⁷ (See [Security and support](#)).
- 7.3.3 The USSD HR Report 2017 noted 'In August [2017] police rescued a Christian teenager accused of blasphemy from a vigilante mob in Alipur Chatha, Punjab. According to local human rights organizations, the mob was beating the accused until the police intervened and took him into protective custody while his blasphemy charges were pending.'⁸⁸ The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated that police reportedly filed charges against several students after the only Christian student in the grade was beaten to death by one of his Muslim peers in August 2017⁸⁹. Dawn News Group reported on 6 June 2018 that the Balochistan Counter Terrorism Department arrested two organisers of the December 2017 bombing of Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta⁹⁰ (see also Societal treatment and attitudes – [Communal and militant violence](#)).
- 7.3.4 Reporting on alleged police brutality, the HRCP 2017 Report stated, 'Police in Pakistan allegedly beat a 14-year-old Christian boy to death on 9 October [2017] because he had got into a fight with a Muslim classmate who tried to bully him into renouncing his faith.'⁹¹ In June 2017 the website Christians in Pakistan reported that police and members of a Christian community in Kharian, Gujrat district in Punjab province, clashed after police accused a local youth of fixing a cricket match. Christians claimed their houses were 'invaded' and they were beaten by the police. The police denied the allegations and stated the locals obstructed the operation into a criminal investigation. According to the report, after complaints, the Station House Officer (SHO) of the local police station was suspended⁹².
- 7.3.5 Deutsche Welle (DW) reported on 28 February 2018 '... Sajid Masih, a 24-year-old blasphemy suspect, leapt from the fourth floor of the Federal

⁸⁴ AI, 'As good as dead', (page 28), 21 December 2016, [url](#).

⁸⁵ USSD, 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2017', (Section 1d), 20 April 2018, [url](#).

⁸⁶ AI, 'As good as dead', (page 14), 21 December 2016, [url](#).

⁸⁷ USSD, 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2017', (Section 1d), 20 April 2018, [url](#).

⁸⁸ USSD, 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2017', (Section 1d), 20 April 2018, [url](#).

⁸⁹ USSD, 'International Religious Freedom Report 2017', (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

⁹⁰ Dawn, 'Two facilitators of Quetta church bombing arrested', 6 June 2018, [url](#).

⁹¹ HRCP, 'State of Human Rights in 2017', (page 89), March 2018, [url](#).

⁹² Christians in Pakistan, 'Police unleashes third degree torture on Christians', 15 June 2017, [url](#).

Investigation Agency's (FIA) Punjab headquarters in Lahore and severely injured himself. In a video statement, Sajid alleged that he jumped because the FIA officials tortured him and ordered him to “sexually assault” Patras Masih, his cousin and the main accused in an online blasphemy case... Following Sajid's accusations, FIA Director General Bashir Ahmed Memon ordered an official inquiry.⁹³ (See also Societal treatment and attitudes – [Blasphemy allegations](#)).

- 7.3.6 In May 2018, DW reported on the arrests of more than 20 Christians in southern Karachi between March and May 2018. According to Christian community members, the police unlawfully detained the Christians – mostly youths – and denied their arrests for weeks before bringing formal charges against them for possessing arms and being involved in criminal activities. Police are legally obliged to bring suspects before a court within 24 hours of their arrest. Members of the community also accused police of harassment, whilst a Christian activist believed the police used arrests and detentions to extort money from families⁹⁴.
- 7.3.7 Amnesty International reported on the risk faced by judicial officials who presided over blasphemy cases, particularly if they acquit the accused. The report noted ‘Some judges have reported receiving letters and phone calls warning them of attacks against themselves and their families if individuals in blasphemy cases are acquitted.’⁹⁵
- 7.3.8 The HRCP 2017 Report noted ‘In September [2017], an anti-terrorism court in Bahawalpur sentenced a 35-year-old Christian, Nadeem James, to death on blasphemy charges. James, a tailor by profession, was accused by a friend of sharing “blasphemous messages” on WhatsApp.’⁹⁶ As well as citing the case of Nadeem James, the USSD IRF Report 2017 also reported on the case of Zafar Bhatti, a Christian who was sentenced to life imprisonment for sending blasphemous text messages in 2012⁹⁷.
- 7.3.9 Reporting in 2014, Al Jazeera stated, ‘Many lawyers told Al Jazeera that because blasphemy cases often inflame public sentiment, they are seldom dealt with fairly by the courts [...] the burden of proof in blasphemy cases was low and that despite the fact that it was difficult to prove blasphemy allegations, lower court judges – often under threat themselves – felt pressure to convict.’⁹⁸
- 7.3.10 The USSD HR Report 2017 stated, regarding the judiciary, that the protection of religious minorities was regularly failed by the courts, noting ‘Courts discriminatorily used laws prohibiting blasphemy against Shia, Christians, Ahmadis, and members of other religious minority groups. Lower courts often did not require adequate evidence in blasphemy cases, and some convicted persons spent years in jail before higher courts eventually

⁹³ DW, ‘Uproar in Pakistan over ‘torture and sexual abuse’ of Christian youths’, 28 February 2018, [url](#).

⁹⁴ DW, ‘Police arrest dozens of Christians in Pakistan’, 18 May 2018, [url](#).

⁹⁵ AI, ‘As good as dead’, (page 36), 21 December 2016, [url](#).

⁹⁶ HRCP, ‘State of Human Rights in 2017’, (page 89), March 2018, [url](#).

⁹⁷ USSD, ‘International Religious Freedom Report 2017’, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

⁹⁸ Al Jazeera, ‘Living in fear under Pakistan's blasphemy law’, 17 May 2014, [url](#).

overturned their convictions or ordered them freed.⁹⁹ Amnesty International stated ‘Many people convicted of blasphemy by the trial courts are eventually acquitted by appellate courts, but only after years of incarceration and uncertainty. Appeals following convictions in criminal cases, including blasphemy, are filed in high courts, and in the Supreme Court if rejected by the high courts, but this process can take several years due to the large volume of appeals.’¹⁰⁰

7.3.11 In its 2018 report, covering 2017 events, the USCIRF stated:

‘The government of Pakistan has not addressed the spread of sectarian or religiously motivated intolerant speech and has not prosecuted perpetrators of violent crimes against religious minorities. Despite the existence of specialized antiterrorism courts to deal with extremist suspects, a vast number of extremists have either been released from custody or avoided arrest and prosecution all together. Often, acquittals of terrorist suspects can be attributed to flawed police investigation procedures, which continue to persist across Pakistan’s police forces.’¹⁰¹ (See [Communal and militant violence](#)).

7.3.12 The USSD HR Report 2017 further noted:

‘In 2015 the Supreme Court suspended the death sentence of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman convicted of blasphemy in 2010, pending its decision on her appeal. Bibi had been on death row since 2010 after a district court found her guilty of making derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammed during an argument. Her lawyers appealed to the Supreme Court in 2014. The appeal was due to be heard in October 2016 but was delayed after one member of the three-judge bench recused himself. The court did not set a date for the next hearing.’¹⁰²

7.3.13 The USSD IRF Report 2017 noted ‘In January an ATC [anti-terrorism court] in Lahore acquitted 115 individuals charged with burning more than 125 Christian homes in Joseph Colony in 2013, following a blasphemy allegation against a member of the Christian community. According to press reports, the courts cited a lack of evidence in the acquittal [despite reported video footage of the incident¹⁰³]. At year’s end, no one had been convicted for the incident. The Christian whose alleged blasphemy sparked the attack remained on death row following his 2014 conviction.’¹⁰⁴

7.3.14 Also citing the acquittal, an Editorial published in Dawn in February 2017, stated that whilst it took 4 years to bring the alleged perpetrators to court, during which time they remained on bail, the Christian man accused of blasphemy was put on trial and sentenced to death within a year¹⁰⁵.

⁹⁹ USSD, ‘Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2017’, (Section 1e), 20 April 2018, [url](#).

¹⁰⁰ AI, ‘As good as dead’, (page 11), 21 December 2016, [url](#).

¹⁰¹ USCIRF, ‘Annual Report 2018’, (page 65), April 2018, [url](#).

¹⁰² USSD, ‘Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2017’, (Section 1e), 20 April 2018, [url](#).

¹⁰³ UCA News, ‘No justice for Pakistan’s Christian minority’, 15 February 2017, [url](#).

¹⁰⁴ USSD, ‘International Religious Freedom Report 2017’, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

¹⁰⁵ Dawn, ‘Editorial: Joseph Colony acquittals’, 1 February 2017, [url](#).

- 7.3.15 In February 2018, BBC News reported ‘A Pakistani court has sentenced one man to death and handed life terms to five others for murdering a student [Marshal Khan] who was falsely accused of blasphemy. Twenty-five others were convicted of lesser offences in the case and 26 people were acquitted.’¹⁰⁶
- 7.3.16 On 20 March 2018, Associated Press (AP) reported that a court ordered the arrest of Khadim Hussain Rizvi, described as a radical Islamic cleric and leader of the Tehreek-i-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLYRA). Rizvi was accused of provoking violence and damaging public property during protests in Islamabad in November 2017¹⁰⁷. Activists from TLYRA were cited in an incident in which a Christian was accused of blasphemy¹⁰⁸, and accused of inciting violence after graffitiing a church¹⁰⁹.
- 7.3.17 In March 2018 Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reported:
‘A Pakistani court has acquitted 20 people of charges that they were part of a lynch mob who burned alive a Christian couple that had been falsely accused of blasphemy in 2014. Brick-factory workers Shahzad Masih, 26, and Shama Shahzad, 24, were burned alive in an industrial kiln by a mob that had been incited by accusations the couple desecrated the Koran near the town of Kot Radha Kishan in Punjab by throwing away pages of the Islamic holy book along with the trash. After the attack, it emerged that the couple had been falsely accused. Police arrested scores of villagers in the case. An antiterrorism court in Lahore in November 2016 sentenced five men to death and 10 others were given varying jail terms for playing a supportive role in the killings. That court also acquitted 93 suspects in the case in 2016. Prosecutor Abdur Rauf says the court on March 24 acquitted 20 other suspects who had been indicted in the case at a later stage.’¹¹⁰

See also [Blasphemy laws](#), [Blasphemy allegations](#) and [Communal and militant violence](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

8. Societal treatment and attitudes

8.1 Discrimination and harassment

- 8.1.1 In January 2017, Altaf Khan, a professor at the University of Peshawar, wrote:

‘The plight of Christians has persisted for decades, but there has also been a rise of hatred against Christians since the late 1980s, when the dictator Zia ul Haq introduced Pakistan’s blasphemy law, particularly used to persecute Christians.

‘Pakistani society is still marred by racism and questions of caste, even among Muslims, despite the Qur’an setting out radical equality for all... So

¹⁰⁶ BBC News, ‘Mashal Khan case’, 7 February 2018, [url](#).

¹⁰⁷ AP, ‘Pakistani court orders arrest of cleric over violent rally’, 20 March 2018, [url](#).

¹⁰⁸ Al Jazeera, ‘Suspect in Lahore blasphemy case fighting for his life’, 3 March 2018, [url](#).

¹⁰⁹ UCA News, ‘Mob attacks Christian worshipers in Pakistan’, 5 March 2018, [url](#).

¹¹⁰ RFE/RL, ‘Pakistani Court Acquits 20 In Case Of Christians Burned Alive’, 24 March 2018, [url](#).

the Christian community reels under a double oppression of racism, based on the low castes many Christians come from, and religious intolerance towards their belief system.¹¹¹

- 8.1.2 In 2012, Asif Aqeel, the director of the Centre for Law and Justice in Lahore wrote, '[C]aste is still very much alive in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Muslims avoid proximity with the Christians due to the latter's origins – unknown even to most Pakistani Christians – in low caste.' He further noted that in some places, discrimination is so pronounced, 'Muslim barbers refuse to give Christians haircuts, as it involves physical contact.'¹¹²
- 8.1.3 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) stated, in a letter to CPIT, dated 3 July 2018, that:
- 'The FCO's Annual Human Rights Report 2017 noted that intolerance towards Pakistan's religious minorities, including Christians, increased over the last year. Discrimination and violence against Christians is widespread and Pakistan was ranked fourth on the Christian support group Open Doors World Watch List 2017 of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. Christians are targets for murder, bombings, abduction of women and girls, rape, forced conversions and eviction from their home.'¹¹³
- 8.1.4 The USCIRF Report 2018 (covering events from January 2017 to February 2018) noted that, during 2017, religious minorities, including Christians, continued to face attacks and discrimination from extremist groups and society at large¹¹⁴.
- 8.1.5 Following a small research study in early 2017 for Norwegian Church Aid, Muhammad Amir Rana, Director, at the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), stated in his presentation to EASO in October 2017, that some members of the Christian community in Faisalabad district had become more socially and economically empowered, and because of their better education they get good jobs or they have set up their own business. However, there was an underlying fear that sectarian violence may be diverted towards Christians. Amir noted 'This particular Christian community [in Faisalabad] is quite integrated within the local Muslim communities; we have found their churches and mosques together, the Fathers and the Mullahs eat together – this is the kind of culture they have. Their fear was the possibility that some religious group will try to exploit the situation and turn the anger towards Christians.'¹¹⁵ (see [Communal and militant violence](#)).
- 8.1.6 Speaking about Karachi, Shehryar Fazli of the ICG, stated at the EASO conference that the presence of sectarian and jihadist groups affected minority communities, stating that Christian cemeteries were defaced and many Christians were leaving the area¹¹⁶.

[Back to Contents](#)

¹¹¹ The Conversation, 'Breathing without living', 12 January 2017, [url](#).

¹¹² Morning Star News, 'Oppressive Powers in Pakistan', 5 December 2012, [url](#).

¹¹³ FCO, 'Letter to CPIT', 3 July 2018, [Annex B](#).

¹¹⁴ USCIRF, 'Annual Report 2018', (page 64), April 2018, [url](#).

¹¹⁵ EASO, 'COI Meeting Report – Pakistan', (page 51), 16-17 October 2017, [url](#).

¹¹⁶ EASO, 'COI Meeting Report – Pakistan', (page 92), 16-17 October 2017, [url](#).

8.2 Blasphemy allegations

- 8.2.1 Whilst Muslims and Christians mostly coexist amicably^{117 118}, outbreaks of communal violence, particularly in relation to blasphemy accusations, have occurred¹¹⁹ (see [Communal and militant violence](#)). According to the USSD IRF Report 2017, blasphemy laws were reportedly used by individuals to initiate complaints against neighbours, peers, or business associates to resolve personal disputes or to intimidate vulnerable people and that ‘there were instances in which government entities such as the police and courts were complicit in this practice’.¹²⁰ The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) report on the State of Human Rights in 2017 (HRCP 2017 Report) noted ‘It is widely accepted that the blasphemy law is used to settle personal scores, appropriate property, or attack a particular sect.’¹²¹ In a letter to CPIT, dated July 2018, the FCO echoed the USSD IRF Report and HRCP’s findings, stating ‘Abuse and misuse of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws to settle personal disputes is common, and religious minorities, including Christians are disproportionately targeted’, adding ‘The majority of blasphemy cases come from the Punjab, which has a high Christian population.’¹²² Whilst a provision in the Criminal Procedure Code states that blasphemy complaints under section 295-C of the PPC should not be investigated by an officer below the rank of Superintendent of Police, this provision was rarely implemented¹²³.
- 8.2.2 In 2016 a report by the Barnabas Fund, an organisation supporting Christian projects across the world, stated in regard to Christians accused of blasphemy in Pakistan:
- ‘The accused, together with their family, local Christian community and legal team, also stand at serious risk of vigilante violence. Even in prison they usually have to be held in solitary confinement for their own protection. This danger remains even if they are acquitted or the charges are dropped, with zealous Muslims seeking to please Allah by killing the blasphemer, especially if they believe the name of Muhammad has been defiled. This means that anyone accused under the laws has to leave their neighbourhood forever.’¹²⁴
- 8.2.3 The FCO letter to CPIT stated ‘2017 saw a continuation of the high number of blasphemy cases brought against Christians, including a young boy, Shahzad Masih, who has not been seen since his arrest in July 2017. In August a 17 year old boy was murdered after being accused of blasphemy by his Muslim classmates. Asia Bibi, a poor Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2011, remains on death row despite international calls for her release.’¹²⁵

¹¹⁷ BBC News, ‘Who are Pakistan’s Christians?’ 28 March 2016, [url](#).

¹¹⁸ PIPS, ‘Minority Rights in Pakistan: Historic Neglect or State Complicity?’, 1 October 2014, [url](#).

¹¹⁹ BBC News, ‘Who are Pakistan’s Christians?’ 28 March 2016, [url](#).

¹²⁰ USSD, ‘International Religious Freedom Report 2017’, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

¹²¹ HRCP, ‘State of Human Rights in 2017’, (page 32), March 2018, [url](#).

¹²² FCO, ‘Letter to CPIT’, 3 July 2018, [Annex B](#).

¹²³ NHRC, ‘Submissions on Proposed Procedural Amendments’, (page 8), 9 August 2016, [url](#).

¹²⁴ Barnabas Fund, 15 December 2016, [url](#).

¹²⁵ FCO, ‘Letter to CPIT’, 3 July 2018, [Annex B](#).

- 8.2.4 Two cases cited by the USSD IRF Report 2017 inferred the use of blasphemy laws being used to settle personal disputes. The report stated:
'In separate incidents in July and August [2017], authorities in Punjab arrested two Christian teenagers for alleged blasphemy; the families of both boys said the accusations stemmed from interpersonal disputes. Another Christian teenager in Punjab, Nabeel (Masih) Amanat, remained in custody on blasphemy charges at year's end; he faced up to 10 years' imprisonment if convicted. Kasur District police arrested Amanat in September 2016 for sharing an allegedly blasphemous picture of the Kaaba in Mecca on Facebook.'¹²⁶
- 8.2.5 Speaking at an EASO conference on Pakistan, held in October 2017, Matthew Nelson, Reader in Politics, PhD, at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, stated:
'... allegations of blasphemy [...] continue to target the Christian community. Having said that, it is crucially important to note that, although Christians and especially the Ahmadiyya are targeted with blasphemy allegations, the majority of blasphemy allegations still target other Muslims. [...] As a proportion of the population, Christians are vastly over-represented in these allegations of blasphemy. But, in total numbers, the difficulties surrounding Pakistan's blasphemy laws affect Muslims more.'¹²⁷
- 8.2.6 The HRCP 2017 Report noted:
'Although the religious minorities, especially Christians, continued to suffer because of the misuse of the law, a large number of Muslims are also in jail under blasphemy charges... Even after an acquittal in a blasphemy case, the accused is still at risk. In most cases, after proving their innocence, blasphemy law victims relocate to avoid trouble after their release from prison. Proving innocence in a false case of blasphemy is a very long process and by the time the accused is cleared, they will already have spent eight to ten years in prison.'¹²⁸
- 8.2.7 According to the HRCP 2017 Report 'In 2017, Pakistan witnessed an increase in blasphemy-related violence while the government continued to encourage discriminatory prosecutions and other forms of discrimination against vulnerable groups by failing to repeal discriminatory laws and using religious rhetoric that incited hatred against minority groups.'¹²⁹
- 8.2.8 The same source noted:
'According to official figures for January – November 2017, there were 135 blasphemy cases in the Punjab, 41 in Sindh, 11 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and 2 in Balochistan... Despite numerous convictions under the law, so far no blasphemy convict has been executed by the state. However, since 1995, at least 65 people have been murdered in Pakistan over unproven allegations of blasphemy. People accused of blasphemy have been

¹²⁶ USSD, 'International Religious Freedom Report 2017', (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

¹²⁷ EASO, 'COI Meeting Report – Pakistan', (page 34), 16-17 October 2017, [url](#).

¹²⁸ HRCP, 'State of Human Rights in 2017', (page 93), March 2018, [url](#).

¹²⁹ HRCP, 'State of Human Rights in 2017', (page 43), March 2018, [url](#).

murdered before their trials ended, and sometimes even after being cleared by the court. The blasphemy allegations alone are enough to put someone's life in danger.¹³⁰

8.2.9 The HRCP also reported:

'Five Christian families in rural Pakistan have gone into hiding after death threats were made against an 18-year-old because of his alleged blasphemy against Islam. Sonu Arshad, who lives in the remote village of Sukheki, 200 kilometres north of Lahore, belongs to one of the families – the only Christians in the village. The families fled on 3 November 2017 after a Facebook page purporting to be that of a local TV channel posted a photograph of the teenager and asked locals to "burn his church and give him the death penalty".¹³¹

8.2.10 International Christian Concern (ICC) reported that 6 Christians, from a town near Faisalabad, were charged with blasphemy on 23 February 2018. According to the report, the Christians were accused of insulting Islamic poetry, although a human rights defender claimed the allegations were because of a fight between Christian and Muslim children, which then turned into a religious dispute. The accused were charged under 295A of the PPC. The report added 'Since the blasphemy accusation was made, members of the Christian community of Elahiabad have fled their homes, fearing potential mob violence. In response, police have been deployed to the neighborhood to keep matters under control.'¹³²

8.2.11 According to Al Jazeera, reporting in March 2018, Christian residents of a neighbourhood outside Lahore feared returning to their village of Baba Bandoon Saeen after it was stormed by protesters looking for Patras Masih whom they accused of committing blasphemy¹³³. Also reporting on the incident, Deutsche Welle (DW) stated '... hundreds of supporters and activists of the Islamist Tehreek-i-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLYRA) party staged protests against Patras.'¹³⁴ Al Jazeera noted that the mob threatened to burn down the neighbourhood. According to the report, Patras surrendered himself to the police and his cousin, Sajid Masih, was also arrested. Both were accused of sharing blasphemous content online¹³⁵.

See also State treatment and attitudes – [Police and judiciary](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

8.3 Women

8.3.1 See the country policy and information on [Pakistan: Women fearing gender-based harm/violence](#) for the general situation of women in Pakistan. See also [Forced conversions](#) for information on forced conversion to Islam and forced marriage of Christian women and girls.

¹³⁰ HRCP, 'State of Human Rights in 2017', (page 93), March 2018, [url](#).

¹³¹ HRCP, 'State of Human Rights in 2017', (page 89), March 2018, [url](#).

¹³² ICC, 'Six Pakistani Christians Charged with Blasphemy', 26 February 2018, [url](#).

¹³³ Al Jazeera, 'Suspect in Lahore blasphemy case fighting for his life', 3 March 2018, [url](#).

¹³⁴ DW, 'Uproar in Pakistan over 'torture and sexual abuse' of Christian youths', 28 February 2018, [url](#).

¹³⁵ Al Jazeera, 'Suspect in Lahore blasphemy case fighting for his life', 3 March 2018, [url](#).

- 8.3.2 In her 2015 PhD thesis, Sara Singha reported on the prejudicial stereotyping of Christian women that resulted in discrimination against them:

‘Ameena Khan argues that prejudicial stereotyping of Christian women is common in local television shows in Pakistan. These television programs show “Christian” women with loose morals and behavior that is antithetical to Islamic norms and culture. American and western television shows reinforce this ideology with depictions of scantily clad women who are “Christian” because they are “western.” Most basti [urban slum] residents have access of satellite television and watch American and British shows on a regular basis. Sometimes these shows are dubbed in Punjabi and/or Urdu. Pakistan censors sexual intimacy from most television shows but not clothing. Khan argues that such portrayals of “Christian” women cultivate a perception of moral laxity among Chuhras [a Dalit (“untouchable”) caste] in bastis because they are “Christian”. Aliani argues such perceptions of Dalit women as na-pak [unclean/impure] makes them frequent recipients of sexual assault and violence.’¹³⁶

[Back to Contents](#)

8.4 Communal and militant violence

- 8.4.1 In its concluding observations, dated 3 October 2016, the UN CERD expressed its deep concern at ‘... the reportedly high incidence of hate crimes such as harassment, violent mobs and killings of persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Hazaras, Christian Dalits, Hindu Dalits and Ahmadis, and the absence of investigation and prosecution.’¹³⁷ (see [Police and judiciary](#)).
- 8.4.2 The Institute for Economics and Peace’s 2017 Global Terrorism Index stated the ‘TTP [Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan] was responsible for 283 deaths in 2016, which accounted for 30 per cent of total deaths from terrorism that year. [...] The largest bombing targeted Christians celebrating Easter Sunday at Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park in Lahore and killed 79 people. This was the deadliest attack in Pakistan since the 2014 attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar which killed 151 people.’¹³⁸
- 8.4.3 In its August 2017 report on the security situation, EASO stated ‘Sectarian violence across Pakistan continues to be a threat to the security situation in Pakistan and the broader region, according to The Diplomat. Shias, but also Sunnis (including Barelvi and Sufis), Ahmadis, Christians and Hindus are victims of religiously motivated violence, especially carried out by radical militant groups.’¹³⁹
- 8.4.4 According to Muhammad Amir Rana, Director, Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), speaking in October 2017 at the EASO conference on Pakistan, after Shia Muslims, Christians were the main victims of violence in Pakistan¹⁴⁰. The USSD HR Report 2017 noted that there were occasional

¹³⁶ Singha, S., ‘Dalit Christians and Caste Consciousness in Pakistan’, (page 72), 23 April 2015, [url](#).

¹³⁷ UN CERD, ‘Concluding observations’, (paragraph 15), 3 October 2016, [url](#).

¹³⁸ Institute for Economics and Peace, ‘Global Terrorism Index 2017’, (page 26), November 2017, [url](#).

¹³⁹ EASO, ‘COI Report Pakistan security situation’, (page 17), August 2017, [url](#).

¹⁴⁰ EASO, ‘COI Meeting Report – Pakistan’, (page 48), 16-17 October 2017, [url](#).

reports of mob violence against religious minorities, including Christians, adding that ‘Mob violence often accompanied blasphemy allegations, and individuals accused of blasphemy from both majority and minority communities were killed during the year.’¹⁴¹ According to the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), 12 Christians were killed in sectarian violence in 2017, compared to 16 Christian fatalities in 2016¹⁴². Although the primary target was Christians in a suicide bomb attack on Easter Sunday in 2016, according to reports, the majority of the more than 70 fatalities were Muslim^{143 144}.

- 8.4.5 Reporting on the death of a university student, who was killed by a mob after being accused of blasphemy, Al Jazeera stated in April 2017 ‘Increasingly... right-wing vigilantes and mobs have taken the law into their own hands, killing at least 69 people over alleged blasphemy since 1990, according to an Al Jazeera tally. Those killed have included people accused of blasphemy, their lawyers, their relatives, judges hearing their cases and members of their communities.’¹⁴⁵ (see also [Blasphemy allegations](#)).
- 8.4.6 DFAT noted in its September 2017 report:
- ‘[T]he Christian community is subject to communal violence. This violence can target individuals, churches, residences or other places where Christians are known to congregate. More than 70 people – including large numbers of women and children – were killed on Easter Sunday in March 2016, when a suicide bomber attacked a park in Lahore. Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), a splinter group of Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), claimed responsibility for the attack, and said it deliberately targeted Christians. Christians tend to live in concentrated areas or enclaves, which mitigates their risk of societal discrimination but increases their vulnerability to violence.’¹⁴⁶
- 8.4.7 According to the HRCP 2017 Report, ‘In October [2017], militants hurled a grenade at the Gospel Faith Church in Quetta. No casualties were reported as there was no one inside the church at the time.’¹⁴⁷ On 18 December 2017, a suicide bomb attack on Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta killed 9 and wounded 60 others. The attackers were stopped outside the church by police officers providing security, but one of them detonated his bomb. The Islamic State (ISIL) claimed responsibility. A spokesman for the foreign affairs ministry condemned the attack^{148 149 150}.
- 8.4.8 On 5 March 2018 UCA News reported that worshippers at the Pakistan Gospel Assembly church in Sahiwal district, Punjab, were attacked by men wielding sticks. A Christian rights activist indicated the attack resulted from a personal dispute but the attackers chose to target the church. The activist

¹⁴¹ USSD, ‘Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2017’, (Sections 1d and 6), 20 April 2018, [url](#).

¹⁴² CRSS, ‘Annual Security Report 2017’, (page 61), March 2018, [url](#).

¹⁴³ CNN, ‘Pakistan attack: How the Christian minority lives’, 4 April 2016, [url](#).

¹⁴⁴ FCO, ‘Letter to CPIT’, 3 July 2018, [Annex B](#).

¹⁴⁵ Al Jazeera, ‘Pakistani student killed over alleged blasphemy’, 13 April 2017, [url](#).

¹⁴⁶ DFAT, ‘Country Information Report Pakistan’, (paragraph 3.84), September 2017, [url](#).

¹⁴⁷ HRCP, ‘State of Human Rights in 2017’, (page 89), March 2018, [url](#).

¹⁴⁸ HRCP, ‘State of Human Rights in 2017’, (page 90), March 2018, [url](#).

¹⁴⁹ BBC News, ‘Deadly attack on Methodist church in Pakistan’, 18 December 2017, [url](#).

¹⁵⁰ USSD, ‘International Religious Freedom Report 2017’, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

added that the Christian villagers, numbering approximately 200, feared leaving their homes in case of further violence. The same source reported that a week earlier, clashes broke out between Christians and Muslims in Faisalabad after activists of Tehreek-e-Labaik (TLY) painted the wall of a Christian house, next to the Good News Church, with pro-Islam slogans¹⁵¹. Morning Star News reported, on 18 March 2018, that Christian worshippers were attacked by local Muslims during a church service at King Jesus Church in Burewala, 155 miles southwest of Lahore. According to the church's pastor, the police registered a first information report against the attackers¹⁵².

- 8.4.9 According to a report in The Telegraph, dated 21 April 2018, members of the Christian community claimed they were being driven out of Quetta following targeted attacks by ISIL. As well as the December 2017 attack on the Methodist church, ISIL claimed responsibility for 2 gun attacks that killed 6 Christians the following April. The Telegraph stated that 'The recent attacks and a campaign of threatening letters have prompted many of Quetta's 50,000-strong Christian population to consider fleeing to the port of Karachi.'¹⁵³

[Back to Contents](#)

9. Discrimination in education and employment

9.1 Education

- 9.1.1 According to The Voice Society, reporting in August 2015:

'Christian pupils frequently face discrimination, and they may be publicly ridiculed or even beaten by teachers because of their faith. The curriculum in non-Christian schools strongly emphasizes Islam. Christian children may be required to study it – even though the law says that they should not be – and they are not given parallel instruction in their own religion. They may be marked down in their examinations simply because they are Christians, and they face many difficulties in obtaining university places. It is not surprising that Christian parents would prefer to have their children educated in Christian schools.'¹⁵⁴

- 9.1.2 Whilst noting the contribution that madrassas (Islamic schools) had made to enhance access to education, the UN CESCR expressed concern, in its Concluding observations, dated July 2017, '... at repeated reports that the curricula of some madrassas do not provide any education other than that based on the Qur'an and have content that may incite hatred against religious and ethnic minorities. It is also concerned that some textbooks and curricula used in Sindh and Punjab contain stereotyped images of religious and ethnic minorities.'¹⁵⁵ In August 2017, the UN Human Rights Committee

¹⁵¹ UCA News, 'Mob attacks Christian worshippers in Pakistan', 5 March 2018, [url](#).

¹⁵² Morning Star News, 'Christians Wounded in Muslim Attack', 20 March 2018, [url](#).

¹⁵³ The Telegraph, 'Christians claim they are being forced out', 21 April 2018, [url](#).

¹⁵⁴ The Voice Society, 'Overview', 28 August 2015, [url](#).

¹⁵⁵ UN CESCR, 'Concluding observations', (paragraph 83), 20 July 2017, [url](#).

(UN HRC) also expressed concern at the religiously biased content of textbooks and curricula in both public schools and madrasas¹⁵⁶.

9.1.3 Regarding Christian schools and textbooks, Nathalie Boschman of Cedoca, stated: ‘... the role of religious minorities from textbooks is removed and textbooks are reviewed by each provincial education board. Christian schools are obliged to buy the same books as the Muslims and each textbook starts with an explanation of Islam, even textbooks on chemi[stry] or biology.’¹⁵⁷

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

‘Christians and Hindus have complained that the existing curriculum is inciting hatred against them. In many educational institutions, they have been forced to learn the Quran and take Islamic studies. Though they have the option to take other alternative subjects like ethics, they then have a lot of issues. The administration says they do not have the teachers or the resources, and this creates issues for them, and their youth feel more alienated within the society.’¹⁵⁸

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

‘Some school teachers have an extremist mindset and directly or indirectly try to influence non-Muslim children to convince them that their faith is illogical, and contrary to the universal truth and Islam as the divine faith. A Christian student said that in Class 6 (age 12 to13), twelve Christians left because of the “aggressive discrimination and pressure to convert”. It was a government school. Student interviews indicated that teachers often instructed non-Muslims and especially Ahmadi and Christian students to eat, sit, and play separately from other students; this response is a combination of teachers’ attitudes or ideology, the school curriculum, parents and the madrassa education (many children attend the mosque or madrassa in the morning or evening for religious instruction along with regular school).’¹⁵⁹

9.1.6 The CSW report added:

‘In 2017 CSW interviewed children from religious minority groups who described how they were routinely subjected to severe physical and psychological ill-treatment including being segregated, bullied, teased and beaten on multiple occasions by both teachers and classmates. Students from each faith group reported that they were made to sit separately from other students, and were insulted and humiliated by students and teachers because of their religion. Many reported being subjected to psychological torment, mental abuse, humiliation and routine taunts, and felt they had to accept this discriminatory treatment as part of their education.’¹⁶⁰

[Back to Contents](#)

¹⁵⁶ UN HRC, ‘Concluding observations’, (paragraph 33), 23 August 2017, [url](#).

¹⁵⁷ EASO, ‘COI Meeting Report – Pakistan’, (page 45), 16-17 October 2017, [url](#).

¹⁵⁸ EASO, ‘COI Meeting Report – Pakistan’, (page 52), 16-17 October 2017, [url](#).

¹⁵⁹ CSW, ‘Discrimination on the Basis of Religion or Belief in Education’, (page 63), February 2018, [url](#).

¹⁶⁰ CSW, ‘Discrimination on the Basis of Religion or Belief in Education’, (page 64), February 2018, [url](#).

9.2 Employment

- 9.2.1 According to PIPS director, Muhammad Amir Rana, speaking in October 2017, 'In Faisalabad, social discrimination in workplaces is an issue. More Christians are working in services sector because of an increase in literacy rates, but discrimination in workplaces is an emerging challenge for them. Especially during Ramadan, the holy month of fasting of the Muslims, they feel segregated and that they are discriminated against.'¹⁶¹
- 9.2.2 The USSD IRF Report 2017 noted that 'Christian 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.'¹⁶²
- 9.2.3 In June 2018, Myriam Renaud, a religion scholar at the University of Chicago, stated:

'... most Pakistani Christians living in major cities are consigned to sanitation jobs and a life of poverty. In Pakistan's northwest city of Peshawar, for example, as many as 80 percent of Christians are sanitation workers. In another of its major cities, Lahore, Christians account for 6,000 out of 7,894 sanitation workers.

'Newspaper ads for sanitation jobs, including by government agencies, frequently call for non-Muslims. One of Asia's Catholic news agencies, UCANews, reported that in May 2017, the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation issued a call for 450 sanitation workers, offering contracts that required employees to be non-Muslim and to take this oath: "I swear by my faith that I will only work in the position of a sanitary worker and not refuse any work".'¹⁶³
- 9.2.4 According to the USSD HR Report 2017, forced and bonded labour was widespread and a large proportion of bonded labourers included Christians¹⁶⁴. In a joint submission to the 28th Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN) and International Dalit Solidarity Network (ISDN) noted '... bonded labour in Pakistan is widespread, particularly in agriculture and brick making, and the majority of the bonded labour community belongs to marginalised and excluded groups such as the Scheduled Caste Hindus, Christians and Muslim Sheikhs.'¹⁶⁵ The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated that 'Religious minority community leaders continued to state that the government failed to take adequate action to protect minorities from bonded labor in the brick-making and agricultural sectors, an illegal practice in which victims were disproportionately Christians and Hindus.'¹⁶⁶

[Back to Contents](#)

¹⁶¹ EASO, 'COI Meeting Report – Pakistan', (page 52), 16-17 October 2017, [url](#).

¹⁶² USSD, 'International Religious Freedom Report 2017', (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

¹⁶³ The Conversation, 'What Pope Francis' choice ...', 28 June 2018, [url](#).

¹⁶⁴ USSD, 'Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2017', (Section 7b), 20 April 2018, [url](#).

¹⁶⁵ PSDN, 'Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pakistan 2017', (page 6), September 2017, [url](#).

¹⁶⁶ USSD, 'International Religious Freedom Report 2017', (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#).

Annex A

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

Updated 17 March 2016

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

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

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

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

[Back to Contents](#)

Annex B

Letter to CPIT from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)

Drafted 16 December 2013

Updated 3 July 2018

Country of Origin Information Report – Christians in Pakistan

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

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

Demographics

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

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

On this basis, there would be around 2.8m Christians in Pakistan. However, some in the Christian community believe this number is too low and that there are higher numbers of Christians in Pakistan, around 5-10% of the population. It is likely to be at the lower end of that range if they are right.

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

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

The Constitutional position of non-Muslims in Pakistan

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

http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1333523681_951.pdf)

The FCO's Annual Human Rights Report 2017 noted that intolerance towards Pakistan's religious minorities, including Christians, increased over the last year. Discrimination and violence against Christians is widespread and Pakistan was ranked fourth on the Christian support group Open Doors World Watch List 2017 of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. Christians are targets for murder, bombings, abduction of women and girls, rape, forced conversions and eviction from their home.

Blasphemy law

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

2017 saw a continuation of the high number of blasphemy cases brought against Christians, including a young boy, Shahzad Masih, who has not been seen since his arrest in July 2017. In August a 17 year old boy was murdered after being accused of blasphemy by his Muslim classmates. Asia Bibi, a poor Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2011, remains on death row despite international calls for her release.

There is a growing trend of Pakistani Christians leaving the country, in particular to live in countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Thailand. According to some media reports (Pakistani and Indian) families of Hindus/Sikhs living in southern Punjab/Sindh have migrated to India. Others (including Christians) have migrated to Canada and other western countries where there are small communities and some have come as asylum seekers.

Violence

Violent extremism against Christians in Pakistan is commonplace. In March 2013, the Joseph Colony in Lahore (a major Christian colony) was attacked by a mob following allegations of blasphemy against a resident. In September 2013, more than 85 people were killed and over 100 injured during a double suicide bombing at a church in Peshawar. In March 2015, the Pakistan Taliban claimed responsibility for two suicide bomb attacks at Christian churches in the Youhanabad area of Lahore which killed 15 persons. And on Easter Sunday 2016, bombs killed 75 persons in a park in Lahore. (Although the attack targeted Christians, the majority killed were Muslim). In December 2017 a church in Quetta, Balochistan province was bombed, killing nine worshippers and injuring about 60 people.

Institutions

There are many churches in Pakistan, which are mostly safe but as mentioned above they can be targets for extremist actions. Christian schools also exist – some of these have been nationalised recently and therefore are no longer run on a Christian basis.

Christian colleges were nationalised in the 1970's by the government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto although some have more recently been de-nationalised and returned to their former owners.

There is little protection of religious minorities from the Government. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony 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 although it is not yet fully operational. In March 2016, the government launched a Human Rights National Action Plan which includes a commitment to set up a Commission for Minorities.

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

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

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

Marriage

A Christian woman marrying a Muslim man is permissible, on the basis that the woman will convert to Islam. It is not permissible for a Christian man to marry a Muslim woman.

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

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

CLAAS

CLAAS is a partner NGO for the British High Commission, in particular for its work on forced marriages. The British High Commission has paid an annual retainer to them for their assistance since 2000. The main focus of CLAAS is religious intolerance, on which they are a trustworthy source. They have campaigned extensively against the blasphemy laws. Joseph Francis from CLAAS was awarded an MBE for his services in the role.

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

[Back to Contents](#)

Terms of Reference

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

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

- Demography
 - Population

- Legal rights
 - Constitution
 - Blasphemy laws
 - Official festivals

- Christian converts
 - Apostasy
 - Treatment of converts
 - Forced conversions

- State treatment and attitudes
 - Discrimination
 - Security and support
 - Police and judiciary

- Societal treatment and attitudes
 - Discrimination and harassment
 - Blasphemy allegations
 - Women
 - Communal and militant violence

- Discrimination in employment and education
 - Education
 - Employment

[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **13 September 2018**

Changes from last version of this note

Updated analysis and country information

[Back to Contents](#)