

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

[Home](#)

[> Research Program](#)

[> Responses to Information Requests](#)

Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment please email Basesdedonnees.DatabaseUnit@irb-cisr.gc.ca.

4 August 2015

JOR105234.E

Jordan: Situation and treatment of Christians; state protection and support services available (2013-July 2015)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

Estimates of the percentage of Christians in Jordan range from less than 2 percent (US 28 July 2014, 1) to 6 percent of the population (JICRC n.d.; Jordan n.d.; ICNL 19 June 2015). Sources indicate that Christians in Jordan typically live in Amman (Jordan n.d.; US 28 July 2014, 1;) and the Jordan Valley (ibid.). They also tend to live in Fuhais and Madaba (ibid.). According to an article by *The National*, an English-language newspaper based in Abu Dhabi, "most" Christians in Jordan are "middle and upper class" (14 Feb. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. Sources report that Greek Orthodox and Catholic are the main Christian churches in Jordan (Jordan n.d.; BBC 11 Oct. 2011).

According to sources, the constitution stipulates that Islam is the state religion in Jordan, but that freedom of worship for other religions is accepted (Georgetown University n.d.; US 28 July 2014, 1), in accordance with "the customs observed in the country, unless they violate public order or morality" (ibid.). Article 6 of the *Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* stipulates that "Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on grounds of ... religion" (Jordan 1952). According to the US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013*, although the constitution stipulates freedom of religious practice for non-Muslims, the report also notes that the government "prohibits religious practices that conflict with the official interpretation of [S] haria (Islamic law)" (28 July 2014, 1).

Sources state that Christianity is an officially recognized religion in Jordan (Freedom House 2015; US 28 July 2014, 3). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* further states that officially recognized Christian denominations include: "Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Assyrian, Coptic, Anglican, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, and Presbyterian churches" (ibid., 3-4). According to the same source, the following churches are not officially recognized and are instead registered as societies: "Free Evangelical Church, Nazarene Church, United Pentecostal Church, Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and The Church of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)" (ibid., 4). The same source states that the Baptist Church is registered as a "denomination" and does not enjoy the full benefits of registration; and that "the United Pentecostal Church and Jehovah's Witnesses" are not recognized nor registered as societies (ibid.). However, according to the *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief* on his September 2013 mission to Jordan, Baptists and Pentecostals are not recognized, but the organizations have status that is "largely comparable to registered associations" (UN 27 Jan. 2014, para. 23).

Sources indicate that by law, 9 seats out of 150 in parliament are reserved for Christians (ibid., para. 17; US 28 July 2014, 4). According to the UN Special Rapporteur, Christians have "usually held positions in the Government alongside Muslims," and have held "high-ranking posts in other State institutions, such as the police force, public media and universities" (UN 27 Jan. 2014, para. 17). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* states that the government traditionally allocates some higher-ranking positions in the military for Christians and that this is "anecdotally estimated to be about 4 percent" of such positions (US 28 July 2014, 4).

According to sources, there are private Christian schools in Jordan that are open to all religions (UN 27 Jan. 2014, para. 39; US 28 July 2014, 5). Sources further state that public schools only provide Islamic religious instruction, though non-Muslim students are not obliged to participate (ibid.; UN 27 Jan. 2014, para. 39).

2. Treatment of Christians

Sources describe relations between Christians and the Muslim majority in Jordan as "good" (*The New York Times* 26 October 2014), "positive" (UN 27 Jan. 2014, para. 16) or, "generally peaceful" (US 28 July 2014, 1). According to sources, Christians in Jordan "can worship freely" (Freedom House 2015), or, have a "greater degree of political and religious freedom" relative to the region (Georgetown University n.d.). The UN *Report of the Special Rapporteur* states that people belonging to religious minorities reported that "they can generally practice their religion freely," including: the choice of wearing religious dress, having "public processions" and performing rituals and prayers (UN 27 Jan. para. 18).

The National reports that most Christians in Jordan tend to live away from the more conservative areas "where residents might be less tolerant of Christians" (14 Feb. 2015). The *Report of the Special Rapporteur* states that its mission was mainly based in Amman however, he was informed that "in rural areas where 'conservative tribal traditions' shape social interactions, the 'climate may be very different and much less tolerant,' and that in areas where Christians do not typically reside, they may be viewed by local residents as not belonging to Arab society (UN 27 Jan. para. 20).

According to the UN, although Jordan has a "tradition of religious moderation," there is concern regarding "religious extremism" and concern that "radical voices within both Christianity and Islam seemed to be gaining ground" (ibid., para. 45).

According to Open Doors, a UK-based "international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches" that conducts advocacy and provides bibles, training and support services (Open Doors n.d.a), "some" individuals within Christian communities may face employment discrimination (Open Doors n.d.b). In contrast, the UN *Report of the Special Rapporteur* states that minorities "generally do not" experience discrimination in employment, the housing market, or hospitals (27 Jan. 2014, para. 18). This assessment "was largely shared" by members of non-recognized religious communities (ibid., para. 19). However, sources report that a person's identity card identifies the bearer's religious affiliation (US 28 July 2014, 7; UN 27 Jan. 2014, para. 26-27) and the UN states that this "renders the holders vulnerable to discriminatory treatment on the basis of their religion or belief" (ibid. para. 27). Such documents are used for school enrolment, visa applications, and applications for a public positions and participation in elections (ibid., para. 27).

According to sources, personal status issues are handled by Sharia courts for Muslims, and by religious tribunals of recognized communities for non-Muslims (US 28 July 2014, 2; Georgetown University n.d.; UN 27 Jan. 2014, para. 29) for matters of marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance (ibid.). The US *Religious Freedom Report 2013* states that there are three tribunals for non-Muslims: "Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Anglican," and members of the Protestant denominations that are registered as "'societies'" may bring their cases to the Anglican tribunal (US 28 July 2014, 2). There are no tribunals for individuals of unrecognized groups (ibid.). According to the UN, "individuals who do not fit into the patterns of recognized communities face a problem if they wish to regulate their personal status affairs in a predictable, fair, and non-discriminatory manner" (UN 27 Jan. 2014, para. 29). The UN states that "with increasing degrees of gravity," this affects members of non-recognized Christian denominations such as Baha'i, and converts from Islam to Christianity (ibid., para. 29). Christians from non-recognized denominations must appeal to the "'hospitality' of another Christian denomination or by resorting to civil courts," which reportedly leads members of these groups to complain of discriminatory treatment (ibid., para. 30), as civil courts largely operate on the basis of Sharia (ibid., para. 23). However, the UN also states that "issues can usually be resolved in practice," although the process adds additional complications and burdens (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* states that in February 2013 several Christian gravestones were vandalized in a Muslim-Christian cemetery in Amman and though Christian leaders were told that an investigation was underway at the end of 2013, "no one was arrested for the act" (US 28 July 2014,

8). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Further information on incidents of violence against Christians could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to sources, a number of Iraqi Christians settled in Jordan in 2014 (Freedom House 2015; *The New York Times* 26 Oct. 2014; Al-Monitor 19 Mar. 2015). *The New York Times* reported in October 2014 that over the course of three months, approximately 4,000 Christians had relocated to Jordan from Mosul, Iraq following attacks by the militant group, Islamic State (26 Oct. 2014). Al-Monitor reports in March 2015 that 1,000 Iraqi Christians who had fled northern Iraq were living in churches in Jordan, after having been "transferred to Jordan with the help of local priests and the government" (19 Mar. 2015).

2.1 Treatment of Converts to Christianity

Sources indicate that proselytising is not allowed in Jordan (BBC 11 Oct. 2011; US 28 July 2014, 3), and proselytizing Muslims "can be prosecuted under the penal code" (ibid.). According to Open Doors, in November 2014, an American pastor of Grace Church in Amman was deported (Open Doors n.d.b). Open Doors describes Grace Church's work as "reach[ing] out to Muslim refugees" (ibid.). On 13 November 2014, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief sent a letter to King Abdullah II requesting further information on the reason for which the pastor was arrested and deported (UN 13 Nov. 2014). The letter from the UN Special Rapporteur states that, based on information received, the Jordanian General Intelligence Department (GID) had been "closely monitoring the Grace Church due to its extensive humanitarian work in recent years with Iraqi and Syrian refugees" and that the GID became suspicious as "many" Muslims had sought assistance from the Church center (ibid.). Further information on state responses to proselytizing could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that there are no penalties under the constitution or civil law against Muslims who convert away from Islam (US 28 July 2014, 3; Georgetown University n.d.). The UN *Report of the Special Rapporteur* states that conversion from Islam to another religion is not a punishable offence under the criminal code (UN 27 Jan. 2014, para. 32).

However, according to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013*, under the constitution, issues pertaining to personal status, including religion, marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance are under the "exclusive jurisdiction of religious courts" and that Muslims are "subject to the jurisdiction of [S] haria courts" (US 28 July 2014, 2). Sources state that Sharia law bans conversion from Islam to another religion (Georgetown University n.d.; US 28 July 2014, 3), and that converts from Islam are still "considered Muslims and generally regarded as apostates" (ibid.). Furthermore, such converts from Islam are not recognized as "falling under the jurisdiction of their new religious community's laws" (ibid.).

The UN states that "civil law implications of such conversions are grave and have clear punitive effects" for those that convert away from Islam to Christianity (UN 27 Jan. 2014, para. 32). According to the UN *Report of the Special Rapporteur*, conversion from Islam may invalidate one's marriage; result in loss of child custody and inheritance rights (ibid.). Similarly, the *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* states that "any member of society may file an apostasy complaint" against a person who converts from Islam, and Sharia court judges can annul converts' marriages, transfer child custody to non-parent Muslim family members or declare the children "'wards of the state,'" and transfer property rights to Muslim family members (US 28 July 2014, 3). Furthermore, a non-Muslim wife who divorces her Muslim husband will lose child custody when the child turns seven (ibid.). The UN report also states that should a Christian and Muslim divorce, once the children reach the age of seven "a Christian wife will lose custody" of them; whilst in the case of a Muslim wife who divorces, she retains custody rights until the child is fourteen (UN 27 Jan. 2014, para. 34).

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* states that some converts from both Islam and Christianity reported encountering "social ostracism, threats, and physical and verbal abuse from their families and religious leaders," and people in interfaith relationships also reported ostracism, and in some cases, violence (US 28 July 2014, 9). According to a country overview on religious freedom in Jordan produced by the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs at Georgetown University, in Jordan, conversion between religions is a "serious social taboo, and there have been honor killings in both Christian and Muslim families for members who change religions" (Georgetown University n.d.). Further information about honour killings of Christian converts could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* states that Muslim converts to Christianity that had been harassed by government intelligence services in the past reported that "they had not been followed or interrogated in recent years" (US 28 July 2014, 8). Open Doors states that "the state does not play an active role" in opposing conversion to Christianity, "but maintains a permissive attitude towards the threats

and violence that arise out of such conversions" (Open Doors n.d.b). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. State Protection and Support Services Available

Information on state protection provided to Christians in Jordan was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. Sources report that the government of Jordan has organized conferences on inter-faith cooperation (Coptic Solidarity 14 Sept. 2013; Georgetown University n.d.), and sponsors the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS), a forum for interdisciplinary study of religious issues (ibid.). Sources state that King Abdullah II has made public statements supporting the coexistence of Christians and Muslims in the region (ibid.; *The Jerusalem Post* 10 Mar. 2015; Al-Monitor 19 Mar. 2015). In his 2014 address to the UN General Assembly, King Abdullah II stated that "Islam prohibits violence against Christians and other communities that make up each country. Let me say once again: Arab Christians are an integral part of my region's past, present, and future" (24 Sept. 2014, 1).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of international relations and Middle East studies at the University of Southern California stated that, to the source's knowledge, Christians in Jordan "have the same level of access to the police and other government authorities ...and can expect the same responsiveness...as any other citizens do" (23 July 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013* states that Christians reported the presence of plain clothed security officers outside the churches of "some Christian denominations" and that some church leaders interpreted their presence as "an attempt to provide better protection following threats against Christian groups in the region" (US 28 July 2014, 7). According to the Berkley Center country overview, "the government actively protects and maintains Christian heritage and historical sites" (Georgetown University n.d.).

According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013*, the government has an advisory body on "Christian religious affairs" called the Council of Church Leaders (CCL) (US 28 July 2014, 3). The CCL is comprised of the heads of the 11 officially recognized Christian churches and works to "facilitate official matters" for Christian organizations, including the issuance of land and work permits (ibid.). In coordination with the government, the CCL is also responsible for issuing marriage and birth certificates to individuals (ibid., 3).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Al-Monitor. 19 March 2015. Brenda Stoter. "Iraqi Christians Find Safe Haven in Jordan's Churches." <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/iraqi-christians-refugees-jordan-hopeless-islamic-state.html>> [Accessed 16 July 2015]

_____. 11 October 2011. "Guide: Christians in the Middle East." <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-15239529>> [Accessed 14 July 2015]

Coptic Solidarity. 14 September 2013. Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo. "King of Jordan's Defence of Arab Christians Amplifies Silence of Western Leaders." <<http://www.copticsolidarity.org/media-news-events/opinion/1942-king-of-jordan-s-defence-of-arab-christians-amplifies-silence-of-western-leaders>> [Accessed 14 July 2015]

Freedom House. 2015. "Jordan." *Freedom in the World 2015*. <<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/jordan#.VaUMcGfbKUI>> [Accessed 14 July 2015]

Georgetown University. N.d. Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs. "Jordan." <<http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/jordan#>> [Accessed 14 July 2015]

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). 19 June 2015. "NGO Law Monitor: Jordan." <<http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/jordan.html>> [Accessed 16 July 2015]

The Jerusalem Post. 10 March 2015. Ariel Cohen. "King Abdullah II Tells European Parliament Religious Coexistence Combats Extremism." <<http://www.jpost.com/Christian-News/King-Abdullah-II-encourages-European-Parliament-to-promote-tolerance-between-Christians-and-Muslims-393488>> [Accessed 16 July 2015]

Jordan. 1952. *Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*.

<<http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b53310.html>> [Accessed 31 July 2015]

_____. N.d. The Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Washington, D.C. "Culture and Religion."

<<http://www.jordanembassyus.org/page/culture-and-religion>> [Accessed 14 July 2015]

Jordan Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC). N.d. "About Jordan."

<<http://www.coexistencejordan.org/en-us/aboutjordan.aspx>> [Accessed 14 July 2015]

King Abdullah II. 24 September 2014. "Remarks by His Majesty King Abdullah II: Plenary Session of the 69th General Assembly, the United Nations, New York, 24 September 2014."

<http://www.un.org/en/ga/69/meetings/gadebate/pdf/JO_en.pdf> [Accessed 14 July 2015]

The National. 14 February 2015. Justin Vela. "Jordan: The Safe Haven for Christians Fleeing ISIL."

<<http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/jordan-the-safe-haven-for-christians-fleeing-isil>> [Accessed 16 July 2015]

The New York Times. 26 October 2014. Rana F. Sweis. "Christians of Mosul Find Haven in Jordan."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/27/world/middleeast/for-mosuls-christians-a-shelter-in-jordan.html?_r=0> [Accessed 14 July 2015]

Open Doors. N.d.a. "About Us." <<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/>> [Accessed 17 July 2015]

_____. N.d.b. "Jordan." <<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/jordan.php>> [Accessed 14 July 2015]

Professor of international relations and Middle East studies, University of Southern California. 23 July 2015. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

United Nations (UN). 13 November 2014. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

"Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief." (UA JOR 3/2014).

<[https://spdb.ohchr.org/hrdb/28th/public_-_UA_Jordan_13.11.14_\(3.2014\).pdf](https://spdb.ohchr.org/hrdb/28th/public_-_UA_Jordan_13.11.14_(3.2014).pdf)> [Accessed 22 July 2015]

_____. 27 January 2014. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief: Mission to Jordan*. (A/HRC/25/58/Add.2). <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/52fa1e214.html>> [Accessed 17 July 2015]

United States (US). 28 July 2014. Department of State. "Jordan." *International Religious Freedom Report for 2013*. <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/222509.pdf>> [Accessed 14 July 2015]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Caritas; The Jordan Interfaith Coexistence Research Center; The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies; Salam Institute for Peace and Justice.

Internet sites, including: *The Algemeiner*; Al Jazeera; Amnesty International; Amman Newspaper; Cable News Network; ecoi.net; Factiva; Human Rights Watch; *Jane's Intelligence Review*; Jordan – Ministry of Justice; *The Jordan Times*; Minority Rights Group International; *The Muslim World*; Salam Institute for Peace and Justice; United Nations – Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, Refworld; United States – Commission on International Religious Freedom; The Washington Institute.

[Tips on how to use this search engine.](#)

[Top of Page](#)

Date modified: 2015-08-13