

WWL 2023 Compilation of Pressure Points and Gender SRP profiles for countries ranking 1 – 76

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Introductory note

This compilation presents a per-country look at the Pressure Points and Gender Profiles for the top 76 countries on Open Doors World Watch List 2023.¹ Gender-specific research persecution (Gender SRP) analysts conducted analysis on these 76 countries, utilizing existing qualitative information to draw out gender-specific forms of persecution for each country. Gender SRP analysts use the term “Pressure Points” to describe these pressures. Detailed information on the nature of this research, as well as definitions for these 30 Pressure Points, are available in the Methodology of *Web of Forces: The Gender Report 2023*.²

The results of this research formed the basis of the *Web of Forces: The Gender Report 2023* which presents global trends and findings. To enhance country-specific understanding of Gender SRP, researchers further utilized the results to compose gender profiles for each of the 76 countries. These profiles are collated below, alongside the accompanying Pressure Points identified for each country, by gender.

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¹ WWL 2023 Compilation of All Main Documents, <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/WWL-2023-Compilation-of-main-documents.pdf>

² Web of Forces: The Gender Report 2023, p. 29, <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GSRP-Report-DIGITAL-ODI-2023-March.pdf>

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1) North Korea

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

An estimated 80% of all North Korean defectors are women, and many North Korean women who defect to China are subject to human trafficking. During the COVID-19 pandemic, North Korean repatriations were temporarily brought to a halt but have since resumed ([RFA, 19 July 2021](#)). Others may face repeated trafficking, and a continuous cycle of violence and harassment from the Chinese who purchased them.

Tens of thousands of North Korean Christians are in labor camps for their faith, where repatriated female defectors and prisoners in DPRK labor camps remain highly vulnerable to sexual violence during the interrogation process, as well as daily prison life. A [report](#) on the human rights violations against women in the DPRK highlights that rape, other sexual violence and torture in detention facilities of women is endemic, and guards are known to sexually abuse or exploit female prisoners (United Nations 2020 report, “Human rights violations against women detained in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea”).

Sources indicate that rape has commonly been used during the questioning of female repatriated escapees. Due to the fall in repatriations caused by COVID-19 travel restrictions, such instances have decreased. One country expert summarized: “Cases of sexual violence and forced abortion in the camps are confirmed through many testimonies from North Korean defectors. Christian female prisoners are exposed to more severe sexual violence...because Christian prisoners are treated worse than normal criminals; they are not even considered as human beings.” The practice of forced abortions in the camps is particularly for repatriated North Korean refugee women who are pregnant by a Chinese father (often the result of being a victim of human trafficking); there are many documented instances of North Korean border guards being instructed to carry out forced abortions supposedly to avoid the North Korean bloodline from being ‘defiled’.

These assaults likely represent a mere fraction of the total rapes committed against Christian women in any given year, as authorities understand the importance of sexual purity in Christian values, and tactically use sexual abuse to intimidate and humiliate. As described by a country expert: “The awareness of human rights of women is weak in North Korean society. Domestic violence is prevalent, and laws and social systems to protect women is insufficient or not working properly.”

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

The patriarchal society of North Korea means that state monitoring and control over the population is especially focused on the male heads of the household. All male adults must belong to workplaces allocated by the government. They have to confirm their attendance at work and cannot stop working for any private reason, making it harder for them to flee the country than women. This is because job allocation is a government system of controlling people.

Commenting on the differences between persecution of men and women, a country expert shared that authorities actively sought to focus on males: “There is a testimony from a former North Korean officer that guilt-by-association is applied mainly to the patriarchal bloodline, so the sons of Christians are punished more severely than the Christians’ wife and daughters.”

The mandatory 10-year military conscription (starting at 17 for male youths) always forces the issue of whether someone has a connection to Christianity in their family history. If such a connection is found, then preferred forms of military service are disallowed. Likewise, those with an identifiable Christian connection are consigned to the lowest positions within universities and workplaces and are denied Party membership. Christian men also suffer maltreatment and physical abuse within the context of labor camps.

2) Somalia

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In Somalia, the social life is primarily clan-based, and almost exclusively Muslim. As a result, women in Somalia mostly lead prescribed lives with little leeway for personal belief or expression. A woman does not have a voice in her community and is dependent on men. Young female converts to Christianity remain one of the most vulnerable populations. Commonly, a woman suspected of Christianity will be humiliated in public, kept under strict house arrest, raped, abducted, forcibly married to a radical sheikh or killed. For example, when a female convert to Christianity was this year discovered by her family, “arrested in her room and tied on her bed with a chain for six months” until another believer was able to come to the rescue. If already married, she will likely be divorced and have her children taken away to ensure that they are raised in an Islamic way.

Forced and early marriages are commonplace (and legally permissible) in Somalia. As such, forced marriage – often to much older men – is easily accessible as a means of coercion to restore converts back to Islam. Some are pressured by families, whilst others are abducted by radical Muslims for the purpose of forced conversion, marriage and sexual slavery. Insecurity in the country due to Al-Shabaab and clan militias has seen a concerning [80% rise in sexual violence](#), primarily against girls (Forbes, 2021). Furthermore, FGM remains rife across the country with more than [76%](#) of women in support of the perpetuation of the practice (28TooMany, 2022). As one country expert explains, “In Somalia, over 90% or more of girls and women have been subjected to FGM despite it having dire consequences, including excruciating pain, permanent disability, bleeding and even death. Talks on ending this practice remains forbidden.”

[Education](#) is often brief for girls, with only 5% making it to high school enrolment (No Ceilings: The Full Participation Project, accessed 3 November 2022). In education, Christian girls can be pressured into attending Islamic Duksi classes and dressing in al-Shabaab compliant burkas. In combination with discriminatory inheritance practices, this can exacerbate women’s economic vulnerability, which is often exploited. Christian women also suffer when their husbands are imprisoned or killed; widows tend to be forced to marry Muslim men, property is confiscated, and the widow is left at the mercy of the man's family. Many are taken advantage of by male relatives and young daughters married off. The family often ends up impoverished.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	False charges; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

A Somali first identifies himself as a Muslim then a Somali.” This common understanding of male identity means that within the tight social controls of the patriarchal clan society, men and boys merely suspected of conversion to Christianity face extreme violations of their fundamental rights. They are at risk of being physically assaulted, imprisoned, heavily threatened, tortured, abducted, or killed in abhorrent ways. These are no idle threats and fear is a constant companion for Somali Christian men and boys.

Men face more hostile treatment because they are perceived as leaders who ought to represent the Islamic faith; expected to lead their family in religious matters, they can consequently be blamed if a family member converts. Leadership positions are removed and they lose their wives and children. For those suspected of conversion themselves, pressure is applied on them to conform by their local community. For instance, they may be deliberately selected to lead the Mosque prayers and be expected to grow a beard, marry more than one wife or perform Islamic rituals in public. These are means of testing suspected converts.

Additionally, boys are expected to own and operate weapons, and many are abducted and indoctrinated by al-Shabaab. Families forcefully send their young men, including converts, to Islamic rehabilitation centers to be trained as al-Shabaab militia, and consequently, “forced into radicalism” as one expert shared. If exposed within this context as Christians, they face further dangers; as one country expert notes, “the family unit is usually the first point of attack or persecution of Christians especially converts.”

If discovered, Christian men are also denied their inheritance and boys are denied education. In Christian families, the whole family and community is affected if the husband is killed or compromised, for men tend to be the financial providers. When the men are killed, their family is often left unprotected, labeled 'kaffirs' and seen as a stain on the community. The underground church also suffers greatly when the men are persecuted or killed because most of the other men opt to go deeper underground, leading to leadership crises.

3) Yemen

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

Yemen is a strongly male-controlled society in which women enjoy few rights; women are expected to obey their fathers, brothers, uncles, and husbands. Without the permission of their male guardian, they do not have equal rights in relation to divorce, inheritance or child custody (HRW 2021 country chapter). Conversion from Islam to Christianity is forbidden both in Islam and in Yemeni law. Within this patriarchal, Islamic context, a female converting to Christianity is considered a shameful act for the whole family. According to a country expert: "Under Arab tribal law, women who convert to Christianity from Islam have dishonored their families, clans and tribes and are subject to the harshest penalties, including honor killings."

Women and girls have more limited access than men to information about the Christian faith and participation in a church group. Because families closely monitor the activities of female members of the household, their coming and going from the household and their telephones come under greater scrutiny (particularly as cell phones are often shared by family members), and it is often more difficult for a female convert to explore her faith and/or practice it with others. This results in fewer women and girls becoming Christians, being active in local churches and passing on their faith to their children.

Converts from a Muslim background are most vulnerable. In a typical scenario, female converts will have their telephone and other means of communication taken away. Next, she might be isolated in the home,

physically and mentally abused, and possibly given in marriage to a devout Muslim, raped or even killed to ‘restore the honor’ of the tribe or family. A country expert explains: “The family would try to isolate such individuals to prevent the spread of corruptive influence.” The family control of girls is the cultural norm in much of the country, although much less so in major governorates such as Sana’a and Aden.

Christian women and girls also risk being sexually abused at the hands of militias due to the concept of “*anfāl*,” which permits non-Muslims in some circumstances to be treated as slaves as part of the spoils of war ([Quran, Surah Al-Anfal](#)). According to local experts these groups are running prostitution rings in the country; there are some reports that Christian migrants in Yemen, as well as Yemeni female Muslim converts to Christianity risk being exploited. There is no clear data yet indicating to what extent Christians may have been raped while in detention, although this is believed to occur, particularly in Houthi-controlled areas.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Life in general in Yemen is tremendously difficult in an ongoing war with heavy restrictions on religious freedom. The most common pressure for Yemeni male converts comes from family and community. Pressure varies in intensity according to the family hierarchy; it is most keenly felt by women and girls, followed by younger men, followed by older men (reflecting cultural levels of status and freedom).

All males, including Christians, can be forced to join militias, if they are of military age. [Young boys](#) are also being recruited into militias (Deutsche Welle, 7 October 2021). When boys are dragged into the army and war, it affects their education and future - not just because of the amount of time it takes from their lives - but also because of the highly controlled Islamic environment in which training takes place.

Male converts to Christianity face a greater risk of losing their job, being beaten and being imprisoned by the local authorities. Whereas women are most likely to experience pressure in the private sphere, men are more likely to experience challenges in the public sphere and Yemen’s collectivist culture. (However, some male converts married to Muslim women do report being perceived as unclean by their wives and

are hence shunned from physical contact). Pastors and church leaders are also in danger of imprisonment if discovered. Within detention facilities, Christian detainees have reportedly experienced physical and mental torture.

If men are imprisoned, killed or lose their job, their families will experience significant financial hardship and become vulnerable to exploitation. Unemployed or imprisoned men may also struggle psychologically due to the loss of status in the community and the risk of being ostracized. Considering these pressures, many Christian men choose to flee their home to another country. They have greater freedom than females to do so.

4) Eritrea

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Female Christians are caught in a pincer of pressure from the Eritrean government and social pressures. Not only are Evangelicals and converts alike subject to increasing government persecution, but they experience the usual social and domestic pressures of belonging to an unacceptable minority. Converts face abduction, incarceration in the home, forced marriage, forced divorce and loss of child custody, particularly in rural areas. If a female Christian is abducted by a Muslim and forcibly married, or lured into a romantic relationship by one, she will be forced to accept his religion as well. Forced marriage is a widely reported tool utilized against female converts in Eritrea. While pressure is reportedly highest against converts both from Muslim and Eritrean Orthodox Church backgrounds, families have also been known to look down on converts, isolating them within the home. While parents may appear to fulfill their parental responsibilities, such as providing school fees, clothing and housing, they may ignore them entirely, causing psychological distress. In some situations, they could be expelled from home, shunned without any help.

Whereas in many countries women are exempt from military service, in Eritrea, women are also subjected to obligatory military training and national service at the infamous SAWA military training camps, a highly controlled environment in which every behavior and belief is scrutinized. Female conscripts – mostly unmarried women subjected to indefinite military service – are vulnerable to various forms of gender-based violence, including from prisoner guards and commanders ([HRW 2022 country chapter](#), p.228). Many choose to flee the country in order to evade such a fate.

Hundreds of women also experience gender-based violence in detention centers. This is within the context of Eritrea’s practice of indefinite detention for no reason other than being Christian. A country expert explained: “Women and girls are prone to rape and sexual violence as a form of persecution especially when under detention on religious grounds.” Women detained or forced to escape the country are not the only victims. The families and children of such detainees and escapees will likely also become victims. In addition to being denied the chance to see their loved ones, they are likely to face other punitive acts, simply for being related to the detainee or defector. In a similar vein, when men flee the country, or are killed or imprisoned for their faith, women are responsible for taking on family responsibilities in their absence, with many families ending up impoverished due to the ostracization and lack of financial provision.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

As is the case for women, male Christians are subject to the system of obligatory military conscription, which places them in a highly controlled environment. As a result, many young Eritreans seek to escape the country. There remains no hope in sight for Christian men and boys forcibly mobilized as the latest peace accord [signed](#) by the Ethiopian government and the Tigrayan rebels does not include provisions for the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the Tigray region (NPR, 3 November 2022). It was hoped that the 2018 peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia might change this compulsory situation but despite the respite of the five-month humanitarian truce and the promise of a final truce amidst peace talks, the Eritrean military continued to be engaged in cross-border fighting alongside Ethiopian federal soldiers against the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) in Ethiopia’s two-year civil war. While this was

primarily limited to Tigray, the conflict rapidly progressed into the neighboring Afar and Amhara regions, with an estimated half a million casualties so far ([The Washington Post, 23 March 2022](#)).

Everyday life is under scrutiny; phone calls are monitored, bandwidth is kept slow and a network of citizens (usually women) are tasked with spying on their neighbors. Indeed, the level of monitoring has caused Eritrea to hold the infamous title of “[North Korea of Africa](#)” and topping the list of the [most censored countries](#) (The Economist, 26 May 2022; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2019). Those suffering the most are Christians who are not recognized by the state. In Eritrea, there typically is no disparity in the treatment of both men and women found in secret cell group meetings; all suffer the same fate of arbitrary arrests and indefinite detention. However, pastors, who tend to be men, can be especially targeted by imprisonment. Any arrests among them causes a leadership vacuum. In cases where an arrested man is the breadwinner, his arrest causes economic distress to his family, an unstable childhood for his children and consistent fear. His children find they are often taunted by fellow children and branded as a ‘Pente’, a label which is deemed to be shameful across Eritrea.

Many are also 'released' into forced military service after such arrests. The Pressure Points that are most specific to Christian men are physical beatings including torture leading to fatalities, imprisonment by government, and being forced to flee.

5) Libya

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

Female and male Christians often face the same means of persecution pressure, but their form or severity can have a gendered component. As Libyan women tend to live secluded from other people and under strict familial control, the severity of domestic persecution experienced by converts can be greater than for men. In general, women have a lower position within Libyan family life than men; this is caused by tribal norms corresponding to Sharia. It is extremely challenging for female converts to access Christian

religious materials or meet with other Christians. If suspected of being interested in Christianity, women can face house arrest, sexual assault, forced marriage or even a so-called ‘honor killing.’ It is difficult for female converts to escape such dangerous situations. There is almost no scope for them to live autonomously, due to explicit restrictions on a woman becoming head of the household or family.

In light of Libya’s honor-shame culture, all women and girls are expected to uphold high norms regarding their sexuality and dress modestly. It is widely understood that failing to do so brings shame upon the wider family.

Christian women who experience sexual violence because of their faith, sometimes as a form of punishment, encounter social and cultural barriers to the prosecution of any offence. This includes police and judicial reluctance to act and family reluctance to publicize an assault, contributing to a lack of effective law enforcement. This vulnerability is further compounded by the lack of adequate legislation on sexual harassment and domestic violence.

Christian Sub-Saharan migrant women and men attempting to cross Libya to reach Europe continue to be a significant group of vulnerable Christians in Libya. Christian women are highly vulnerable to trafficking, abduction and sexual enslavement, especially when they are separated from their male companions - such as in migrant detention centers. One expert comments: “The position of women is low, migrant women is even lower mainly because they are seen as house-keepers, or sometimes even as prostitutes.”

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In general, men face higher risks of physical violence in Libya, against a backdrop of considerable volatility ([UN News, 28 March 2022](#)). If the Christian faith of a convert is discovered, men face loss of employment, physical and mental abuse and eviction from their family home. As the providers for their family, Christian men who lose their ability to provide as a result of persecution often feel that they have lost their role in

the family, causing psychological distress. The risks for Libyan Christian men are so high that the formation of fellowship groups is nearly impossible unless whole families convert.

Forced labor and slavery are widespread for Sub-Saharan men who have migrated to Libya, including Christian men. They are often young and travel without their family, which makes them vulnerable to being abducted for enforced heavy agricultural labor, especially when they run out of money. Others are abducted or arrested and are only freed if a ransom is paid. If the men have a family in their home country, those families will be financially at risk as they depend on their husbands and fathers to protect them and take financial care of them.

Libyan men and boys have been increasingly forced to fight in militias, causing more and more to flee their home towns to evade such a fate. Migrant Christians in detention camps, too, are forced to fight. As a country expert explains, “both local converts and migrant men risk conscription, either the militia of their own tribe/family/town (in the case of converts) or in any of the militias (in the case of migrants).” Refusal to fight can be met with death.

6) Nigeria

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In the North of Nigeria, and increasingly in the South, the situation of Christian women and girls continues to be dire. Raids by Boko Haram and the splinter group ISWAP, Fulani militants and armed ‘bandits’ have terrorized Christian communities. Women and girls have been raped, forced into sexual slavery, kidnapped for ransom and killed. There is a general practice of treating women as inferior to men, in rural regions especially, which makes their maltreatment easier. Women and girls are especially vulnerable to sexual violence in IDP camps. An expert commented on their 2022 research: “The banditry, Fulani militia activity and herdsman attacks have subjected a lot of Christian young women and girls to rape, in our

interviews during our numerous visits to internally displaced persons camps, as high as fifty to sixty percent of the women and girls in camp have been either rape by bandits or kidnappers. about eighty percent of kidnapped victims that are women have been raped by their captors.”

Abduction is used regularly to depopulate Christian-dominated territory and impoverish Christian families. Most commonly, Christian girls are abducted and have been known to be trafficked by radical Islamic religious leaders for the purpose of forced marriage and forced conversion – even women who are already married. An expert comments, “Of late, Emirs have provided a special covering for abductors of minors, they collect the minors from the abductors and convert them to Islam then marry them off to willing Muslims, who often rape the minors to impregnate them. The emirs act like their parents, while their biological parents are denied access to them.” When parents try to rescue their child, they commonly face resistance from the community, police and judiciary, who argue the marriage is legitimate under Islamic law and the girl has accepted Islam. In addition to being “married”, girls abducted by militants have reportedly been used as suicide bombers, human shields or as leverage in negotiations with the government or their families.

The fear that something will happen with their Christian daughters causes many Christian parents to push for early marriage as a kind of protection. This, alongside laws permitting under-age marriage in some states, contributes to the high early marriage rate for girls ([Girls Not Brides, accessed 21 Nov 2022](#)). Some Christian parents also choose to keep their girls at home, due to the dangers girls face travelling to and at school; this compounds the dependency of women and girls on men and fosters illiteracy about their rights. School abductions have also led to parents sending their daughters to safer states for education. Those remaining in schools in northern states are forced to wear Islamic code uniforms; the wearing of hijab, for instance, is compulsory for all female students in Sharia-run states.

When women are raped, their husbands can sometimes struggle to move past the trauma – they may even view their wife as dirty or impure, particularly if pregnant. Many homes have broken up because of this. When girls are abducted, a deep sadness falls upon the family. Men often see it as their fault for not protecting their children adequately. The victims themselves, too, carry scars and trauma for a very long time, and can be stigmatized by communities. Christian communities therefore end up deeply fractured and there have been [calls for a greater response](#) to gender-based violence (Daily Trust, 23 October 2022). The high rate of killings of Christian men also causes many dependent wives and children to fall into poverty or flee for safety.

Particularly in the Hausa ethnic group, the general perception is that women are not supposed to work outside the home or fend for themselves. Generally, poverty can also make women and girls more vulnerable to pressure from perpetrators and they can encounter challenges in meeting basic needs. In addition to the great emotional toll and social cost of violations, in some communities where widows are the main financial providers (possibly widowed due to persecution targeting their husbands), such violations also affect the community’s economic well-being.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In the North of Nigeria, and increasingly in the South, Christian men and boys are often specifically targeted and killed by actors including Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani militants and armed ‘bandits’. Much of this violence happens through attacks on Christian communities in rural areas and at roadblocks. These killings not only serve to eliminate the current generation of men and boys, but also guarantees a considerable fall in the birthrate of Christian families. A country expert comments: “A lot of [men and boys] are paying the supreme price for their faith on a daily basis.”

For those who survive such attacks, abduction and forced inclusion in militant ranks remain a threat. There are reports of church leaders being regularly abducted for ransom. Discrimination against Christians has also been reported within the government armed forces, with Christian soldiers being deliberately posted to the most dangerous areas, where many are killed by Boko Haram or other jihadist groups.

Christian men and boys have also been strategically marginalized in terms of education and employment. They are increasingly excluded from gaining admission to schools or universities, and are unlikely to gain employment within the Civil Service in Sharia states and at federal level, even if highly qualified. They can also be fined or detained unlawfully. The ensuing combination of frustration and multiple dangers causes many young men to leave the country in search of safety and better opportunities.

The combination of violence and pressure has a devastating effect on the Church and Christian families. If a man is killed, loses his ability to work or has his property seized, his family can become impoverished. The vulnerability of the family is a living testimony of the overwhelming power of the perpetrators. This is particularly evident in how perpetrators are almost never brought to justice.

Violence against women is also used as a weapon to harm Christian men. Men and boys have been forced to watch their wives, mothers, daughters and sisters be raped in front of them, or abducted, causing deep trauma and feelings of helplessness, as they feel they should have been able to protect them.

7) Pakistan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; False charges; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

While all women are vulnerable to gender-based violence in Pakistan, women from religious minorities face overt and violent forms of gender-specific religious persecution. In 2019, the trafficking of women from Pakistan sold as ‘brides’ in China gained international media attention ([PBJ Learning, 17 March 2022](#)). These dangers, alongside more insidious forms of human trafficking that center around forced conversion, remain live risks for women from religious minorities ([CREID, 30 July 2021](#)).

Reports of the abduction of Christian women and girls have increased throughout the WWL 2023 reporting period, including in areas previously considered to be ‘safe’. Christian girls as young as 8 - primarily from poor families and including girls with physical disabilities - are kidnapped, forcibly married, sexually assaulted and forced to convert to Islam on pain of death ([CLAAS, 18 August 2021](#); [CREID, November 2020](#)). In addition to abduction, reports indicate that Christian girls have been seduced as a means of converting them to Islam.

Many families never see their girls again, partly because the authorities rarely take meaningful action to bring perpetrators to justice. A country expert explains: “The legal system repeatedly fails these young women. Many between the ages of 8-18 are being abducted, raped and married to older men. Some of them over 50 years old. The psychological trauma and abuse continues even if a case is brought to bring back the girl. Many of them are forced to say they're over 18 years old or that they converted voluntarily.” The challenges involved represent a huge emotional strain for the families who constantly fear retribution

from the perpetrators and their supporters. For victims who are recovered, the shame of abduction and rape places a huge shadow over their lives within Pakistan’s honor-based culture.

Christian women and girls are at risk of sexual violence in the public sphere, including in the workplace and in schools. Many of them are maids, or cleaners, and are targeted for sexual exploitation. According to a country expert, it is becoming the norm to rape Christian children, with reports from 2021 revealing assaults against a three-year old girl and an eight-year old girl, the latter at the hands of her school principal ([International Christian Concern, 31 July 2021](#)).

Christian women and girls are also trapped in cycles of debt and bonded labor, such as in brick-kiln factories. This affects Christians of both genders, although it is a context in which female Christians may be additionally exposed to sexual violence. A country expert shared an account of a woman who “committed suicide because of abuse and sexual harassment, departmental negligence and religious oppression.”

Christian women and girls are also at risk of honor killings and blasphemy allegations. They additionally risk being killed, such as in the case of 24-year old Sonia, from Rawalpindi, who was fatally shot by a Muslim man for refusing to marry him ([International Christian Concern, 12 June 2020](#)).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Blasphemy laws continue to provide the framework for many of the rights violations against Christian men in Pakistan. Christian men live in constant fear of blasphemy allegations, false charges, destruction of their property, arrest, imprisonment, beatings, torture and execution. Exemplifying the dangers, in late 2020 a Christian man was sentenced to death for having sent ‘blasphemous’ text messages to his former supervisor, having been in custody since 2013 ([Al-Jazeera, 8 September 2020](#)). As a country expert observed: “False imprisonment is one of the biggest areas [for men and boys] especially relating to false accusations of blasphemy/apostasy, in these instances entire families and communities are impacted.”

Christian men and boys are often compelled to take lower status and dangerous jobs. They are often referred to as "Chura," a derogatory word meaning "filthy", which is used for road sweepers and sewage cleaners. Whereas there is also a Christian middle class and not all hold lower status jobs, discrimination and social inferiority are ubiquitous. Islamic law and practices promote an attitude of Muslim superiority in society; thus, Muslims are encouraged not to accept Christian men being in more senior positions to them in workplaces. This can translate into a lack of employment opportunities and discrimination after a job is found.

There are also reports of Christian boys being subject to sexual abuse. Experts indicate that instances of rape and murder of young boys are on the rise in Pakistan, including young Christians. Christian men and boys are also trapped in cycles of bonded labor, such as in brick-kiln factories.

8) Iran

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Iranian women have few legally protected individual freedoms and are heavily constrained, a situation which came back to international attention with the death of Mahsa Amini. Amini. Her death in September 2022, after being beaten by morality police under hijab regulations, sparked nationwide protests over the restrictions on women and the state of the Iranian nation as a whole ([Euronews, 2 November 2022](#)). "Amini's death has now become a symbol of the violent oppression women have faced in Iran for decades ..." ([CNN, 25 September 2022](#)).

To additionally be a woman is particularly precarious for Christians detained for their faith. According to some estimates, the majority of house-church members in Iran are women, as the domestic setting provides more opportunities for them to participate in ministry and leadership. While this has allowed many women to fulfil their spiritual calling, it has also made them more vulnerable. They risk being arrested and sexually harassed by the authorities during interrogation and imprisonment. Shaming

women in this way is an effective way to stain their reputation and harm their social status, and can damage their chances to find work.

With many churches forced to shut down and Christians increasingly isolated, some Christian women, particularly Muslim background converts, are forced to marry Muslims. This pressure from family and local community affects both women and girls; it is possible for girls as young as nine to [legally be married](#) (HRW, Human Rights Report 2020). If a female convert is an already-married mother, it is highly likely that the custody of the children will be taken from her to ensure the children are raised in accordance with Islamic law. A country expert shares: “Forced separation of children from Christian mothers is one of the most terrifying acts for believer women. The arrest and imprisonment of Christian women have in some cases caused serious disturbances in their families.” Converts may also be placed under house arrest and denied access to Christian community.

Within marriages Christian women are unprotected against sexual abuse and domestic violence; authorities consider such issues a private matter and legislative justice is lacking. There is an explicit restriction on a woman becoming the head of a household or the head of a family. While rape is illegal, a rape victim must present multiple eyewitnesses, accounting for a women’s testimony being worth half of a man’s.

This lack of legal protection against violence creates impunity for perpetrators of the violent religious persecution of Christian women in both private and public spheres. Since Iranian women are not free to travel on their own, fleeing a dangerous situation and finding sheltered accommodation becomes additionally challenging.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Despite the majority of house-church members now being women, more men are arrested, prosecuted, sentenced by the government, and often imprisoned for many years experiencing physical and mental abuse while detained. Men are more often arrested in urban areas, whereas in rural regions they are

forced to flee the area and can be forced out of their homes. Lengthy imprisonments can cost families; sometimes the strain and emotional pain caused by separation leads to divorce and child trauma.

Men are usually the primary providers for their families, especially if they have young children. When converting to Christianity, men risk losing their jobs, particularly if they are of have been arrested. If they apply for a business registration or trade permit and the officer discovers their Christian faith, the application is likely to be turned down. This puts extra financial and psychological pressure on the families, with an expert commenting: "If the male breadwinner of a family loses his job/business/income because of persecution, it can lead to financial ruin for the family." Younger converts may be banned from continuing with their education upon discovery of their faith.

When single Christian men are under acute stress through monitoring, threats (including the threat of apostasy) and harassment, they are likely to flee the country, which naturally impacts the family emotionally and financially.

9) Afghanistan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied/restricted healthcare; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

The swift take-over of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021 effectively stopped the advancement of women's rights, in a country where women have long had a lower social status and been viewed as second class citizens. Women from religious minorities, including Christians, are especially vulnerable. In an early announcement following their take-over, a Taliban statement declared: "Our women are Muslim. They will be happy to be living within our frameworks of Sharia" ([Al-Jazeera, 17 August 2021](#)). Since then, the Taliban has faced international condemnation for severely hindering girls' access to education and women and girls face further restrictions on movement, appearance and work ([Gandhara, 6 October 2022](#)).

Female converts also face extreme pressure on a familial and societal level, facilitated in part by the limited role women play in Afghan society and their few rights to social protection. Although conversions usually happen together as a family unit in Afghanistan, when a woman decides to convert to Christianity

on her own, she is likely to keep it a secret. If her faith is discovered, she is vulnerable to physical abuse and being put under house arrest. She may also be forcibly married to a Muslim or sold for sexual enslavement. Forced marriages and rape are used as tools for forced (re-)conversion, particularly against women and girls from a Muslim background. A young female Christian convert can be forced to marry a non-Christian (often older) with relative ease. Reflecting the severity of the situation, a country expert reports that some women and girls have committed suicide to avoid such a fate. Due to Afghanistan’s honor-shame culture, women are unlikely to report instances of rape or sexual abuse due to both the stigma attached and the lack of legislative justice.

According to a country expert, in the first few weeks after the take-over, Christian women and girls were being targeted and abducted in order to be forcibly married to Taliban fighters, with fathers being forced to give up their daughters at gunpoint. The expert explained that women are perceived as “spoils of war” but there are doubts as to whether this is ongoing.

In light of such circumstances, female converts choose to keep their faith secret from their families. This means they have fewer opportunities to connect with other believers.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

The Taliban take-over also increased pressure on Christian men. Men and boys had experienced particular fear around being forcibly recruited to join the Taliban’s new army; the extent to which this is still ongoing is unclear ([The Portal Centre, 26 October 2021](#)). Church leaders - the majority of whom are men - have also been specifically targeted by the Taliban; many have disappeared, others have been beaten, tortured and killed.

As men are at the forefront of public life, male Christians are extremely vulnerable to community and family pressures if their faith is discovered. They will be harassed, socially isolated, beaten or killed. If married, they will likely have their wives and children taken away from them. Given that men and boys have greater freedom of movement, they are additionally vulnerable to kidnapping, sexual violence, or killing, in the streets. A country expert summarizes: “The acts of daily violence on men and boys are now

greater as women are not allowed alone on the streets.” In light of this, Christian men choose to keep as low a profile as possible, with some choosing low-level positions in the workplace so as not to gain unwanted attention. They are forced to live, work and identify as Muslims. Since men are the economic providers in their household, families rely on them financially. If male converts are killed, female family members are left vulnerable to exploitation and poverty.

There is a tradition of abusing young boys in Afghanistan, as well as girls. According to a country expert, this is “part of a culture of pedophilia in the region, which is linked to attacks on minorities and those weaker than them whom they can abuse.” Christian boys, deemed to have no worth on the basis of their faith, are thus vulnerable to this form of exploitation.

10) Sudan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Women have encountered rapid change in Sudan in the past few years. Under the transitional government in 2020, there were positive changes impacting women’s rights and safety, including the elimination of the apostasy law, the removal of permits from male relatives for women to travel, and the banning of FGM ([Human Rights Watch](#), 16 July 2020). It was also [announced](#) that Sudan’s transitional government had agreed to separate religion from the state, ending 30 years of Islamic rule (Bloomberg, 4 September 2020). However, in 2021, COVID-19 and the deteriorating economic conditions led to increases in domestic violence, including physical and sexual violence, and an increase in forced marriage ([UN News](#), 19 July 2021). The October 2021 military coup only further stymied the progress on women’s rights, with women reportedly facing increased targeted violence amid the unrest ([SUWRA, 20 February, 2022](#)). Female Christians continue to face tremendous challenges and are at a disadvantage in society

simply because of their gender. Continuing gaps in protective legislation remain avenues for religious persecution.

Christian women and girls, particularly converts, are vulnerable to rape, forced marriage and domestic violence. On a broader level, Islamic extremists have reportedly kidnapped Sudanese girls for marriage and/or sexual slavery. Converts may also be isolated within the home to reduce the embarrassment and shame of the conversion on the family, as well as to ensure they cannot meet with other Christians. Converts will also be denied inheritance and if already married, divorced from their husbands and separated from their kids. An expert explains, “Muslim husbands forbid talking about Christianity to children, and if that is done, they divorce the wife.”

Furthermore, it is challenging for women and girls to report sexual crimes and domestic violence to the authorities. The testimony of women is not considered equivalent to that of men, and there is significant social stigma attached to rape that deters from coming forward. Additionally, it has been reported that policemen themselves have raped Christian girls, which feeds into a landscape of impunity for perpetrators. Women play a major role in raising their children, representing the family at societal events and helping their husbands with agricultural tasks. The persecution of women and girls therefore has a rippling negative impact on the wider family and community.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Violent Islamic militancy continues to plague many African nations and has led to an increase in the persecution of Christians. The government of Sudan targets male Christians with a variety of serious false charges, including “terrorism”. The prosecution of four male Christian converts from Islam under the decriminalized apostasy law raises serious concerns over the progress of the religious freedom reforms made by the transitional government in 2020. Although these charges were later [dismissed](#), church leaders have also reportedly been threatened with apostasy charges for engaging in ecclesial

activities (HRWF, 21 September 2022). Church leaders, who are predominately male, are the most frequent targets and government security forces monitor their activities daily. An expert summarizes: “Pastors and other Christian leaders have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. ...it has been mostly tied with wanting to rebuild churches in communities which had burned down churches.”

Christian men and boys, particularly converts, are vulnerable to beatings, imprisonment, harassment within the workplace and displacement. Converts may be kicked out of their house and shunned by their families. Others feel forced to leave their home due to the pressure of persecution.

Men are usually the head of households and providers of the family in Sudan. If they are unable to provide for their families due to persecution, the family will experience trouble financially. Preceding, but especially during the recent unrest, men are particularly important for security; in remote parts of the country, absence can lead to family property being looted and wives and daughters being sexually attacked. Hence, Christian men and boys become prime targets for abduction and killing by radical groups like Janjaweed due to the cascading effect their absence creates. As an expert shared, “The abduction of men/boys is designed to make the whole family susceptible to economic crises... forcing the family to flee the area.”

11) India

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

The Indian national Constitution provides legal equality for all citizens irrespective of their religion, sex, race or caste, and prohibits religion-based discrimination. However, the reality is far different; other simultaneously existing laws uphold ancient traditions, which are by nature patriarchal and exploitative of weaker classes of society.

Persecution of Christian women often targets their physical body through molestation, rape and sexual harassment. Daughters, sisters and wives of pastors are particularly vulnerable. Shame is a very powerful force in Indian society. Sexual attacks serve to shame the family, as her sexual purity connotes the honor and prestige of her family. Young Christian women and girls are particularly vulnerable in tribal areas to sexual predation. Physical attacks on Christian women have historically included acid attacks, brutal beatings and killings. While both male and female converts face pressures if their faith is discovered, female converts are more vulnerable to physical domestic violence. They are also at further risk of incarceration by their family and local community, forced marriage, forced divorce and being abandoned or expelled from their home or village. A country expert reported: “Women and girls are targeted more because they are likely to not be able to retaliate. In families of Christian leaders, often his wife and his daughters are attacked or abused when they are alone. Several killings and rapes have been reported”.

Social discrimination is widely utilized as a means of isolating and pressuring converts; they are banned from social life as well as communal resources. Women from the lower strata have always been exploited by high caste Hindus who mostly adhere to Hindutva’s ideology today. Many women from this lower caste community have turned to Christianity; this makes them a double target - for being Dalit and now Christian.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Despite legal protection, Christian men who are discovered talking about Christianity or choosing to adhere to the Christian faith are likely to be subjected to violence in many forms across most Indian states. Men and boys are seen as physically strong, and so the persecution of Christian men targets their physical strength as well as their position as decision-maker in the family and head of the household (if older), or head of the church. Violations against men include brutal beatings, killings and emotional torture such as

being forced to watch family members being assaulted. Church leaders are particularly vulnerable; being a pastor continues to be one of the riskiest vocations in the country today. For example, a country expert speaks of a male Christian leader who “was humiliated for conducting prayer at his house. He was threatened not to do any sort of prayer in the house ... the police interrogated him due to complaints by the local villagers.” Hindu radicals target church leaders and their families in order to set an example to the wider Christian community. Fear grows with each attack.

Another prevalent and effective form of discrimination in India is social exclusion. Men and boys may be socially isolated by their community and family, excluded from taking seats in councils or accessing government schemes and benefits, or verbally harassed. Upon discovery of their faith, they may lose their job, be transferred to faraway places, be given increasing workloads, face client boycotts, and be compelled to participate in Hindu worship practices. Others may face challenges in obtaining a permit to set up new businesses. Such pressure in the workplace has reportedly been getting worse over the past years. Economic deprivation also takes the form of unjust fines and being detained for extended periods of time. As men are the main providers this can throw the whole family into poverty. It also serves to dishearten the local Christian community.

False charges are often brought against Christian men, such as accusations of blasphemy, attempting to convert Hindus, molestation or rape of women, or denigrating Hindu gods and goddesses. These charges are usually brought against pastors and preachers. Imprisonment of Christians carries a stigma which falls on their family as well. Whilst most detainees are released after a few days, some cases drag on for years.

12) Syria

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

After years of ongoing violence, peace remains uncertain in Syria. More than half of the population have been internally displaced or have fled the country, and sexual violence remains an ongoing issue of concern ([UN News](#), 9 March 2022; [Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic](#), 8 February 2022). In a context of instability and restrictions on religious freedom, women and girls from religious minority groups – including Christians – risk abduction, sexual harassment and rape. Whilst the rate of instances has dropped dramatically since IS dominated areas of Syria, this remains a risk in government-controlled areas and in rebel-held territory – though the threat is higher in the latter. Although there were also some reports of sexual violence against men and boys, women remain more vulnerable to such violent acts.

Christian women and girls regularly experience harassment and acts of discrimination in the public sphere, even being seduced deliberately in an attempt to convert them to Islam. For example, if a Muslim shop owner sees a woman in a hijab and another who is wearing a cross, she might well keep the Christian waiting and potentially even raise the price for her. Women have also reported being spat at in the street and discriminated against in the workplace. Christian women are most vulnerable to persecution in areas controlled by Islamist groups.

For female converts (particularly those from a Muslim background), violence can come from their own families and communities. Such pressure affects women and girl converts most, then younger men and lastly older men, reflecting the levels of status and freedom generally within Islamic culture. A country expert explains: “Women/girls tend to be more (though not much more) vulnerable than their male counterparts because they are by tradition dependent on their male family members.” Leaving Islam is a great taboo and seriously violates family honor. They may face domestic violence, forced marriage to a Muslim, or even be killed to restore the honor of the family.

Female Christian converts married to a Muslim risk divorce, particularly if their conversion becomes known to in-laws. In this instance, they would also be denied custody over their children since Sharia law dictates that rights are given to the Muslim party. Christian women married to male Christians of Muslim background also face challenges, as the law considers them to still be Muslim. It can be extremely difficult for them to raise their children as Christians, and should the husband die, the Christian wife would be entitled to no inheritance unless she converted to Islam. According to Sharia law, a Muslim woman is not allowed to legally marry a Christian man (vice versa is possible). This makes a marriage between a female Christian of Muslim background and a man from other categories of Christian communities legally impossible.

As women are typically reliant on their fathers and husbands for financial security, they are more likely to fall into poverty following persecution. Christian widows, for example, often rely on support from their local church for survival.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

In light of the [ongoing violence and proxy conflicts](#), a common fear among indigenous Christians – and among many other Syrian communities – is that young men will be forcibly conscripted into the Syrian Army or to other military factions, such as the armed wing of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party referred to as People's Protection Units or YPG (Global Conflict Tracker, last accessed 15 November 2022). In Syria, there is enforced military service for all men at the age of 18; those wishing to be exempt must pay a hefty fine, prompting many men to consider emigration. A country expert observed: “In northeast Syria, there were ongoing reports of Christians being kidnapped and forced to serve at the front.” While not only Christians are targeted in this way, there are often fewer consequences for perpetrators who recruit Christians in this manner when compared with other groups. Service within the armed forces can prevent men from working, or even starting a family. Within the armed forces, Christian men are likely to face further discrimination.

The second major challenge facing Christian men is discrimination in the workplace. Unemployed Christians have immense difficulties obtaining a job, and employed Christians stand little chance of being promoted. Muslims are always given priority. In Syria's traditional society, males are the main providers and support their families financially. If they lose their jobs, the whole family may have to rely on external financial support to survive. Male converts from Islam face additional forms of freedom of religion violations, as they may be bullied more in the workplace and denied work opportunities if their faith is known. They may further be threatened by their family or expelled from the home.

The threat of abduction of male church leaders continues to have a considerable negative impact on Christian communities. There are numerous Christian leaders that Islamists have kidnapped during the war for political or financial reasons, several of whom have not been found or rescued yet. Christian leaders of Historical church communities are most at risk for these kinds of attacks, as they are recognizable to extremists by their dress. There have been several examples of many others in a community leaving once a leader emigrates, which shows the impact such leaders can have on their churches and towns.

Male converts from a Muslim background also come under strong pressure to marry a Muslim woman. It is additionally difficult for him to marry a woman from a Christian background as he is registered as a Muslim; Christian women would be unwilling to enter such a marriage as their children would automatically be likewise registered as Muslims.

13) Saudi Arabia

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Women and girls have an extremely limited voice in Saudi Arabia’s Islamic, patriarchal society, and are under constant monitoring by their family and local community. A country expert explained that this situation becomes "amplified" Saudi women who are known to have become Christians. "They are seen as even less valuable and not worth hearing."

Leaving Islam is one of the biggest sins a Muslim can commit; for Saudi female converts from Islam, pressure primarily comes from the *Family* and *Community spheres*. Upon discovery of their conversion, they risk physical violence, verbal harassment, and being forcibly married to conservative Muslims as a ‘corrective’ measure (sometimes as a second wife). Whilst boys are more likely to be expelled from the home, girls are more likely to be kept under strict house-arrest, have their phones removed and be isolated from the outside world. Families may even search phones for Christian messages and contacts, and can withhold financial support such as allowance to purchase essential items. Exemplifying these dangers, in 2021 a female convert was beaten, locked in her room and forced to marry a Muslim because her family found Christian text messages on her phone. Converts who are already married risk being divorced and losing custody of their children.

Outside the context of marriages, sources report that instances of rape and sexual assault are commonplace across Saudi Arabia for the thousands of non-Saudi (especially Asian and African) housemaids across the country who are Christian (or non-Islamic), a position in which they are commonly abused and virtually treated as slaves. This reflects the subordinate position of women in Saudi society

and their unprotected status when on their own (e.g. when working outside their home) which is strengthened by their nationality and religion (i.e. non-Saudi and non-Muslim).

Given such pressure - and the ultimate threat of honor killing - it comes as no surprise that many Saudi women choose to become secret believers. Fleeing is rarely an option, as despite [2019 legislation](#) allowing women to travel without a chaperone (HRW, 22 August 2019), the movement of women remains heavily controlled by male guardians who can easily withhold her passport, money and possessions (HRW 2022 country chapter).

Women are largely dependent on their families for the support of their basic needs, including shelter, food and clothing. As a country expert explained: “Knowing that these basic needs could be taken away and harsh physical punishment applied to them, most Saudi female Christians live out their faith in silence and secrecy.”

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

The male-dominated nature of public society in Saudi means that Saudi Christian men pay a considerable price if their faith becomes known. Saudi Arabia’s strict Islamic society means that any deviation from standard behavior is quickly observed.

In a shame and honor culture, to bring shame on the family is the worst thing a son or father can do. Whereas female converts are often punished secretly or behind closed doors, male converts are punished publicly or openly within the family. They risk being publicly shamed, beaten, imprisoned, thrown out of their home, emotionally abused and threatened. They may be denied financial support, then offered material incentives to return to Islam and revoke the shame brought upon the family. Men can be forced to divorce their wives and not permitted to see their children. Families might search phones and computers for proof of their suspicions of the man leaving Islam. Alternatively they might be taken to a Sheikh who will pressure them to recant.

Compounding the psychological trauma, families commonly cover up why they are maltreating their male family member. A country expert explained that one Christian “was disowned by his family who then lied

to others about why [he was disowned] which further shamed him. They even posted lies about him on social media.”

If converts are detained or imprisoned, their families will be affected by such absence on an economic level, since men are by and large the providers in Saudi families. In light of such pressure and the potentially crippling impact they could have on their families, most converts choose to live as secret believers. This extends as far as not even telling their own children about their faith, for fear that extended family members or school staff could discover that they have left Islam.

14) Myanmar

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce
Security	Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks
Technological	-

The military coup of February 2021 and subsequent conflict implicates fresh concerns for women in Myanmar. Over the last decade some progress had been made on women’s rights in the country, yet this is rapidly disappearing after the military takeover ([UNDP](#), 8 March 2022). Furthermore, the army is a known perpetrator of sexual and gender-based violence, with evidence that such violence is escalating since the coup, especially through interrogation practices ([USIP](#), 30 November 2021). Despite such challenges, women continue to be involved in protest action ([BBC News](#), 9 December 2021). Rape and physical assault by the armed forces is a significant threat to Christian women, particularly those belonging to ethnic minorities.

Christians feel they are viewed as second-class citizens across Myanmar, without the same legal protection and rights as the Buddhist majority. Thousands have become IDPs and refugees due to the coup. Women in Myanmar are also subordinate; reflecting this, a traditional Burmese proverb says: “Husband is god, son is master” ([Burma Library](#), “Social Roles and Gender Stereotypes”). This context creates multiple challenges, including creating obstacles to reporting sexual violence. As a country expert stated: “There are more women being raped and harassed, and the women are afraid to speak out because of cultural sensitivity and it is considered a social taboo.”

Women lack robust legal protection. Generally, victims of domestic violence lack legal cover. Specifically, Christian women married to non-Christian men can be legally pressured into following the husband’s religion, unlike Buddhist women. This law, which was mainly aimed at the Muslim minority, also acts as a hindrance to female converts to Christianity from a Buddhist background (especially secret converts). Within mixed-religion marriages, if the daughter decides to be a Christian, the non-Christian father often arranges for her to be married to a Buddhist. The mother and daughter have no power to prevent this.

Among the Muslim Rohingya minority, non-family members also utilize marriage as a means of cultivating Islam among Christian girls. In the past, Rohingya Islamist groups have reportedly abducted Rohingya Christian women, forcibly married them to Muslim men and attempted to convert them to Islam. Additionally, there have been instances when men have pretended to be a Christian – going so far as to be baptized – in order to find a Christian girl. After getting married, they then applied pressure on their wife to convert to Islam. However, in the WWL 2023 reporting period, no cases of this were reported.

Female youth – in combination with a female converts’ lower status – are also vulnerable to house-arrest and can face discrimination at school. This restricts their access to community life, including Christian fellowship. If married, they may also be divorced by their husband. External sources report that Christian women in the predominately Christian Kachin state have been trafficked to China to become “brides,” where they are raped with the aim of impregnating them to produce male heirs, although this is becoming even more hidden ([Human Rights Watch](#), 21 March 2019; [Family Research Council](#), 15 December 2020). Kachin Christians have been exposed to these atrocities for many years – they are even targeted within IDP camps where the Myanmar army inflicts further acts of abuse.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Due to the insecurity and resulting displacement prompted by the ongoing conflict, the threat of death affects both men and women without gender differentiation, illustrating the precarious position that families are faced with. In Myanmar, men are culturally encouraged to find work as the [primary breadwinners](#) within the family unit; if they lose their job or are driven from their village or town because

they are Christians, the whole family suffers and it causes emotional distress (Care International, “Rapid Gender Analysis, Myanmar – Rakhine State”, 2020). Such persecution is real and tangible for male converts, who have fewer job opportunities available to them. Others find themselves in cycles of forced labor. Converts also face threats, ridicule and physical beatings.

It is especially difficult for Christian men to practice their faith within the context of the armed forces. The Myanmar army has been known to impose forced labor on Christians as a means of preventing them from attending Sunday services and accessing Christian community. Several men have consequently lost their faith. Men have also been targeted for recruitment into militias such as the Kachin Independence Army, although the frequency with which this occurs is contested. As a country expert explained, those who refuse are subjected to "tremendous intimidation, threats and torture. Pastors and leaders who discourage young men from joining the rebels are also targeted by the insurgents". Targeting church leaders also serves to harm the wider Christian community, much like a family is made vulnerable without the family head.

Na Ta La schools aim to convert Christian children, which is an effective way of stopping Christianity from spreading to the next generation. The boys at these schools are raised to become Buddhist monks; when they start at the Na Ta La schools, their heads are shaved, they are given monks clothes and they also go around the local community begging for food.

15) Maldives

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Given the extremely strict interpretation of Islam in the Maldives, non-expatriate Christian men and women must be secret believers to avoid severe persecution. If a Christian woman or girl is discovered to be a Christian, she risks being pressured into marriage and exposed to domestic violence in an attempt to force her to reject her new-found faith. NGOs have reported ongoing community pressure on women to wear Islamic clothing and harassment of women who choose not to do so (US Department of State IRFR

2021, p.12). A country expert explained: “Maldivians are expected to wear hijab when they reach a certain period of their lives (e.g. marriage, having children). Thus, once they're 'expected' to do so but do not conform, then they get pressured and harassed.”

Despite the closely-knit social control on the islands, abuse, rape and sexual harassment are surprisingly common in a culture that generally excuses gender-based violence within the home. According to a country expert, “sexual abuse and child abuse is rising as well as domestic violence”. This observation is supported by reports which further note that the COVID-19 lockdown has been a contributing factor to a spike in violence (HRW 2022 country chapter). The threat of sexual and physical abuse can be used as a tool for religious persecution against Christian women.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Being a non-expatriate Christian in the Maldives is so dangerous for both men and women that husbands, wives and children may not even know of each other's faith. The inability to meet as a community creates instability in the family and lack of access to Christian support, mentoring and training. If a Maldivian is found to be a secret Christian believer, he is likely to face bodily harm, harassment, threats and possibly government imprisonment (although there have been no such cases in recent years). In light of this pressure, many have chosen to leave the country and live abroad, when possible financially. If imprisoned, the wider family will suffer financially and emotionally, and children are likely to be bullied at school.

16) China

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Trafficking; Violence – sexual

Group	Female Pressure Points
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

As marriage and birth rates fall in China, women are seeing an erosion of equal opportunities and are now encouraged toward “family virtues,” meaning they should focus on child-rearing and caregiving roles ([Wall Street Journal](#), 9 November 2022). It is too soon to tell how this will impact persecution, but it represents the possibility of increasing vulnerability for Christian women.

China’s (now abandoned) one-child policy is notorious for having created a gender imbalance. The consequences of this policy are interacting with the vulnerability of Christian communities in neighboring countries, as well as creating additional pressure on Chinese women. Female Christians from neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Myanmar caught in China’s network of trafficking may be sold as brides in predominately rural areas, although Chinese repression of media and control of the internet makes it difficult to document cases ([HRW, 7 June 2022](#)).

Christian leaders are a target in China. Since many churches, especially house churches, are led by women, women are similarly affected by persecution, discrimination, and intolerance as men, and may be imprisoned if their religious activities are discovered.

Generally speaking, converts from Muslim and Buddhist backgrounds face the greatest pressures if their faith is discovered; their husbands may be pressured into divorcing them because they are seen as traitors to their ethnic group. They may further encounter bullying and harassment in school or their place of work.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Although they face similar pressure to women, men and boys are at greater risk of being physically abused, such as being beaten by police officers. Male Christian leaders are particularly targeted for government surveillance. Catholic priests and high-profile house church leaders have been abducted. In these instances, men may be physically abused, including being beaten by police officers. While in detention, many men are traumatized. For those under prolonged detention, they are unable to provide financially for their families. Due to such pressure, some church leaders choose to emigrate.

17) Mali

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied food or water; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

There has been a resurgence of attacks by Islamic militants since late 2019, within a broader context of instability. Militant groups kidnap girls and sometimes even married women, in order to attempt to forcibly ‘marry’ or ‘remarry’ them to some of their members, a life of sexual slavery. Whilst this does not affect Christian girls alone, it is considered a common tactic used by Islamic militants to spread Islam, and is a widely feared threat for female Christians. A country expert comments: “In many places, Christian girls are being pushed into marriages with Muslim males on a large scale because of the rise of radical Islam and a lack of security.”

Despite national laws protecting women and girls, traditional and cultural practices as well as gender norms, mean that Christian women are especially vulnerable within the ambient Islamic culture. They experience social rejection and when facing persecution, the children suffer repercussions of whatever befalls their parents. When parents are separated, or fathers are killed or some other loss of subsistence income occurs, some Christian girls feel they have no option but prostitution for survival, which also increases their vulnerability to human trafficking. Widows are particularly vulnerable to this.

In Mali, female converts to Christianity are most vulnerable to pressure and violence for their faith. They are exposed to harassment and threats, sexual abuse, physical violence and even killings. Single converts

will likely be forcibly married to a Muslim, in order to reduce the shame brought upon the family. Married converts face forced divorce and the possibility of losing their children. This is particularly common in northern Mali. Women have also reportedly been expelled from their homes. Even where it is tolerated that they live in the vicinity, they may not be supported or fed, making them extremely vulnerable. Although there are national laws that protect women and girls in general, traditional and cultural practices and gender norms make women more vulnerable to such treatment. Mali has one of the world's [highest rates](#) of child marriage in the world, with 54% of girls married before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides, 2022).

As a result of the traumatizing pressure and violence that Christian women and girls face, families and communities are weakened.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

As violent militant attacks continue in a volatile manner across Mali, Christian men and boys are particularly subject to death-threats and violent, physical attacks because of their faith. Church leaders are also closely monitored and face strict restrictions on movement within remote communities. Targeted attacks on Christian homes and businesses are effectively being used to impoverish families. For men, especially Christian leaders, this dire situation is exacerbated by the targeted social rejection and constant violent harassment of their families. Many have been forced to flee as a result. Converts face the greatest level of persecution in this regard and married males may additionally be forcibly divorced by their wives.

Within the context of widespread poverty and [ongoing violence](#) in one of Africa's poorest nations, men and boys are exposed to recruitment by jihadist groups where they will be forcibly converted to Islam (Human Rights Watch, 27 October 2022). They may also be abducted by such groups and killed. Those living in rural and remote areas in northern parts of the country are especially vulnerable to forced recruitment into violent groups. This has a devastating effect on their families and fellow Christians

who are traumatized by such persecution. In an attempt to protect Christian boys, they may be separated from their parents and moved to safer areas, but this creates other challenges.

The loss of Christian men and boys financially weakens families, as males are the primary providers in Mali. It also weakens the health of the Church in Mali.

18) Iraq

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Following years of atrocious treatment of women from religious minorities during the war against IS, survivors of sexual enslavement who returned to their families carry the shadows of their trauma, as they work to reestablish their lives.

Women remain unprotected from gender-based violence and due to social stigma associated with sexual violence, victims often choose to remain silent. Rape victims – who can be forced to marry their rapist under Iraqi law – often choose not to report incidents of assault to avoid such a fate. Concerning the WWL 2023 reporting period, a country expert stated: “Christian girls in Iraq, especially teenagers, are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment by their Muslim neighbors.” They are also reportedly vulnerable to sexual harassment from Shiite militias ([USDS, May 2021](#)). In some areas, Christian women and girls choose to wear veils (as Islamic women do) for their own safety.

Female converts from Islam are most vulnerable to violations of their fundamental rights for their faith. Pressure comes most often from the wider family. A convert risks abuse in the form of house arrest, beatings, sexual harassment, rape and even being killed to restore family 'honor' ([Al-Jazeera, 8 March 2021](#)).

A female convert might also be divorced by her husband and lose custody of her children; while both male and female converts risk being divorced by their Muslim spouse, Iraqi divorce laws make women more vulnerable as they have fewer legal rights. If single, a female convert may be forcibly married to a

conservative Muslim. The attitude of the spouse’s family is crucial in this issue. Further adding challenges, female converts from Islam cannot officially marry male Christians, as the Iraqi state still considers them to be Muslims; Muslim women are not allowed to marry non-Muslims.

Single Christian girls without a convert background have also been reportedly 'lured' by Muslim men, who then harass them and coerce them into marriage. Within the wider community, Christian women are viewed as being women and girls who are loose and free. Women have reported that they have suffered sexual harassment and vulgar threats because of this perception, including in the workplace. A country expert commented on the severity of risks facing female Christians: “Families may fear for their daughters safety and feel encouraged to emigrate to protect them.”

In conclusion, Christian women – especially converts from Islam - suffer from unequal treatment in all sectors of society.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Violence – death
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Christian men face various forms of pressure in Iraq. In particular, job discrimination affects men belonging to all WWL categories of Christian communities, especially those working in the public sector. Christians in central and southern Iraq have been put under pressure to leave their jobs, especially if they are working for foreign organizations or are employed at higher levels of society (e.g. government companies). In the north, Christians often struggle to get employment and often experience exploitation at their workplaces. Christian business owners also face discrimination, causing many to emigrate. In this mostly traditional and tribal Iraqi society, men are often the primary breadwinners for their families and losing their jobs or income can have a considerable effect on Christian families.

Male converts from a Muslim background are particularly vulnerable to violations. In a culture where retaining honor is everything, they risk being ejected from their families, threatened or killed. They may also be pressured into marrying a Muslim girl in an attempt to restore him to Islam. Men from Christian background also risk being killed for their faith, the perpetrators being mostly violent Islamic militants.

These factors greatly increase the already strong motivation for emigration; the loss of Christian men not only affects their direct families, but also the local churches which consequently find themselves confronted with a lack of potential leadership. Further weakening the church, priests and Christian leaders (the majority of whom are men) remain vulnerable to kidnappings and killings, particularly in the Nineveh plains region. While there were no known instances of abductions or killings of church leaders in the WWL 2023 reporting period, it remains a constant threat, particularly if they are considered to be speaking out against political leaders or militias.

A country expert observes how churches and church leaders (typically male) are targeted: “Before it was more a matter of evident and fierce act of violence by terrorist groups, now is becoming more subtle and tacitly understood as a general state of the affairs in a country severely hit by years of conflict.”

19) Algeria

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Despite gaining [legal protection](#) against targeted violence in 2016 (CBS, 2 February 2016), Algerian women continue to be [disadvantaged](#) in law and society, compounding the pressure Christian women experience due to their faith (OECD, “Social Institutions and Gender Index: Algeria”, 2019). Christian women experience pressure in several public spheres, including within workplaces and educational settings. This includes harassment (particularly if they are unveiled), the possibility of sexual assault and death threats.

In the private sphere, too, female converts face severe violations of their religious freedom from family members. Conversion is forbidden and dangerous. Church leaders report that Christian converts (especially women) are often beaten, harassed, threatened and/or placed under house-arrest for their faith by their Muslim families. In addition to restricting women’s access to meaningful community, families also prevent converts from accessing Christian radio or television channels.

In the light of this pressure and violence, many female converts opt to hide their faith and live as secret believers. A country expert comments: “Christian women are much more concerned with the danger of meeting other believers because of the supervision of families (which makes them eternal minors).” Should their family discover their Christian faith, it is likely that unmarried converts would be threatened with forced marriage to a non-Christian as a corrective measure, and to restore them to the Islamic faith. This can also be used as an effective threat against Christian women. If already married at the point of becoming a Christian, her husband can divorce her, use her faith to exploit her, or restrict her access to Christian religious materials.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Christian men in Algeria regularly experience community and economic pressure, facing harassment in workplaces and communal spaces. As men are the main providers in Algerian families, the loss of work can have a crippling effect on the whole family, creating fear and a sense of helplessness. Given the prevalence of male church leaders in Algeria, this makes men more likely to be interrogated or detained, which also affects their ability to work. A country expert comments, “The majority of church leaders have regularly received a summons from the police and/or gendarmerie to answer certain questions about the functioning of local churches.” If imprisoned, they can leave behind children and families who may struggle without a financial provider.

Families are often the source of additional violations, such as physical beatings, being forced out of the home, verbal insults and threats. In comparison to other Christian men, male converts face the most severe violations of religious freedom. They suffer ostracism and rejection not just from their families, but from the wider community too. Upon discovery of their faith, they may also be beaten and taken to the local mosque by force. Under such pressure, converts are forced to live out their faith in secret.

20) Mauritania

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks
Technological	-

Within Mauritania's tribal society, women are subject to the authority of their fathers and husbands. As such, the most vulnerable Christian females are those who have converted from Islam, the majority religion. Leaving Islam means disregarding a father or a husband and bringing shame upon the family. This can have severe consequences, especially since most women and girls are (financially) totally dependent on their families. When it is discovered that a woman or girl is Christian, she may be deprived of food, bullied, and put under house arrest in order to keep her isolated.

Traditional marriage practices place converts in a particularly vulnerable position. In Mauritania, one's first spouse is generally chosen by the parents, and this selection often happens before a girl comes of age. As such, unmarried female converts might find themselves forced into a marriage with a Muslim man to keep them under the influence of Islamic family life. In general, most women do not have a choice in marriage. Should she refuse, she risks being shunned by her family and friendship circle.

In this culture, a girl always stays in the family home and does not leave her family until she is married; otherwise, she may be labelled a prostitute. Married female converts can easily be divorced and end up with no means to survive. In general, women can be easily divorced, and polygamy is still practiced. Making it additionally challenging, Muslim women (also Christians from a Muslim background) cannot legally marry a Christian man.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical

Group	Male Pressure Points
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Male converts to Christianity bring shame upon their (extended) family. As a result, they are most likely to be ostracized, thus losing respect and status in society and among their friends. In many cases, converts are expelled from their homes, or physically abused. Sometimes, converts feel forced to flee their town or country to avoid being forced to perform Muslim rites; if it is confirmed that they have converted, charges of apostasy can be brought in a religious court. If their faith becomes known, converts are likely to have to flee their village or city to escape serious consequences.

Christian men, especially those involved in church leadership or evangelization, can be imprisoned. Male Christians are thus at risk of long prison sentences and high fines.

By excluding ethnic Africans from finding work or by forcing migrant workers to pay high fees for staying in the country, Christian men among them can be easily put under pressure to leave Mauritania. This is all part of a strong “Arabization” movement and many Sub-Saharan African Christians do leave as a result of this, or live very difficult lives.

21) Uzbekistan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

While laws in Uzbekistan give equal rights to men and women, traditional Islamic culture places women lower than men and subservient to them within the family context. Total submission is expected from women to their parents, or if married, to their husbands. Perpetrators of violence against women commonly go unpunished, in part due to the lack of legislation addressing domestic violence and marital rape (HRW 2022 country chapter).

Within this patriarchal context, women are not free to choose their own religion and are likely to face severe opposition upon conversion to Christianity. Persecutors target female converts both to inflict harm upon them, but also as an instrument to cause psychological harm on their husbands and wider family members. Incarceration by a convert's family (i.e. house-arrest) remains a common and socially accepted form of putting female converts under pressure. Access to social networks, specifically Christian networks, is restricted in the hope that the convert will return to Islam.

Female converts, particularly those in conservative regions with traditions of bride-kidnapping, run the risk of being kidnapped by their own communities and married off to a Muslim, especially in rural areas. While no cases have been reported in the WWL 2023 reporting period, this remains an ongoing risk. Families, too, arrange such marriages in the hope that the convert will return to Islam. Sexual violence within those marriages is an often unacknowledged component that becomes normalized under the legitimization that marriage gives. If already married at the point of conversion, Muslim husbands commonly divorce their wives and deny them their possessions. Pressure to divorce often comes from the wider family network.

A country expert explains that sexual violence “remains unreported in most cases. New-believing women from Muslim backgrounds are especially vulnerable. ... [F]amily violence and rape are common and up to 90% women suffered rape and sexual violence; since culturally it is considered shameful for the woman and her fault, women do not speak about it even to close family members. In case of conversion, the risk of being raped or sexually harassed increases as it can be used as a form of punishment.”

Christian women and girls suffer from numerous daily pressures within the family unit, including verbal, physical, psychological and sexual violence. For women in rural settings, the lack of social and municipal infrastructure renders them entirely reliant on their families. The violation of rights of women and girls also creates fear and anxiety within families and church communities.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Church leaders, most of whom are men, are common targets for violations of rights. Typically, they will be fined, detained, denied exit visas to leave the country, or put under house arrest. They can be fined for such offences as meeting illegally, possession of religious literature, or having Christian songs on their smartphones. The persecution of church leaders is a deliberate tactic, as targeting them causes a ripple effect, spreading fear and anxiety throughout their congregations. Pastors and lay leaders of unregistered churches in particular have been insulted, beaten and humiliated. A country expert reported that in one area of the country “every pastor and his family were surveilled by about 30 people. Practically every step was watched.”

Christian men continue to face inequalities in every area of their lives. Some men will be denied promotion at work, while others may lose their job altogether unless they renounce their faith. Christian businessmen face constant state monitoring to see if they are involved in any illegal activities, as well as pressure from the local Muslim community who will often obstruct their business activities; this occurs mainly at the local level, rather than at the national level. As the man is normally the provider, this form of economic harassment has a crippling effect on the whole family, particularly following on from the negative impact of COVID-19 on Uzbekistan’s economy. Family members feel fear, anger and anxiety. To avoid this, many Christian businessmen choose to keep their Christian faith secret.

Converts to Christianity also suffer from verbal, physical and psychological abuse, regularly being mocked in their places of work and study and coming under greater pressure from police and local officials.

22) Colombia

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied/restricted healthcare; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

More than six years after the 2016 Colombian peace agreement referendum, violence remains rife in Colombia; cases of sexual violence against women, especially outspoken female leaders, [continue](#) in rural areas where armed groups use them as a weapon of war to generate fear and silence entire regions (International Crisis Group, 27 January 2022). Women belonging to indigenous and Afro-Colombian ethnic

groups are disproportionately [affected](#) by conflict-related violence (ONU Mujeres, Colombia, accessed 7 November 2022). For instance, within indigenous communities, the authorities oppose Christians who refuse to accept the indigenous rites and customs – including compulsory ancestral purification rituals without which access to “Western medicine” is denied. As a result, many women in these communities are deprived of fundamental healthcare services. One country expert reported that women "cannot access prenatal and maternal-child health services because the ancestral beliefs protected by the government itself endorse midwifery, as an ancestral knowledge and indigenous expression. For other health services, care rights are denied because they do not accept ancestral rites or because they are not considered members of the community.”

Furthermore, Christian women may be promised in marriage to non-Christian men in order to eradicate their faith, or be abandoned by their husbands, separated from their children, threatened and ostracized by the community. This exposes them to forced displacement where they are vulnerable to criminal groups, trafficking and sexual exploitation. In areas under criminal control, the guerrilla indoctrination of children also affects Christian girls, since they not only have to accept the violent ideologies imposed despite their faith, but their vulnerability exposes them to becoming victims of abduction, rape, sexual harassment and trafficking. Such criminal activity worsened during the COVID-19 crisis, and spiked rates of forced recruitment and forced prostitution were observed ([USDS, 2022 Trafficking in Person Report: Colombia, 2022](#)).

In gang-held territories, some girls are ‘bought’ from their parents or brothers on pain of death. This phenomenon also affects Christian families who are put under enormous pressure to surrender their young women, targeted for their perceived purity and obedience, to cartel leaders for sexual purposes – or even marriage. In other instances, the girl may be targeted for seduction. This serves to both satisfy the sexual desires of the criminal commanders, as well as to silence the work of churches. “It has been found that illegal armed groups are showing a tendency to recruit children of Christians because they consider them more vulnerable, innocent, and, in the case of girls, purer (virgins),” a country expert explained. When the girls refuse, they either resort to violent threats or abduction and forced marriage. Another expert asserted that “the forced union between an adolescent and a member of criminal groups is not always presented in the form of 'marriage', but rather due to violence that characterizes their actions, they simply separate a girl or adolescent from their home and force her to live with them, as if they had married.”

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement

Group	Male Pressure Points
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men have always faced a higher level of threats and violence in regions of armed conflict, partly because they represent the head of the family (or of the church, if they are pastors or priests). As the providers for the family, men face being extorted to provide finances for armed groups. Non-church leaders face the risk of being killed, while pastors or priests may be physically assaulted, extorted for financial gain, forced to leave their regions, or even killed. Exemplifying these dangers, in March 2021, the Bishop of Buenaventura, Rubén Darío Jaramillo, reported that he had been threatened by armed groups with the use of explosives for denouncing violence and drug trafficking in the region (Verdad en Libertad, 8 February 2022) This is one of many such cases.

Within some indigenous communities in particular, converts to 'non-accepted forms of Christianity' face extreme pressure. They may be beaten, harassed, threatened or sent away to do forced labor in a different territory. "Indigenous converts must live in absolute secrecy because if they join churches or make their faith public, they are at risk of being tortured, expelled, incarcerated, and even their families may run the same risk," a country expert explained.

Christian men and boys are also exposed to abduction, forced recruitment and violence at the hands of criminal armed groups. They are subject to indoctrination and mandatory participation in the activities of these groups which may include perpetrating abductions, surveillance activities, sexual abuse, killings and trafficking. Not only is there a high risk of recruitment for combat purposes for men, but also "for the transport of illicit substances and weapons," an expert explained: "In most cases, armed groups convince children by offering them money or food, taking advantage of their socioeconomic conditions related to poverty, inequality and lack of opportunities." According to the [International Crisis Group](#) (ICG), there was a dramatic increase in the recruitment of children into armed groups in 2020, in part due to an exploitation of the COVID-19 crisis by criminals, who reinforced their territorial control while state resources were diverted in tackling the pandemic (ICG, 6 December 2021).

In light of threats and reprisals, many see forced recruitment as an "inescapable destiny," one expert explained. Even if the children are able to escape the clutches of these gangs, they will face life-long threats from former gang-members and risk abduction in the future. The forced recruitment of Christian men and boys also impacts women and the strength of the family unit, as she must raise children alone

and survive economically. As an expert shared: “This type of situation fosters structural poverty in areas under the control of organized crime and due to the need to provide basic goods to the family, children must leave the school, which makes it much easier to convince them to continue the criminal life.”

23) Burkina Faso

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Burkina Faso is located in a region where Islamist groups have a huge influence, and the rule of law is very weak, particularly in the Sahel and the eastern regions of the country where Islamic law is applied. Jihadists exploited this weakness during the COVID-19 crisis to gain increased control of the country’s infrastructure, especially in [the north](#) (Royal United Services Institute, 9 November 2022). Within this context, there is a high potential for women and girls to be abducted by militants during raids. Female converts, according to many reports, are especially vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage. The militants may force them to marry one of their members or subjugate them to sexual slavery. Christian girls will also be put under intense pressure to convert to Islam.

Raping Christian women and girls is a common method of attacking Christian communities. In many areas, there is very little understanding of women’s rights, so many people consider it “normal” to sexually assault a woman. However, girls and women who are abused think that they have brought shame and stigma to the family, and the feeling of worthlessness can weaken the family spiritually if not addressed. In particular the daughters of Christian leaders are often targeted through sexual violence “to aggravate the Christian community”.

Converts from an Islamic or traditional religious background face additional pressures. Families beat them, give them in forced marriage, withdraw them from school and in some instances, chase them out of the family. Some young women are also threatened with death. Although Burkina Faso is a CEDAW

signatory and has committed to ending [child, early and forced marriage](#) by 2030, 52% of girls are married before their 18th birthday (Girls Not Brides, accessed 25 November 2022).

Another common form of putting pressure on converts is to keep them under house arrest. As conversion to another religion is considered a betrayal by some families, they may also be repudiated and denied their inheritance.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Islamic militant groups operating in the Sahel region often recruit their members from countries like Niger and Burkina Faso. Christian men and boys are targeted for recruitment, physical attacks and for ransom. The abduction and killing of Christian men causes fear and trauma in Christian communities, as well as economic fragility as the men are normally the family providers.

Further fracturing the stability of the Church, many men and boys flee the country due to the pressures they face. A country expert comments: “Christian men and boys are targeted and recruited by militant groups. In conflict areas, they are often victims of physical attacks by violent Islamic militants. When Christian men and boys are forcibly displaced from their homes and towns because of their faith, the families are seriously affected by the persecution as well.”

Church leaders, the majority of whom are males, have also been targeted by militant groups. There have been reports of pastors and their families being abducted and held in captivity. Others have been “executed in front of their families”.

24) Central African Republic

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

The many years of violence and instability in CAR have left Christian women and girls vulnerable to various forms of religious persecution, particularly, rape, abduction, trafficking and forced marriage. Some girls who are abducted are subjected to sexual slavery; sexual abuse is a source of shame for women and girls, and they can struggle to move on from the trauma, particularly if they become pregnant. “Rape is an interminable part of the lives of Christian girls and women in the country,” a country expert asserted, observing that sexual violence against women in CAR remains a “weapon of war used by rebel groups to terrorize, traumatize and demoralize Christians in their faith”.

Within the context of high poverty rates, parents are sometimes enticed into giving their Christian girls in marriage in exchange for significant gifts. 68% of women in CAR between the ages of 20 and 24 were married off before they turned 18 – the second highest prevalence of child marriage in the world (Girls Not Brides, 2022). In other cases, Christian girls who thought they would be free to practice their faith once married to a Muslim discover that they are instead forced to convert. Female students in particular face the risk of abduction and sexual violence while on the way to and from school. This has discouraged parents living in high-risk areas from sending their daughters to school. Girls who are abused and become pregnant are likely to drop out of school. [68% of women - <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/central-african-republic>]

In CAR, women are generally more dependent on their families than men, so family-driven persecution affects them more. Because CAR is one of the poorest countries in Africa, ranking near the bottom of almost every indicator, financial need can drive Christian women with many children to agree to convert to Islam in order to survive. Converts to Christianity face further pressures from family members. They can be put under house arrest to prevent them from meeting with other Christians or forcibly married to a much older Muslim. There are reports that sometimes a Christian mother is only allowed to attend

Christian gatherings on condition that her children are sent to the mosque. Mothers have been separated from their children because of their faith.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

When Christian families are targeted by radical militias, Christian women in CAR are usually sexually assaulted and left alive, while men are mostly killed for their faith or detained by the militia. Others are abducted and either incorporated into the ranks of the rebel group or used as forced labor to extract gold and diamonds in the mines.

Pastors are especially targeted on account of their perceived efforts to convert members of the community, and sometimes, false accusations revolving around espionage are used as a pretext. Pastors have even been attacked during church services. A country expert narrates: “The deacon of one church was found on the telephone and accused of having provided information about them to the FACA and their Russian allies. He was shot in late 2021.”

Christian men also experience discrimination in the workplace. Islamic leaders dominate the marketplaces, control trade and impose large taxes on Christian businessmen or even loot the shops of Christians to keep them in poverty. Boys and men are at times forcibly recruited into rebel militant groups and they are also targeted for torture and assault. Within national military service, too, they can experience discrimination on the grounds of their faith. Forced disappearance, killing, threats and the tactical impoverishment of men is greatly affecting Christian families.

25) Vietnam

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Despite having one of the highest female workplace participation rates, women bear an unequal share of domestic work and are considered subservient. As in much of Communist Asia, women are traditionally expected to care for their parents, which requires a significant investment of time and energy. The country holds socialist ideals of equality, but Confucian values remain, which still influence aspects of society, such as school textbooks ([Mai Trang Vu & Thi Thanh Thuy Pham, 2021](#)). This is also reflected in Vietnam’s son-bias and the ongoing practice of sex-selective abortions, with the sex ratio at birth one of the most unequal globally ([The Diplomat, 13 July 2022](#)).

Female Christians may be forced into early marriages, especially converts and those in tribal cultures may be under pressure in the home from family members. A country expert adds: “In the current Hmong persecution, women are often the first converts to get the brunt of the pressure to recant,” potentially as they are perceived as easier to coerce. For example, within marriages, women face oppression, violence and threats of divorce from their husbands. This reinforces the feeling that they are unequal, creating fear and despondency.

Christian women and girls continue to be victims of sexual assault for their faith, in ongoing situations resulting from forced marriage and the trafficking of brides to China among Hmong women (in northern provinces). Reports also indicate the targeting of ethnic and religious minorities ([Humanium, 15 November 2022](#)).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement

Group	Male Pressure Points
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied communal resources; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Although men generally have [higher positions than women](#) in the workplace, Christian men also face discrimination and harassment at work, with some losing their jobs altogether because of their faith (International Labor Organization, 2022). Government officials have monitored and interfered with the work of known Christians. As men are the primary providers in Vietnam, this paralyses the whole family economically and weakens their place within society. If they are church leaders, their congregations are weakened and may even face closure. A country expert explained: “They usually monitor the activities of pastors, leaders, Christians and the activity of church then they report to the local authority.”

Christian men in Vietnam are targets for arrest (on faith-related grounds) and abduction, causing many to flee their villages. 206 prisoners of conscience were reportedly in prison at the time of access (9 December 2022), including several Catholic activists who were speaking out for religious freedom ([The 88 Project](#)). Generally, once in custody, Christian detainees suffer harsh treatment, physical beatings and are put under pressure to renounce their Christian faith. Male Christians can also expect physical violence from villagers or the authorities, even risking death for their faith.

Christians also experience pressure within the armed forces. Military service is compulsory for all men; evasion is punished by a prison sentence. Religious convictions are not grounds for non-participation. Within the armed forces, Christians are unable to read the Bible freely or partake in other Christian practices.

26) Turkmenistan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual

Group	Female Pressure Points
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Within Turkmenistan’s patriarchal and Islamic culture, domestic violence is the greatest threat for Christian women who live with non-Christians. Total submission is expected, both to their husbands as well as to their parents. A country expert explains that women from a Muslim background in particular are expected to live in “total obedience to husbands”.

Female converts therefore, who by turning away from Islam challenge the existing accepted social order, are particularly vulnerable to persecution. They face harsh physical beatings, house arrest, verbal abuse, threats and rejection. They may even be sexually assaulted as a form of punishment, although such instances are rarely reported due to the attached stigma and shame, and the impunity granted to perpetrators.

Female converts in conservative regions run the risk of being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim, as a corrective measure. Converts may also be forced into marriages not due to kidnappings, but due to the obligation to follow pre-marital arrangements made by her parents prior to conversion. Considering such pressure, many women choose to live as secret believers upon their conversion out of fear.

More broadly, abusing women can be used as an instrument to intimidate and cause distress for Christian husbands and family members, thereby pressuring the wider Christian community and fostering fear and feelings of helplessness across the Turkmen Church. As a country expert stated: “Persecuting women is an instrument for persecuting their husbands and other family members too.”

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Men in Turkmenistan normally hold leadership roles within the family, as heads of the family and financial providers, and within the Church. Pressure and violence directed against them affects entire families and congregations, causing fear, anger and financial hardship. Christians feel that state agents look for any excuse to issue fines to Christian men, for instance for holding illegal gatherings, for the possession of religious literature, even for downloading Christian songs. Pressure also comes from the community on a local level; Muslims obstruct business activities of converts and Protestants (whom they view as a sect), forcing many Christian business owners to keep their faith a secret. As men are the primary financial providers in Turkmenistan, they cannot afford to lose financial income.

Church leaders in Turkmenistan, who are generally male, are especially targeted for persecution. Muslims consider them primarily responsible for leading people away from Islam and attack those they deem to be most active evangelistically. The state authorities regard them as primary targets to control Christian activities; they expect a certain level of cooperation from those in leadership to inform them of anybody with radical or 'extremist' views. A country expert explained: “The state regards pastors and church leaders as primary targets to control Christian activities. They are used as examples for the other Christians of what may be expected.”

With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that the authorities also influence the choice of who assumes leadership positions. Church leaders also face challenges in obtaining religious training; many have been denied exit visas when going to Christian conferences and seminars. Tight restrictions exist over religious education and institutions in Turkmenistan; training can only be conducted in special, state-licensed religious institutions. There are, however, no such institutions in Turkmenistan.

Christian men also face discrimination, intolerance and bullying within the context of the armed forces; military service remains mandatory in Turkmenistan, and objection on grounds of conscience is not permitted. Those who refuse, risk imprisonment. Additionally, male converts face harassment and interrogation by their families and local communities. They may also experience threats, disinheritance, shaming and beatings.

27) Cuba

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied/restricted healthcare; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal

Group	Female Pressure Points
Technological	-

Pressure on Christian women and girls in Cuba is, in part, facilitated by legislative gaps concerning domestic and intrafamily violence, although the recently ratified Family Code does include additional protection for women and girls ([The Guardian, 26 September 2022](#)). Data gaps restrict comprehensive analysis, but reports indicate that domestic violence worsened in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ([OHCHR, 31 January 2022](#)). Similarly, the increasing rate of femicide in Cuba poses a viable threat to Christian women and girls ([Radio Television Marti, 3 August 2022](#)).

Women involved in antigovernment activism are typically fired from their jobs, threatened and monitored. For example, police [continued to harass](#) the well-known “Ladies in White” – a group of women founded by the relatives of political prisoners – on their way to and from Sunday church services; primarily to quell their frequent marches (France24, 24 January 2022). In addition to beatings, members have also been arrested and detained for short periods of time.

Due to the historical repression of religion in Cuba, especially Christianity, it is challenging for women to form stable families. Christian women and girls are often insulted because of their more conservative sexual values. In Cuba, abortion has been legal and free for a long time and is presented as being a normal contraceptive method. Abortions are obligatory in the case of genetic malformation, in line with the Cuban government's ideal of maintaining a 0% rate of births with deformities. This is a major challenge for Christian women wishing to remain loyal to their Christian beliefs. Refusal may be regarded as an act of opposition towards the government.

While a greater issue for men, women were also affected by the mass detentions following the [2021 Cuban protests](#) (HRW, 11 July 2022). Reports suggest female political prisoners, like their male counterparts, encounter restricted access to medicines and Christian materials.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical

Group	Male Pressure Points
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Denied/restricted healthcare; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men are generally more susceptible to arrests and harassment since they are more likely to hold leadership positions from which they criticize government actions based on their Christian beliefs. They additionally face fines, confiscation of Christian literature, destruction of property, and death threats. A country expert explained: “Many house church leaders continued to report frequent visits from state security agents or CCP officials. Some reported warnings from the agents and officials that the education of their children, or their own employment, could be threatened if the house-church leaders continued their activities.” Members of the [Christian Liberation Movement](#) are also continuously threatened and incarcerated in [inhumane prison conditions](#), evidenced by the treatment of Yandier García Labrada (CubaNet, 28 July 2021; CubaNet, 13 December 2021).

The number of detentions has risen significantly following the July 2021 protests, where many Christians – particularly young men – were arbitrarily arrested and have received sentences of up to 20 years ([The Guardian, 15 February 2022](#)). Several demonstrators remained missing months later and hundreds more were still awaiting their verdicts in September 2021 ([Aleteia, 21 September 2021](#)).

National service is compulsory for men. If it is discovered that they are active Christians or have Christian parents, the level of discrimination and persecution depends on the attitude of the commanding officer. There have also been reports that Christian conscripts have been forced to engage in military operations that contravene their beliefs. Reflecting on recent protests over [Hurricane Ian blackouts](#), one country expert revealed the violation of conscience experienced by young Christian men “who not only had to carry weapons under threat but also had to intimidate the protesters with them, despite the fact that they considered that they were protesting for just causes that coincided with their Christian values.” Although alternative forms of social service are theoretically possible, the right to conscientious objection is very rarely upheld.

Given the economic difficulties resulting from state policies and US sanctions, many men must work abroad in order to meet family needs. The Cuban government, however, has made it increasingly difficult for regulated persons – active critics of the government – to travel, including church leaders. A country expert reported: “One of the most common measures of the regime to repress opposition voices is to prohibit or prevent them from leaving ...especially if the trip takes place in the context of a summit, forum, congress or event in which the violation of human rights on the island is discussed.”

28) Niger

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Although the law mandates equal treatment of women and men, Niger’s society is heavily male-dominant and harmful traditional practices like forced marriage and widow inheritance cause women to be more vulnerable to persecution. It has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with [76% of girls](#) being married by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides, accessed 25 November 2022). This is in part due to [wide-scale poverty, food insecurity crisis](#), and continuing instability within Niger and in neighboring countries (Concern USA, 10 January 2022).

Like many other countries in the Sahel, women and girls in Niger are also particularly vulnerable to abduction, rape and sexual abuse by extremist groups. A country expert comments: “Abducting and marrying girls to militants is part of an organized program by Islamist militants to breed its next generation of fighters.”

Beyond the threat from extreme jihadist groups, female Christians face the possibility of rape and targeted seduction for the purposes of forced conversion. Due to the high poverty rate, some Muslims allegedly use money, clothes, and phones to entice Christian girls, according to reports. Families also do not report instances of rape as it will impact the marriage prospects of the victim and is viewed as a source of shame. More broadly, many Christian girls also face sexual harassment and discriminatory remarks for failing to wear the hijab. Female genital mutilation remains a live risk for Christian girls living among ethnic communities, for instance, the Gurma tribe in the Tillaberi region.

Additionally, Christian women in Niger are affected by living under Sharia. For example, according to Sharia, a Christian woman has no right to claim custody of her children in divorce cases, even though Niger is officially a secular country. Converts to Christianity can face extreme hostility from their families and

local communities. They can be denied custody of their children, forced out of the home, forced into marriage with a Muslim man and raped. “Young female converts, if discovered, may be forcibly married to a radical cleric as a corrective measure”, a country expert explained. Many have also been denied their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity. Reports also suggest that women are often unaware of their legal options to defend their rights but when the case is taken to court, the problem is often settled satisfactorily (OECD, 2019, “[Social Institutions and Gender Index: Niger](#)”).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Trafficking; Violence – death
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Converts to Christianity can face the most severe forms of persecution, as conversion from Islam to any religion is considered a betrayal by some families. They may be rejected by their families, chased out of their family home, or put under house arrest.

There is another phenomenon in Niger – although not specifically a form of targeted religious persecution – which affects all communities and has a strong negative impact on Christian families: Boys in Niger are subject to recruitment as child soldiers. There is a high potential for boys to be abducted and forced to join the ranks of militant groups, or physically harmed during raids. They can also be abducted for forced labor, and/or trafficked between militant groups in exchange for money, weapons, or other resources. Christian men and boys have also been targeted for killings by extremist groups. A surge in attacks by armed Islamist groups over the last year has forced many men, especially pastors and church leaders to flee to safer cities like Niamey, or across the border to Burkina Faso. Since Nigerien tribes are close-knit, this situation can harm all families in a community. “There were numerous reports of abduction or kidnap of priests and other religious leaders, especially in the Tillaberi and Diffa regions”, a country expert shared. Older men who cannot flee are at a higher risk of being killed ([Human Rights Watch, 23 February 2022](#)).

Christian men in Niger can also face dismissal from their jobs because of their faith or have their business boycotted by the Muslim community. As men and boys are usually the financial providers, this leaves his family vulnerable and exposed.

29) Morocco

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

According to reports, most people in Morocco who openly declare their Christian faith are men, because their ability to be more independent in society means that they are less vulnerable to pressure than women. Although women's rights in Morocco have developed over the last sixteen years, which has given women more legal equality, women in Morocco remain in a generally less advantageous position than men (HRW 2022 country chapter). For example, they have few economic opportunities, as highlighted in Georgetown's "[Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20](#)" (p.15), making them dependent on men. Cultural expectations bind women to the home and domestic duties, especially in rural areas.

While all Christians from an Islamic background can, in practice, be denied their rights to inheritance or family affiliation, this is a particular risk for women. They are also more vulnerable to arbitrary divorce and the denial of access to their children. Personal status law follows the country's Maliki-Ashari Sunni interpretation of Sharia which enables such persecution.

Christian converts are also at risk of domestic confinement, forced marriage to a non-Christian and/or being expelled from the home. In some instances, the pressure is simply so intense that the girl relents and agrees to a marriage to someone who does not share her faith in order to escape the pressure of her family. As these pressures demonstrate, religious persecution against women characteristically takes place within the family home. Family members fear the scandal of their daughter's conversion, particularly if she is bold enough to demonstrate it in public. Considering such pressure, it is extremely difficult for converts to grow in their faith. Gaining access to Christian religious materials is difficult. Christian women using the Internet as a way to counter isolation, risk experiencing cyber-harassment for their faith and self-expression.

Although Moroccan society is relatively liberal in some respects, Christians from an Islamic background in rural areas must adhere to the religious form of clothing and way of life and may suffer harassment if they change these customs, especially during Ramadan.

Additionally, rape, or the threat of rape, is a taboo subject that is socially associated with a woman’s personal honor, which is linked to her family’s honor. The high level of stigma attached makes it a powerful tool for religious coercion. This is the case both for Moroccan women and for the numerous female Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, of whom it is thought a majority are Christian; their rape is not just motivated by exploitation but also by religious intolerance.

A country expert gave this summary: “The general position of women is a lot worse than that of men. While men have to protect the family honor, the women have to keep it high.”

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In general, male converts to Christianity are among the most vulnerable in Moroccan society, although they arguably face less pressure than female converts. By leaving Islam, they are perceived to bring shame upon their families and will face a wide variety of hostility as a result.

Within the domestic sphere, they will likely be ostracized by their families. If young and unmarried, a male convert will likely be denied financial support. If already married, he risks abandonment by his wife, whose family will also place pressure on the couple in order to ensure she is freed from his influence. Additionally, a convert can, in practice, be deprived of his inheritance. If single, he will also face pressure to marry a Muslim, although this pressure affects women more. If he reaches the age of 40 however and is still single, the pressure will mount.

Christians, particularly converts, also face difficulties in the public sphere. They are more likely than women to be targeted for government interrogation, beatings or imprisonment, especially if they are a church leader. However, the severity of the backlash after conversion depends on their social position and political standing within the local community.

Employment is also a key area of pressure for men, as they are usually the main providers in their families. They may lose their jobs or be harassed at their workplace, throwing them into economic uncertainty. It will be harder for them to secure new employment if their faith is known. Christians are sometimes accused of having converted for financial gain, since Christianity is associated with opulent Western society. Discrimination and harassment have also been reported in educational settings.

Every year, there are reports of a handful of arrests of Christian men. These arrests can occur for nothing more than having a Bible in their possession, or for discussing Christian faith with a Muslim. Fines can accompany the harassment. The pressure from families and society can be so sustained that male converts leave their homes, particularly those who are threatened with death. This makes Christian fellowships harder to form or sustain.

30) Bangladesh

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – death; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Bangladesh is culturally class-based and patriarchal. Despite the country being led by female politicians for many years, Bangladesh is still a country where it is normally dangerous and difficult to be a woman. It has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world, with [59% of girls](#) being married before they turn 18 (Girls Not Brides). Although the overall child marriage rate in Bangladesh has declined and altered in structure in recent decades, the rate of child marriage continues to be one of the highest in the world.

In this context, women and girls – particularly converts – are most vulnerable to rights violations from their nuclear family, extended family, friends, neighbors and local community, with persecution complex, often hidden behind marriages and family life, justified by social norms. Conversion is viewed as a betrayal of their culture and religion and as such, Christian women and girls can face harassment from their community, especially if they do not conform to expected modes of dress. Because women and girls are mostly dependent on males, sexual assault, rape, forced divorce and forced marriage are common forms of religious persecution. They are not only abused physically, but also mentally, and can be targeted through house arrest, isolating them from churches and communities. According to [reports](#), violence

against women and girls in Bangladesh increased during the COVID-19 crisis and female Christians have been vulnerable to these forms of persecution (UN Women and others, March 2021).

“Sexual abuse may be the most common way to persecute Christian women and girls. It assumes that a woman's sexual purity is equivalent to her worth,” a country expert shares, continuing, “Women are considered by the persecutors as ideal targets to destabilize the Christian community and stifle the next generation of Christians without reprisals. The threat of shame prevents much of the injustice done to Christian women from being disclosed or brought to the attention of the police. Even when presented to the appropriate authorities, the police often delay taking action.” Victims of sexual abuse struggle to move on from the trauma, particularly if they become pregnant by their abuser. Furthermore, [refugee camps](#) continue to be places of heightened vulnerability for women and girls (UN Women, 2 January 2022).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

One result of the male-oriented culture in Bangladesh is that men generally become Christians first, followed by their families later. Likewise, as leaders within their families, men and boys often face persecution first. They are commonly beaten for “betraying their culture and religion” and threatened. Pressure from community members and local Muslim leaders has also caused men to flee from their homes. A country expert commented: “In a predominantly male country, men are supposed to run and support their families.”

Christian men have been targeted by the authorities; sometimes they are also accused of bribing people into becoming Christians and become entangled in drug dealing by so-called “friends” for the purposes of attracting the attention of the police. Church leaders in particular can be at risk of arrest, although imprisonment is still rare.

As men are the main providers, if they lose their job because of their faith – or are imprisoned – it will affect their whole family. The additional economic hardships of the COVID-19 crisis has pushed many families to breaking point.

31) Laos

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce
Security	Trafficking; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

While Christian men and women tend to suffer equal levels of social ostracism and pressure in Laos, there are areas of specific vulnerability for women. Converts face the greatest levels of pressure. Within their local community they face mockery and isolation within the workplace and are looked down upon by those around them. In the domestic sphere, they may be beaten, disowned or put under intense pressure to renounce their faith. Girls may also experience discrimination and harassment at school, although they are less likely to be physically beaten compared to boys.

In Lao culture, value is placed on marital status. Christian women are undesirable marriage prospects, and so single Christian women attract additional insults and threats since they are deemed to be of lesser worth. Child marriage also poses specific risks; a country expert commented: “Young girls are often married to older men and when they convert, they are more vulnerable to persecution from the spouse and the extended family.”

Since Christian men are commonly arrested and detained for their faith, their wives suffer economically from the loss of the financial provider, as well as emotionally. The families must usually pay considerable sums of money to secure their release, triggering further financial paralysis. Without the aid of her husband, the woman is left with the burden of providing for their family or finding shelter if the village chief evicts them from the village. Female Christian leaders have also been arrested.

Pastors in northern areas of Laos have raised concerns about the increasing human trafficking of brides to China. Girls from ethnic minorities, including Hmong Christians, have been trafficked into China, where they are forced into sex work or into marrying local men ([La Croix, 26th May 2021](#)).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Church leadership in Laos tends to be dominated by men, a role that has become frequently targeted. Pastors are vulnerable to attacks on churches and to incarceration by the authorities. Sometimes, following incarceration, pastors are released upon paying a large fine. The economic pressure of fines such as these, as well as the time when the church leader is absent, weakens church congregations and evokes fear. Families are similarly affected by these detentions, as Christian men remain the primary providers in Laos. A country expert observed: “When the breadwinner, who is the man or pastor, is arrested the whole family suffers. The children are mocked in school and the family suffers in the village.”

Male Christians also face persecution and unfair treatment in the workplace, causing additional economic pressure. They may be excluded from government and military jobs for example, or may lose their job altogether. For those in military training, men are conditioned to give their sole allegiance to the Communist Party and to hate the Party’s enemies. Among the enemies are groups that threaten to alter the culture and traditions of Laos; this includes Christianity, which is viewed as a Western and unwelcome religion. Within schools too, Christian boys are more likely to experience physical beatings and harassment.

A major problem across Laos that affects boys and young adults is drugs, which are inexpensive and widely accessible. The tactic is to lure young men into an addiction, then use the addiction as a psychological tool of manipulation – arguing that the addiction shows that they aren’t true Christians. Given the limited educational and professional opportunities afforded to Christians, many men and boys are drawn into addiction.

32) Mozambique

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

The most common violations affecting Christian women and girls in the country are sexual harassment and rape – attributed to the incursion of Islamic militants – and forced marriage to militants, according to local sources. A country expert explains: “Young Christian women are forced to get married with insurgents’ leaders and other women are forced to work as slaves.” Mozambique also has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with [53% of girls](#) being married before they reach 18, often fueled by low education and employment opportunities for women and girls (Girls Not Brides, 2022). Cultural pressure to conform to community norms is so high that some Christian girls have reported being forced by their parents into unions with Muslims, primarily, for the prestige of having a married daughter “even when it was known that this would have implications on their faith.” Victims of forced marriage and rape have been psychologically and emotionally traumatized by these events.

Abduction is also commonly used as a tool for violating rights of freedom. During the WWL 2023 reporting period there have been numerous reports of abductions across areas of the country where jihadists and their cells exert influence. One expert noted: “Christian girls were taken as war trophies.” In addition to marriage, girls are also used for forced labor. The practice of viewing women as domestic slaves and tools of sexuality has fueled the abduction of women by insurgents to use for sex as well as domestic chores. This has especially been exacerbated by the rise in violence in the north of the country and is one of the main drivers of [human trafficking](#) in Mozambique (USDS, Trafficking in Persons Report: Mozambique, 2022). “Over 800 women are said to have been sent to jihadist camps for forced labor or sex”, a country expert disclosed.

In Muslim-dominated eastern regions of the country, Christian women and girls are required to comply with the Islamic dress code in all Muslim schools and in communal areas. Converts from a Muslim or African Traditional Religion background are particularly vulnerable to persecution from within the family sphere. Many Muslim families living in Mozambique force suspected female converts to marry a Muslim man to ensure that they cannot get involved in Christian activities. Objection to these marriages can prove

fatal for young women especially. If already married, converts face the threat of divorce and the loss of custody of their children. They may also be denied their due inheritance.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

According to country experts, *Islamic oppression* is the most common engine of persecution, particularly in the north of the country. It is reported that Christian men and boys have been particularly targeted by Islamist insurgents and killed or chased out of their homes. Young boys are particularly vulnerable to abduction and forcibly recruited into militias. This practice has been [confirmed by multiple reports](#) by Human Rights Watch (HRW, 24 November 2022). A country expert commented: “Young men are recruited to join the insurgents, older men are killed because they are regarded as weak and cannot join the insurgents' army.”

Church leaders who have been critical of the government and denounced the instigators of persecution have been harassed by government officials. Pastors have also reported being denied exit visas and being incarcerated for up to three years in re-education camps. “In 2021, 5 pastors from Cabo Delgado were detained in Mocuba”, a source revealed.

33) Indonesia

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal

Group	Female Pressure Points
Technological	-

Gender inequality in Indonesia is an ongoing issue acknowledged by the government. Despite the attention, male-biased gender norms, child marriage and education disparities [remain](#) (World Bank Blogs, 14 December 2020), and sexual harassment is considered an “epidemic” on university campuses ([HRW](#), 12 April 2022). Media reports have highlighted a lack of effective implementation of legislation, noting that it is often challenging for victims to report incidents and [access justice](#). This was particularly the case in the context of COVID-19 which caused a rise in gender-based and domestic violence (Jakarta Post, 10 March 2021).

Women who convert to Christianity can face violence, psychological abuse, and death threats if their faith is discovered by their families. Many women within marriages may choose to keep it a secret for this reason, also risking separation from their children if their husbands find out about their faith.

Christian women and girls can face the threat of divorce, which means losing their physical and economic security, more so in the rural areas. Christian women who are the first in their household to convert to Christianity are most vulnerable to this threat, although it is rarely implemented. In a patriarchal system, it is harder for the wife to influence the husband than it is for the husband to influence the wife.

In addition, Christian women are marginalized through enforced religious dress codes. In provinces like Aceh, women are required to wear a hijab, especially within the government office. Women who are caught not wearing the hijab may face bullying, interrogation and labelling as immoral women. A country expert gives an example of a woman walking in the market without a headscarf when “a local man says she is a prostitute even though she is dressed modestly.” In 2021, the government attempted to ban compulsory religious clothing in schools, but this progress was reversed by the Indonesian Supreme Court, and reports indicate pressure to wear the hijab is increasing ([The Diplomat](#), 14 September 2022).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	-
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

In Indonesia, both female and male Christians face violations of their rights. However, for men this occurs less in private areas of life. Instead, reports indicate that prominent male figures like Christian pastors and activists are the primary targets for public religious discrimination. They can face accusations, interrogations and may have to stand trial for charges such as “inciting religious hatred.”. Blasphemy laws in the country are reportedly [misused](#) to incite religious intolerance and silence critics, although pastors rarely stand trial (CSW, 8 April 2021).

Christian men and boys can be bullied for not being circumcised; a country expert shares that some Muslims in Indonesia “consider uncircumcised men to be infidels so bullying often occurs in schools against Christian men.” The presence in the region of radical Islamic groups with links to the Islamic State group has also been a threat to their physical safety.

34) Qatar

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – death; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

In general, women in Qatar face restrictions and limitations to their human rights, due to Sharia and the cultural Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. These same restrictions make Christian women particularly vulnerable to religious persecution. Generally, women are vulnerable to domestic violence, and Qatari women and girls are subject to guardianship by their male family members, where accepted cultural privacy standards dictate that: Whatever happens in the family home cannot be interfered with by the authorities ([HRW](#), 29 March 2021).

Within this context, it is especially difficult for female converts to Christianity. Conversion from Islam to another religion is forbidden, and those who do so must usually conceal their new religious beliefs. If their faith is discovered, they can risk severe consequences. Their families have the authority to limit their travel, deny financial support, deny access to the Internet, phone and books and keep them under house-arrest. It is much easier to apply pressure like this on women and girls. Converts also risk facing sexual

violence, or in the most extreme cases, honor-killings. A country expert explains: “If Native Qataris converted to Christianity, they would be under intense pressure both from their government and from their clans or tribes. A Qatari woman would risk being killed by her family under tribal law.” Thus, those who convert tend to remain silent about their conversion.

Additionally, women from a Muslim background are legally restricted from marrying a non-Muslim. A frequently mentioned form of religious persecution facing female converts is forced-marriage to a religious person who is expected to humiliate her in order to convert her back to Islam; this person can restrict her freedom for a lifetime. Some may even be married to a strictly religious uncle or nephew as his second wife, where she may live a life essentially as a sex-slave deprived of any community or respect. If already married before they convert, women may face further pressure from their husband.

Housemaids working in Qatar often face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become a high-profile issue at the international level. Although not primarily faith-related, many Christian domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, experience [serious abuses and exploitation](#), including physical, verbal and sexual violence (Amnesty International, 20 October 2020).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Besides the official restrictions on non-Islamic religious expression in Qatari society, Christians try to keep a low profile by self-censoring. Usually male Christians come under public scrutiny, since it is men who are visible in the public sphere and at the forefront of interaction with the authorities. Those in Christian leadership, who are typically male, are required to report details of church activities, further subjecting them to scrutiny. A country expert summarizes: “Pastors are closely monitored and need to be careful how they present themselves in public and what they approve and disapprove.”

Converts risk domestic pressure; if discovered, families can threaten the removal of their wife and children. In the ‘best’ circumstances, the wives could agree to live with their husband on the condition that the children will not be informed of the faith of the husband. Such converts might be able to privately carry out acts of Christian worship, but they cannot then share their faith with their children. These

combined restrictions mean that Qatari men are effectively isolated and find it very difficult to meet with other Christians or be taught and grow in their Christian faith. In more extreme cases, men can face physical trauma or even death for their faith.

Furthermore, convert Christian men are also under pressure in the area of employment, since the loss of a man’s status and job will affect the whole family through loss of income, future prospects and social isolation.

Expatriate churches are also highly monitored. Known Muslims (whether nationals or non-nationals) are not permitted by the authorities in the officially sanctioned religious complex and a non-national would risk deportation. These are all issues which directly concern men primarily.

35) Egypt

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

There have been [reports](#) that Christian women are targeted for marriage by grooming, rape and forced conversion by Islamist networks, mainly in rural areas, villages and southern towns (WWM, 14 September 2017). Police response has been often complicit or apathetic and many women remain missing. The psychological toll is high, and many women live in fear, especially in rural areas. They feel as though they cannot leave the house by themselves and at times they will ask for male company for protection. There are also reports that Christian girls are lured into marriage; these girls are often under-age and come from vulnerable families, often from situations of domestic abuse.

Traditional practices do not help in this regard: Early marriage is part of the [norm](#) in more rural and traditional areas (Girls Not Brides, 2022). Girls can also struggle to access education ([ICC, 1 August 2021](#)). A country expert commented: “Girls carry the burden of honor of the whole family. If she makes a mistake she brings shame to the whole community (the church included).” Older married Christian women whose

husbands regularly work for periods away from home have also been targeted. This can also devastate their husbands.

Female converts from Islam are most vulnerable to freedom of religion violations. They may be isolated and locked in the home, physically abused or even killed to defend the family honor. If married, they will very likely be divorced by their Muslim husbands, leaving them without any financial support. The custody of their children may be taken from them, as well as inheritance rights, although an important [legal case](#) in 2019 has been seen as a protest to conventional approaches to inheritance (The Times, 27 November 2019).

Egypt has had a reputation for having relatively high rates of sexual harassment and violence within the wider region. Due to international pressure and in-country activists, there have been some [improvements](#) in protection for those reporting sexual abuse (Reuters, 16 August 2020). Official statistics for past years are lacking, in part because women and girls refrain from reporting incidents [out of fear](#) of retaliation and the stigma attached to sexual abuse (New Lines, 4 October 2020). Giving some indication of a baseline from which these improvements have come, a UN report based on a 2013 survey states that over 99% of women in Egypt have experienced sexual harassment, regardless of what they wear or what their religion is ([UN Women](#), Study on Ways and Methods to Eliminate Sexual Harassment in Egypt, 22 December 2015, p.6). This is reinforced by a study that shows Cairo as being the most dangerous megacity for women in the world ([Thomas Reuters, 16 October 2017](#)).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – death
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christians in Egypt often feel they are being treated as second class citizens in a Muslim-majority country. Exemplifying this, the number of Christian in senior military or government positions is minimal. Unemployment is a great pressure on men throughout the country, especially in upper Egypt. Particularly in rural areas, it is hard for Christian young men to find a job, which can be exploited to coerce young men away from Christianity with financial incentives. Further exemplifying economic discrimination, there have been instances of Christian men experiencing discrimination simply due to their Christian names.

According to [Daraj Media](#) (14 March 2021), over the last 30 years, only 12 Christian players have been part of Egypt’s Premier League. As the main financial provider, this hinders a Christian man’s ability to provide and impacts his self-confidence, which in turn affects his family. The strain of these dynamics has reportedly caused higher rates of domestic violence and divorce.

Church leaders – most of whom are male – are particularly vulnerable to rights violations, in part as they are easily identifiable as Christians. The harassment and killing of clergy has evoked feelings of fear and helplessness in the Christian community and has been a factor in emigration spikes. Those who speak out against injustices are also targeted.

Converts can be particularly targeted and some male converts are eventually forced to flee the country.

36) Tunisia

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian women and girls in Tunisia are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and domestic violence. On Georgetown’s [‘Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022’](#), Tunisia ranked 117th out of 170 countries. [Reports](#) highlight the societal discriminatory norms and lack of employment opportunities that women face (World Bank Blogs, 23 December 2020). The culture is not generally respectful of women in practice, nor does it recognize women as leaders. The free movement of women and girls is also restricted. This gap in gender equality is also exploited as a means of religious persecution.

As conversion from Islam is forbidden, converts from Islam face the greatest breadth of persecution if their faith is discovered. Women are more at risk in the traditional family context (since men have more freedom to express their own opinion). They may be physically beaten, expelled from their home, put under house arrest, threatened with death and/or raped. If already married, she will likely be divorced, have her children taken away and have her financial support withdrawn. Some Christian women

have been separated from their children for prolonged periods due to disputes related to their new Christian faith. Single female converts on the other hand may be forced into a marriage with a Muslim man, especially when they get above a certain age. This is particularly common in rural areas.

The main source of persecution for women in Tunisia comes from the dominating male in the family: For a single female that would be the father, the brother or any other family member who follows in rank after that (uncle etc.); for a married woman that would be her husband or even fiancé. Female converts, especially in rural areas, have little chance of accessing either Christian community or Christian materials. For example, a girl may be kept in her room for months and targeted with physical violence for a perceived conversion to Christianity.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

New converts to Christianity – both male and female – are by far the most vulnerable group of Christians in Tunisia. Convert Christian men face intimidation, beatings and death threats. They bring shame upon their families by leaving Islam and can therefore be ostracized. Pressured by their families, Muslim wives may leave a Christian convert, and he may be denied inheritance or even access to his possessions. However, the severity of backlash following conversion depends on his social position and his political standing within his community. While Christian men may have been expelled from their homes when the family first learnt about their conversion, many have found that their families will quietly accept the conversion at a later point in time. Others however have been forced to permanently relocate, particularly away from rural areas.

Male converts also face loss of jobs and promotion and physical violence. When a man is persecuted, his family becomes vulnerable and lacks protection.

37) DRC

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

The Democratic Republic of Congo has a complex political, socio-economic and cultural landscape. Women across several areas of DRC, particularly those dominated by Islam, are commonly treated as inferior. This has an impact on their experience of much of life for girls. For married converts from Islam, this can play out in being denied access to their children, or commonly - if widowed - being denied access to their inheritance.

In addition to this discrimination, Congolese Christian women are vulnerable to abduction, rape, trafficking, and sexual slavery, especially by ADF militants. A country expert summarizes: “Women and girls are raped, forced to marry ADF soldiers and others are trafficked. Sometimes these women and girls are killed.” Many Christian women who are spared are reportedly kept as a kind of “trophy.” Christian women, particularly converts, may be forcibly married, forcibly impregnated or forcibly divorced. These forced marriages are often early marriages, as sources report that elderly Muslim men often prefer young Christian girls. Child marriage rates are high in the DRC, with some [37% of girls](#) marrying before they turn 18– among the top 20 countries in the world with the highest rates of child marriage (Girls Not Brides, accessed 30 November 2022).

Kidnappings and instances of rape most commonly occur at the hands of armed groups in the northeastern regions, causing extreme psychological distress and trauma for the victims. According to experts, women are sometimes raped next to male hostages, who are bound. Certain terrorist groups seek Islamization through violent means, forcibly marrying abducted women to militia leaders and subjecting others to a life of sexual slavery. Women and girls have also been known to be used as human shields during violent confrontations with government forces. “The persecutors sometimes put women (sometimes pregnant) and small girls in front, knowing that they cannot be easily shot”, an expert revealed.

Reports indicate that government soldiers have also been complicit in the widespread [sexual violence](#) against women in conflict zones (HRW, 18 October 2022). Due to the shame of sexual violence, Christian women and girls may face isolation and rejection from their families and communities following an attack. Rape can “[socially destroy](#)” communities and victims, due to stigma and the fear of disease linked to rape (van Wieringen, K., 2020). Speaking on the impact on the victims and the multiplier effect in the community, a country expert observed: “Women and girls who are persecuted through discrimination and sexual violence often get traumatized and develop very low self-esteem. As a result, they do not see themselves as capable adults who have important roles to play in society.” In more extreme cases, an attack may cost a girl her life.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In a context of endemic violence and impunity, Congolese Christian men face violent and extreme forms of persecution, including maiming, abduction, forced recruitment into militia groups, forced labor, sexual mutilation, disemboweling and brutal killings. While women and girls face the highest rates of rape, an expert highlights that “men and boys also face conflict-related sexual violence.”

To escape their kidnapers, men may be forced to pay large ransoms; these fines paralyze already impoverished families, sentencing them to live out the next few years in even more desperate poverty. Even without punitive ransoms, Christian men reportedly face discrimination in the workplace and in some cases, are denied the opportunity to work.

The targeting of Christian men in these ways also serves to weaken their families as well as the wider Church. Church leaders are also targeted, especially if they have publicly denounced violence. “Churches that attempt to criticize the government risk being shut down and having their leaders arrested. Furthermore, churches that try to speak against the actions of the ADF expose themselves to suffering more violent attacks,” an expert shares.

38) Mexico

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Within the context of a country with a 95.6% Christian population, the persecution facing Christian women in Mexico usually overlaps with other exacerbating factors, focusing mostly on indigenous communities and in regions dominated by organized crime. Christian converts from indigenous communities face high levels of pressure, including being forced to marry non-Christian indigenous men; tribal authorities consider this a way of pressurizing them to renounce their faith.

Criminal gangs represent the other primary threat to women and girls. Since Mexico is among the countries with [highest rates](#) of human trafficking in the world, women are easy targets for recruitment for abduction and sexual slavery, most commonly by illegal armed groups (US Department of State, “2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mexico”). Additionally, within the WWL 2023 reporting period, there has been an increase in femicide and violence against women and girls. Some studies suggest more than [70%](#) of all women in Mexico have experienced different forms of violence – sexual violence the most prevalent and often occurring in 2021, possibly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Reuters, 31 August 2022).

Criminal leaders target children of Christian homes, because their attitude of obedience is presumed, making it easier to instruct and indoctrinate them. Those who resist face threats against their own lives as well as those of their families, motivating internal forced displacement. One country expert asserts: “It cannot be ruled out that Christian parents have been victims of this situation, despite their attempt to prevent their daughters from being kidnapped or receiving money for a forced marriage, especially in a context of abandonment by state authorities and de facto submission, both to the power of the indigenous community and to the criminal groups that operate in those areas.” Some women and girls are also targets of abductions and killings since they are considered targets of criminal groups for their relationship with the cartel enemies.

Additionally, the fact that women are forced to maintain a relationship with members of criminal groups leads to an inevitable threatening of their Christian faith and that of the family; in many cases this dynamic leads to their separation and breakdown. Women recruited into criminal gangs are subjected to packing

drugs, distributing, cleaning houses or making food or serving as sexual slaves. Those who convert to Christianity and desert such groups are likely to find that their families face punishment in the form of violence or the threat of violence. These dynamics perpetuate cycles of violence, insecurity and socio-economic issues for women and girls.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Within the context of ongoing violence and organized crime, young men and boys are more likely to be killed in Mexico than women ([Vision for Humanity, 2022 Mexico Peace Index, p 28](#)). While there is no law which makes Christian men and boys particularly vulnerable to hostility on grounds of faith, in the areas controlled by criminal groups or drug cartels, young men are exposed to indoctrination and forced recruitment into these groups. Some young men accept this as an inescapable destiny due to their economic and social circumstance. Those who do not accept it - whether for reasons of Christian faith or otherwise – face threats and potential abduction and killing. Families, too, are bribed and intimidated to force their children to obey the gangs. The Jalisco Nueva Generacion Cartel (CJNG), the Gulf Cartel (CDG), and Los Zetas are among the main criminal organizations notorious for [recruiting](#) children and adolescents (CFR, 7 September 2022).

The impact of forced recruitment of Christian men and boys is far-reaching. A country expert commented: “The drug trafficker harasses, above all, the children of pastors or of Christians with more commitment in the faith community, to recruit them or as a way of pressuring their parents to stop their Christian activities in the area.”

Men in Mexico generally face intense pressure and violence as the heads of families and leaders of churches. Threatening the male head intimidates the wider families and communities. When armed

criminal groups wish churches to cease functioning or to limit their activities, the threats are often aimed first at the leader of the church. In recent WWL reporting periods, there have been several examples of priests and pastors being beaten, kidnapped for ransom, and killed ([Agenzia Fides, 1 September 2021](#); [Reuters, 22 June 2022](#)). Church leaders are also the most frequent victims of fines and extortion since it is believed that they must have access to church funds. Leaders are also targeted in order to prevent them from conducting positive work within the community or speaking out against illegal activity.

Church leaders also face extreme travel restrictions, especially traversing territories controlled by different cartels. One country expert stated: “Priests and pastors must be extremely careful when traveling, not only with respect to the permission of the area leader, but also take into account the time and manner of travel, to avoid being a victim of episodes of violence.”

Converts from an indigenous background (ancestral rites or syncretistic practices related to Catholic Church) face particular pressure and violence; they may be beaten, harassed, and expelled from the community. The level of pressure and violence increases if the convert is deemed to be a Christian leader since such leaders are presumed to be inciters of rebellion and influential propagators of the Christian faith.

39) Ethiopia

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Despite the long history of Christianity in Ethiopia, many Christian women remain vulnerable to religious persecution. Violations of basic rights against Christian women in Ethiopia often occur in the form of abduction and forced marriage to a non-Christian. This is facilitated by a general situation in which abduction and forced marriage [remain present](#) at a national level despite having been prohibited and criminalized by law (UNICEF, 13 June 2022). Country experts have explained that the rising violence in the

country compounded by the severe drought has [quadrupled](#) the prevalence of child marriage in some regions (The Guardian, 30 April 2022). [40% of girls](#) are married under the age of 18 and sources reveal that early and forced marriage particularly occurs in rural parts of the country (Girls Not Brides, accessed 2 December 2022). Female Christian teens (and converts in particular) can be forced to marry a follower of a different religion after abduction or family arranged marriage. Christian girls can also be secretly convicted on economic grounds and married by Muslim men without their parent's consent. Following her "marriage," the Christian wife is expected to take on the religion of her new husband.

Speaking on this discreet tactic of conversion and subterfuge, a country expert disclosed: "Many young Christian females with non-believer or Muslim parents get together, contact the parents, and offer them a huge sum of money in exchange for their daughter's hand in marriage. Because of their [economic] fragility, the parents embrace the perks and forcefully tell their daughter to marry someone in this manner. This has led to the conversion of many young Christian converts to Islam." Families that do not conform to these cultural norms are often threatened and ostracized. Tribal leaders also incite relatives to castigate Christian girls that object to such marriages. This leaves some girls – especially converts – no choice but to "go from one place to another [in order to] not marry an unbeliever and hide, resulting in dropout of schools and psychological damage."

Rape is also an effective means of punishing a Christian woman or girl due to the severe consequences. A country expert explained: "If a girl is raped, the community isolates her; she will not be able to marry or learn; her family will be embarrassed, and, if a woman is raped, her future will be ruined by the word of the event. The violated girl's marriage would be frowned upon by the community." There are also reports of sexual violence being used extensively in the Tigray region; while the extent to which this is religiously targeted is contested, Aid to the Church in Need has reported the rape of Catholic nuns by the military ([ACN, 28 May 2021](#)).

Female converts from Islam face the most severe violations, particularly at the hands of family members. They may be deliberately isolated from other family members and from their church community, put under house arrest in order to protect the family's honor, physically abused and forcibly married to a Muslim. "She is compelled to leave her children and house if she is a wife," an expert adds. When a Muslim wife converts to Christianity, forced divorce is the most likely outcome. Even if her spouse does not seek a divorce, his family will pressure the spouse to divorce and claim custody of the children, to protect the family name and ensure their grandchildren are given an Islamic upbringing. In areas where Christianity is a minority religion, a (de facto) divorce is most likely to take place outside courtrooms; the elders presiding over a tribal court see Christian faith as a dangerous deviation and will likely grant custody to the other spouse in order to prevent the spread of Christianity in the community.

Christians often face difficulties in procuring their inheritance after their decision to convert; it is reported that this affects mainly women. Since 78% of the population live in rural areas, inheritance is viewed as one of the main means to survive (World Bank profile). Inheritance rights are in principle handled through official state institutions where religious discrimination is minimal. However, in areas where traditional

systems are still dominant, or in the many cases that do not go through the official state process, part of the exclusion for new converts includes disinheritance.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men in Ethiopia are generally more likely to suffer physical attack and displacement than women and girls, although rampant violence in the country has challenged this trend by exacerbating attacks and displacement for all. Nonetheless, given the scale of civil unrest, boys and men are particularly prone to conscription into armed and paramilitary forces. They may also be robbed of their possessions, or even killed during raids. It is deemed more strategic to attack men and boys, especially Church leaders, as they are usually the propagators of the Christian faith and providers for their families. A country expert remarked on the recent uprising: “The main target was to kill church leaders; pastors and Christian [youth] leaders.” Attacking them weakens their whole family and the Christian community in general.

The government also plays a role in violating men's religious freedom through imprisonment. Men are particularly at risk of this in Muslim-dominated areas. Reports indicate that Christians face an increased likelihood of arrests on religious grounds in the Oromia and Amhara regional states. In addition, there are numerous instances and allegations of government interference in church elections and appointments. Since the majority of church leaders are men, these violations predominantly affect Christian men. The allegations target almost all leaders of major churches in the country, accusing them of being pro-government and of receiving appointments through government influence. New reforms continue to be discussed, however, and there is some hope that in future years this will become less common.

When converts are discovered, “ministers and missionaries are hunted down by extremists,” a country expert revealed. Many converts have been forced to flee their towns and settle elsewhere to avoid attacks and harassment. Although unverified, there are claims that Christian men have been lured into marriages by non-Christian women “trained to catch Christian men”.

40) Bhutan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

While society in Bhutan is traditionally [matriarchal](#), and Bhutanese women do not have to contend with institutionalized forms of discrimination, female Christians are vulnerable to pressure for their faith, particularly from their families and local communities (Verma Priyadarshini, "Women in Bhutan: Exploring their socio-cultural status in the late 20th century", Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Volume 75 [2014], pp. 920-927). As a country expert comments: "[W]hile legally women are given equal rights as men, in practice there is discrimination especially for those from a Hindu background."

Christian women who convert from Hinduism or Buddhism to Christianity are at the greatest risk of persecution, typically through being emotionally abused by their families or divorced by their husbands. A divorce is relatively [easy to procure](#) in Bhutan, increasing the fear among female converts that their husbands might decide to leave them (OECD, 2019, "Social Institutions and Gender Index: Bhutan"). While there were no reported instances of forced divorce in the WWL 2023 reporting period, this remains an ongoing risk for converts. A country expert shares that, due to polygamous practices, "the unbelieving spouse will just marry another person," exacerbating the fear that female converts may be left or sidelined by their husbands. Christian women married to non-Christians are also socially under pressure to stay with their husbands despite domestic abuse.

Furthermore, whenever Christian women are married to a non-Christian and do not want to convert (e.g. to Buddhism), they can in some instances face intense pressure from their husband and/or husband's family to convert in order to avoid the shame of a divorce. For single converts, the fear of being pressured into marriage is based on tangible threats, although no such instances have been reported in the WWL 2023 reporting period.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access

Group	Male Pressure Points
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Although men and women enjoy equal rights under the law, traditional matriarchal society means that there is still preference in practice for inheritance and land ownership to pass down the [female line](#) (World Bank, Bhutan Gender Policy Note, 2013). In this context, Christian men and boys often experience persecution through families, being disowned by their family, asked to leave the family home, and losing inheritance. They will likely experience strong pressure from their peers and local community, compounding the sense of isolation and rejection.

They further experience pressure in the work place. When male Christians lose their job or are excluded from the traditional way of farming, the entire family is affected by the economic loss as he is typically the financial provider.

41) Turkey

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

Although the Turkish legal system is generally not prejudicial as regards religious freedom, “elevating Islam’s public role in this constitutionally secular republic has been more than a slogan; it has found expression in many government policies”, according to the [Economist](#) (1 July 2019). As regards the rights of men and women, the prevailing culture and the lack of implementation of their equal rights under law allows for some gender inequality in practice.

Turkey knows high levels of domestic violence and femicide. Despite [several campaigns](#) organized to change these attitudes, Turkey [withdrew from the Istanbul Convention](#) (BBC News, 30 July 2020 and 20 March 2021). A country expert summarizes: “Generally speaking, women are more vulnerable to persecution in Turkey because their position in society is of inferior status...Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence, did anything but help the role of women in Turkey. Christian or other minority women are particularly vulnerable, even more so in rural areas. Violence and murders of women have massively increased over the past years under Erdogan's rule.”

Female converts are most vulnerable to persecution, especially in rural areas. Within Islamic society they are already considered to have less authority than men and are subject to familial control. Becoming a Christian, or marrying a Christian, contradicts the expectations on women to bring honor to their family; they are expected to honor their families by their career choices, their relationships and their marriage choices. The violation of rights of women and girls affects their families, inspiring anger, fear and anxiety in other family members.

Converts – particularly those who are unmarried – face the threat of being locked in the family home. Reports indicate that girls have fled their homes to other cities in order to find safety. Converts also risk sexual abuse, harassment, rejection and being denied access to church or religious materials. Sexual abuse is rarely talked about in Turkey’s honor and shame culture – as such, many victims carry trauma alone. Experts indicate that female Turkish Christians experience greater levels of mental abuse than men in general.

Christians also face pressure in the public sphere. Given the current increased emphasis on Islam in Turkey, women are likely to face increasing pressure to meet Islamic expectations of dress and conduct. Those who fail to do so risk being harassed, insulted and even physically harmed.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In Turkey, media, police, bureaucratic and communal discrimination and hostility target both male and female Christians. However, men face the additional pressure of interwoven religious and cultural expectations: They are expected to be defenders of Islam and Turkishness, concepts which are closely aligned in public perception. Failure to live up to that expectation creates pressure on men that can prevent them from ever stepping foot into a church.

According to sources, men and boys are more likely to be detained or threatened. They may be arrested and mistreated by the authorities, face job loss, disinheritance loss or family rejection. During military service men are in an environment where, if their Christian religion is recorded in their ID, they are likely to be viewed with suspicion by their superiors and bullied by their peers. Despite obligatory military service, Christians are unlikely to rise in army ranks, and converts face extra challenges to live as a Christian in the military environment. A country expert shared a story of a convert conscripted into the army who “had to keep his Christian faith basically a secret... maintaining his devotional practices had become a virtual impossibility.”

Christians also have much difficulty finding employment in the public sector, while they also face discrimination in the private sector. As men are the main financial providers, the violation of rights of male Christians can hit his wider family and community hard. It can cause anger, fear and anxiety. The psychological toll of being unable to provide for their families can be considerable.

42) Comoros

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Many Comorian families traditionally have matrilineal inheritance, giving women a good deal of influence in the home that can often serve as a buffer against persecution. Nevertheless, female converts from Islam experience serious difficulties due to their conversion and are kept under close family scrutiny. Women and girls who convert to Christianity before they have received their inheritance, face the danger of being disinherited for their faith, due to the shame that their conversion has brought upon the

family. This leaves them at a financial disadvantage, leading to poverty and distress. In addition to being shunned, there is the possibility that they will be forced into marrying a Muslim in order to put pressure on them to return to Islam. There are no reports in the WVL 2023 reporting period that Christians have been subjected to forced marriage, although pressure remains high. Women who refuse to marry face ostracism from their community. Christian women and girls are more vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, and abuse, especially at the community level.

Apostasy remains a criminal offence in Comoros although not generally enforced. According to a country expert, sometimes, “the communal aspects of punishment such as isolation, denunciation and verbal or physical abuse at times could even be far worse.” A married woman who converts can be divorced for her faith. In some instances, husbands have been largely accepting of their new-found faith, although they have then come under huge pressure from their family and local community to initiate a divorce. Should a divorce occur however, she will remain responsible for the upbringing of her children and be able to share her Christian faith with them.

Christian women and girls are also vulnerable to trafficking. Comoros is renowned as a [transit hub](#) for traffickers who traffic mostly women and children to the Middle East for sex work and forced labor (USDS, Trafficking in Persons Report: Comoros, 2022).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Forced divorce; Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied food or water; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Comoros is a matrilineal society in which the cultural norm is for a married man to move in with his in-laws. Male converts in Comoros are often dependent upon their extended families and lack independence. In this situation, the family has the means to exert a great deal of pressure upon a convert to return to Islam. They are denied equal treatment in the home, verbally abused, and in some cases, occasionally denied food. Often their wife is put under pressure to divorce them and expel them from their home. In rare instances, male converts have faced such extreme pressure and threats that they have fled to another town for safety, although no such cases have been reported in the WVL 2023 reporting period.

Christian men also experience discrimination in the workplace. Employers favor Muslims and as such many Christians are out of work. In addition, because of high corruption levels in public service, most employees pay a bribe to get into positions, a practice that Christians are not willing to condone. The persecution of men and boys affects Christian families and communities greatly. Where Christian men are not able to find work because of being discriminated against, they are not able to provide for their families and become increasingly dependent on women who hold the family wealth.

The government also closely monitors Christian activities and maintains all legal prohibitions against any other religion other than Sunni Islam. This makes Christian preaching, training of Church leaders, and publication of Christian materials extremely difficult. Since the majority of church leaders in Comoros are men, these violations predominantly affect male Christians. According to a country expert, pastors and priests are particularly vulnerable to arrests if what they preach is interpreted as “against social cohesion.”

43) Malaysia

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Targeted Seduction; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

With four prime ministers since 2018, political instability is an ongoing challenge for Malaysia ([The Independent](#), 24 November 2022). Rights have long been restricted for Muslim women and girls who are governed by Sharia law, which restricts their rights in relation to marriage, divorce and child guardianship.

In light of this, female converts from Islam to Christianity are vulnerable to a wide spectrum of pressure, the most prevalent being the threat of sexual violence and/or forced marriage to a Muslim. Since the minimum legal age for marriage in the Islamic family laws (16 for females) can be lowered with the consent of a Sharia judge, it is possible for girls to be married as teenagers ([Girls Not Brides, accessed 6 December 2022](#)). This can make girls who convert to Christianity much more vulnerable. Such cases are rarely reported, however, as they are seen as shameful for the family (in the sense that it is deemed shameful for marriage to be necessitated to pressure a convert daughter into rejecting her new-found faith).

Peer pressure within schools has reportedly increased for girls, particularly in relation to dress code. While schools in Malaysia have been prohibited from compelling students to wear the *tudong* (a traditional headscarf) for nearly three decades, social pressure leads to them wearing it anyway ([Free Malaysia Today, 9 February 2021](#)).

The COVID-19 crisis reportedly caused a [42% increase](#) in domestic violence, which is likely to have impacted Christian female converts (Ova, 17 March 2022). On rare occasions, Christian women are also vulnerable to being detained and interrogated by the authorities about Christian networks and leaders, although this remains a greater source of pressure for men.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Following a period of political instability, the government is a point of concern for male Christians in Malaysia. While there had been previous pledges to sign the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, conservative Muslim groups strongly oppose this as they fear it will encourage apostasy and proselytism of Muslims. Men and boys are often the targets of these groups. The persecution typically impacting Christian men also comes in the form of bullying by vigilante groups and monitoring by the religious authorities.

44) Tajikistan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal

Group	Female Pressure Points
Technological	-

Although in Tajikistan the law generally gives equal rights to men and women, traditional culture puts women in an inferior position compared to men and requires them to be obedient to male family members. Domestic violence is widespread, and perpetrators operate in a culture of impunity. Compounding struggles for victims, there is a distinct lack of mental health support in the country ([MNN, October 2020](#)).

As Tajikistan is a predominately Muslim nation, female converts from Islam are particularly vulnerable to intolerance, discriminating pressure and violent persecution. Since Islamic teaching in the country compels women to submit in all ways to the men in the family, in practice, women do not have the independence or freedom to choose their own religion. If their conversion is discovered, female converts run the risk of being locked up, beaten, rejected, sexually assaulted, or forced to marry a Muslim. In particular, women and girls who had a premarital arrangement before their conversion will be forced to marry. Although there were no reported cases in the WWL 2023 reporting period, this remains an ongoing risk for converts. If a woman was already married before becoming a Christian, she will likely experience beatings from her husband and be forcibly divorced. In short, female converts are put under immense pressure to recant their new faith.

A country expert gives an example from one city in Tajikistan, where a female Christian’s husband “simply forbids her and her son to attend the Church and locks them up.” This temporary house-arrest ensures that she and her son do not have access to Christian teachings and rites.

The state authorities in Tajikistan prohibit the use of religious clothes or symbols, including those worn by female Christians. Among some Baptists and Pentecostal groups, married women traditionally cover their heads with a headscarf. This headscarf is different from the one used by Muslim women, but there is concern that it could possibly become a future cause for arrest.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience

Group	Male Pressure Points
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Like other parts of Central Asia, men in Tajikistan normally hold leadership roles within the family and within the churches. As such, there is more pressure on men from the police. From time to time, police officers disrupt meetings and interrogate the Christians attending. The local authorities often impose fines on Christians because of their faith and for legal reasons such as gathering without a permit, possessing and printing religious material without a permit, or perceived proselytization. Rights violations by the state include searches, detention, interrogation, confiscation, fines and imprisonment. When detained by the police, Christian men suffer verbal and physical abuse, threats, beatings, and pressure to become informers. If a man is a church leader, his treatment by the authorities will affect his church and cause levels of fear to rise; active convert leaders will face the highest levels of pressure.

At the hands of the local community, Christian men can lose their jobs and suffer beatings, threats, verbal and physical abuse, discrimination, ostracization and pressure aimed at their family members. Men are the main providers and if they lose employment it affects the whole family. Within the context of mandatory military service, too, Christian men have been exposed to various forms of physical and mental persecution.

Known converts will be harassed and interrogated harshly by non-Christian members of their family and community. At the hands of his own Muslim family, a Christian convert may face beatings, humiliation and loss of inheritance. For young men who are students and still needing financial support, such financial dependency can be the means parents use to prevent and discourage conversion.

Due to strict laws about religious education, the state restricts the training of church leaders. As church leaders are predominately male, this primarily affects men, particularly those belonging to non-Orthodox groups.

45) Cameroon

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage

Group	Female Pressure Points
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Cameroon is a secular country, yet the Far North region continues to suffer from the violent presence of Boko Haram. Christian women in northern Cameroon are subject to several forms of persecution related to their status in society. Boko Haram continues to regularly abduct women and girls, forcing them into marriage with one of their members or subjecting them to forced labor and rape. They are further put under extreme pressure to renounce their faith and [embrace Islam](#) (USDS: “2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Cameroon”). A country expert summarizes some of the risks: “Christians living in the Far North region that has been terrorized by Boko Haram are under a constant threat of abduction by Boko Haram fighters. These Christians are also sometimes forced to marry Boko Haram leaders and fighters.” Exemplifying just how repressive these militants are, country experts indicate that several girls have been forced to act as suicide bombers to further decimate Christian populations.

Compounding these pressures, strong governance is lacking in Cameroon. [Multiple reports](#) of sexual violence and other “pervasive” human rights violations by the military and armed separatist groups have spurred no significant government action (Al-Jazeera, 29 April 2021). Cameroonian authorities have impeded several local human rights NGOs by “harassing their members, limiting access to prisoners, refusing to share information, and threatening violence against NGO personnel,” according to a country expert (HRW 2022 country report).

Female converts to Christianity from a Muslim or Animist background face further pressure within family and community. Linked partly to a lack of education, women in Cameroon are dependent on their husbands or fathers; when they decide to convert to Christianity, it can be considered an act of defiance. They can be denied the opportunity to socialize with other Christians and to go to church. Unmarried converts risk being forcibly married to a non-Christian, particularly in the north of the country. Cases of house arrests and forced confinement of Christian women and girls are rarely reported but are “very prominent, especially in families of Muslim converts.” Married converts conversely face the prospect of divorce, the loss of custody of their children, disinheritance, and eviction from the home. “When one half of a couple converts, the tendency is to alienate the wife and children for the man's case, or to send the woman out of the house in order to put pressure on them so they denounce their new faith”, an expert shares.

Poverty and [financial dependency](#) make Christian women and girls more vulnerable to these various pressures (Reliefweb, 23 October 2019). According to an expert, these pressures are the “combined effect of pre-existing cultural and traditional discriminatory norms and practices, gender discrimination and socio-economic vulnerability caused by the crisis.” Women are also more likely to be employed in informal low-wage jobs that are highly susceptible to disruption during public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic ([World Bank, 25 May 2022](#)). Displaced Christian women also face severe economic hardship in Muslim-dominated regions. An expert disclosed: “They are given irregular and meager wages by their Muslim employers. If they try to speak against this harsh treatment or demand regular pay and better wages, they are beaten and maltreated.”

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Boko Haram also poses a major threat to Christian men and boys living in the northern regions of Cameroon, particularly church leaders. Going to school remains risky for boys as well as for men who are teachers, as evidenced by the chain of attacks on education since the [reopening of schools](#) in September 2022 (VOA, 15 September 2022). Men have been abducted by militant groups, tortured, and used for forced labor. Others have been forcibly recruited into the ranks of militias. This leaves Christian families without a family head and provider, making them vulnerable to attacks themselves. Communities have become reduced in size due to such attacks, compounded by many men leaving the locality for safer areas. In the North West and South West regions, according to a country expert, men and boys are most at risk of threats to life because they are accused of supporting either military forces or separatist groups.

An expert summarizes: “The proliferation of the Islamic militants in the North poses a major source of persecution for Christians. In their bid to establish a Sharia state, Jihadist religious leaders have mainly targeted the clergy, students, political leaders and humanitarian workers to advance their course. Under the period of review, students in mission schools have been reportedly killed, archbishops and teachers affiliated to the church have been kidnapped and molested by separatist groups and Boko Haram.”

Conflict in the Anglophone region has also fueled instability in the country and caused many people to flee, including Christians.

Christian men also face discrimination in the areas of job opportunities and promotion. Furthermore, they also experience hindrances from government officials when they oppose corruption and violence. Several Church leaders have reportedly been arrested on false charges, tortured, and killed by government officials in response to their criticism of the government's [inhumane](#) crackdown on political opposition (US Embassy, 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices/Cameroon, 12 April 2022). When a man refuses to get involved in unethical practices because of his Christian beliefs, he is taunted and called a coward. When jobs are refused due to discrimination, the family cannot thrive. Boycotts also affect Christian families economically, financially, and psychologically. The lack of economic alternatives [lends fertile grounds](#) for the recruitment of more men and boys into armed groups (Reliefweb, 28 May 2021).

Male converts to Christianity also face pressure from family and community members. They may be rejected by their nuclear families and be denied their due inheritance. A country expert comments: “Men too are also coerced into marrying Muslim girls to prevent them from staying Christians. Muslim girls are sent to seduce them and eventually get pregnant so the man will be forced to marry them.”

46) Brunei

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest)
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Although Brunei is a CEDAW signatory, Human Rights Watch reported in May 2019 about the [threat](#) the new Sharia Penal Code poses to minority groups such as women and religious minorities (HRW, 22 May 2019). Despite international condemnation, rights and freedom continue to be restricted, and Brunei’s human rights record has come under harsh [criticism](#) (The Diplomat, 29 October, 2021).

Male and female converts to Christianity face the most pressure for their faith. Due to the ever-stricter implementation of Islamic laws, women are forced to wear a hijab and are punished by the religious authorities when they refuse to wear one. Within schools, universities and workplaces they risk

discrimination if unveiled. This generally does not apply to known Christian families, but to converts (although all women need to wear a veil if in government positions).

Similar to the experience of male converts, women and girls are usually disowned by the family when their conversion becomes known. The family often isolates them, and Imams can be called to make them recant. They may also be forced to attend Islamic spiritual rehabilitation programs. For unmarried women, sometimes their families also threaten them with forced marriage to Muslim men they know. Married converts to Christianity are likely to have their children taken away from them in order to ensure they are raised as Muslims. Custody decisions are not gender-specific, but the law bans surrendering the custody of a minor to a Muslim convert.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

As previously mentioned, male and female converts to Christianity face the strongest levels of pressure for their faith. Some men and boys are disowned by the family when they convert and are forced to leave the family home. Students also risk discrimination and verbal abuse within educational settings.

Male converts may further face beatings, humiliation and harsher treatment when persecuted by religious authorities. If men and boys are identified by the security department, they are put under pressure to recant their Christian faith. This affects their wider family and brings shame to the community.

47) Oman

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement

Group	Female Pressure Points
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied food or water; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Despite the legal declaration that all citizens are equal, Oman’s [Personal Status](#) Law perpetuates multiple gender inequalities. For example, Section 38 requires women to obey their husbands. The law also perpetuates [inequalities](#) around divorce, inheritance and child custody (UNDP, 2018, “Oman: Gender Justice and the Law”). This is reflective of the generally vulnerable position of women in the ultra-conservative society of Oman, where fathers, husbands and male guardians exert significant control over their lives. Women typically stay in the family home with their children and assume a subservient role. This has an impact on their faith; as they have no voice in Omani society, they are not expected to have their own religious beliefs. As such, it is extremely difficult for women to convert from Islam to Christianity, and they will experience severe persecution should they do so; the level of persecution converts experience reflects their social standing.

One of the first ways of exerting pressure on converts is to isolate them from other Christians, stripping them of all means of communication and keeping them within the family home. Unmarried converts may also be put under pressure to marry a Muslim in order to force them to return to Islam. Converts to Christianity do not have the option of marrying a Christian spouse, as women registered as Muslims are legally restricted from marrying a non-Muslim.

House-maids working in Oman can face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become a high-profile issue at the international level. Although not primarily faith-related, many Christian domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, experience (sexual) abuse.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce

Group	Male Pressure Points
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

It is very difficult for Muslim men to convert to Christianity in Oman. Christian converts are likely to suffer from the ramifications of social ostracism, both by immediate and extended family, as well as by the surrounding community. Men who convert to Christianity are likely to lose the financial support of their families as well as the necessary connections to find or maintain a job in Oman's network-based society, or access further study opportunities. Furthermore, no Omani family will allow their daughter to marry a man who disrespects his own family by rejecting them and all they have taught him.

If a convert has family and employment at the time of his conversion, he risks losing it all. When a man leaves Islam, by law he automatically loses custody of any children ([Musawah, Articles 160-163 of the Personal Status Law \(1997\)](#)); as a country expert explains, ‘he is deemed to be not sensible, untrustworthy, and incapable of bearing the duties as a guardian.’ His wife might also divorce him and he can easily lose his job, which has major implications for all his family members since men are traditionally the breadwinners for their families. Converts may even be exiled from their family home, placing them in an extremely vulnerable position.

As for expatriate male Christians, any pressure they experience because of their faith is most likely encountered at the workplace. There is a clear risk that they might lose their workers visa if their faith activities are too public or otherwise undesired.

48) Kazakhstan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

In Kazakhstan the daily life of indigenous people is based on traditional Islamic culture, which disadvantages women and requires total submission. A country expert summarizes: “Traditional culture puts women lower than men and requires obedience to men in the family. For that reason, a woman cannot choose her own religion and will be persecuted if she converts to Christianity.” This makes female converts from Islam more vulnerable to persecution, both as Christians and as women who challenge the existing order.

Converts risk suffering physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats and being put under house arrest. One female convert reported that she had been regularly beaten by her husband a few years previously, and that he kicked her in her stomach while she was pregnant. Despite a strong relationship with her parents, she felt too ashamed to report the beatings to them for fear that she would be viewed as a bad wife. Her husband has since left her to provide for their children by herself, compounding her sense of shame.

Facilitating such domestic violence, there has been a notable lack of effective measures to address gender-based violence against women, which is understood to have increased as a result of COVID-19 measures ([HRW 2021 country chapter](#)).

While there have been no reported cases, the risk of being forcibly married to a Muslim remains an ongoing risk for converts. This is sometimes linked to abduction, as part of “bride kidnapping” practices ([RFE/RL, 21 April 2021](#)). Women and girls living in rural areas are most at risk of falling victim to this tradition. Christian women are also vulnerable to sexual assault, and in the WWL 2023 reporting period, there was at least one report of a young Christian woman being raped.

Spouses and children of converts in the countryside have also experienced pressure from their families who try to keep them within Islam. It is difficult for a woman to escape such pressure as she stands little chance of living on her own, due to high unemployment and a lack of financial independence ([Open Democracy, 19 June 2018](#)).

The persecution of Christian women serves to create fear and anxiety in families and Christian communities. Targeting women can also be used as an instrument for persecuting their husbands.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement

Group	Male Pressure Points
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

While Kazakhstan has gradually been closing the gap in terms of gender inequality, men continue to assume roles of higher responsibility than women; the religious persecution which Christian men experience reflects this socio-cultural structure. As men are normally the leaders of families and churches, when they become a target of persecution the wider family or church congregation will suffer. If a man loses his job, his wider family suffers. Likewise, if a church leader is interrogated or imprisoned, fear soon spreads in the church he serves.

Pressure on Christian men comes from both the State, as well as the family and community spheres. State-based persecution has included interrogations, fines, detention and imprisonment. When a Christian gathering is raided, the leaders bear the brunt of the raid, because they are perceived as responsible for conversions taking place. Church leaders have also been imprisoned following these interrogations. Furthermore, obligatory military service for young men provides an extra potential risk of persecution because it is a highly controlled environment in a Muslim-majority state. Further, those Christians, who for religious reasons, do not want to take up arms are still forced to join the army.

Family-based persecution affects converts from a Muslim background. They face harsh verbal harassment, physical beatings and being expelled from the family. Young men who are still students and need financial support, risk losing this support upon conversion.

Earning a living remains complicated for Christian men since they are directly affected by the bribes required of Protestants in order to run their businesses. Converts in the countryside are especially under this pressure at this point. Some business owners keep their Christian beliefs a secret. Reports indicate that Protestants are persecuted in this way but not Orthodox Christians, and that converts face pressure on their businesses from the local authorities and local community. Converts and church leaders particularly risk losing employment due to their faith.

49) Jordan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Female converts from Islam are the Christians who are most vulnerable to persecution for their faith in Jordan. This is especially notable, considering the many refugees in Jordan. Pressure comes most often from family members. If she still lives with her family, she risks house arrest, isolation, beatings and sexual harassment. Female converts can also be prevented from meeting with other like-minded Christians as a punishment for conversion and to prevent the individual from bringing more shame upon the family. Although arranged marriages are not uncommon in Jordan, female converts are under additional threat to be married off involuntarily in a further effort to retain family honor and bring the daughter back on 'the right path'. This can extend to honor killings, which are a risk for converts in rural areas, although such killings are now punishable. While no such instances have been reported in the WVL 2023 reporting period, it remains a live risk. A country expert commented: "Female converts from Islam are more likely to be killed based on honor, and in fact female converts in Jordan are more likely to face harder persecution even if it does not lead to murder."

Female converts from Islam cannot officially marry male Christians. Even if they marry abroad, the state does not recognize such marriages. When married to non-Christian husbands, female converts risk physical and verbal abuse (women might also face similar challenges if their formerly Christian husband converts to Islam). They are also faced with travel restrictions; travel bans can be imposed by the authorities but also by family members, for instance to prevent the female convert from leaving the country. If this ban is violated, a court case can be started for "travelling without permission."

Female converts are also vulnerable under Islamic Family Law (which is used for personal status matters in Jordan among Muslims) and are likely to be forced to divorce, lose the guardianship of their children, and lose claims to inheritance. The attitude of the non-Christian spouse's family is crucial in this issue. The recognized churches in Jordan have been working on the [revision of personal status laws](#), to improve the position of women regarding divorce and inheritance rights (Zenith, 25 October 2019) but to date no

major improvements have been achieved. In particular, apostasy laws continue to pose challenges to Christian women ([St Charles Institute](#), last accessed 6 December 2022).

On a wider level, all Christian women face pressure to follow a specified dress code, and are at risk of sexual harassment within the public sphere. Christian women have also been reportedly enticed into marriage with a Muslim; this seems to be a strategic means to prevent the establishment of Christian families.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	

Within Jordan’s heavily Islamic context, Christian men – particularly converts – face a wide range of pressure for their faith. While some Christian men do occupy senior positions in the workplace, government and armed forces, job discrimination continues to affect all Christians, especially those from a Muslim background. General unemployment rates for all men in Jordan have risen in recent years and were made even worse by the COVID-19 crisis, with a reported 23% of people out of work and a 48% youth unemployment rate (World Bank country overview). This has increased the pressure on men who have lost their jobs because of their Christian faith. If their faith becomes known, Christian men with a Muslim background can be denied security clearances and jobs. In the mostly traditional and tribal Jordanian society where men are regarded as the financial providers for their families, this can cause economic troubles for the wider family, as well as feelings of worthlessness for men.

Under Sharia, marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men are not allowed. For the marriage to be legal, the man must convert to Islam. This makes legal marriage impossible between a Christian man who is not a convert and a Christian woman with a Muslim background. Sharia law also determines that if a Christian wife converts to Islam, her husband must convert as well for their marriage to remain legal.

Christian men who are converts to Christianity face further difficulties in an honor-shame culture when their families reject them and expel them from their homes because of their choice of religion. Christian men also face pressure from the state authorities. Men are reported to be interviewed by intelligence services and placed under pressure to provide information on other Christians, especially if they are part of a ministry helping converts. Pastors and denominational leaders are also targeted for interviews: In

2022, a male Christian leader was coerced into signing an agreement to stop church activities and was threatened with deportation.

In light of economic difficulties, often exacerbated by faith-related pressures, some men are prompted to emigrate. If the pressure on Christian families leads to emigration, this has a potentially negative effect on future church leadership.

50) Nicaragua

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Compared to other Latin American countries, women and girls experience relatively few gender-specific forms of religious persecution. Those most at risk are female dissidents of the regime, human rights activists, or relatives of political opponents. Christian women – primarily Catholic – can fall into this category. They then easily find themselves at the mercy of allies of the government (who keep them under constant surveillance) and criminal groups. Ongoing state oppression under President Daniel Ortega has worsened in the WWL 2023 reporting period, placing such women in a condition of increased vulnerability. Due to a lack of confidence in the justice system, many victims have not reported crimes against them. Perpetrators enjoy impunity, and even those imprisoned for their crimes are often later granted pardons.

Christian women and girls also suffer the loss of Christian men and boys, who are more vulnerable to being imprisoned, abducted, or forced to flee Nicaragua (See below: *Gender-specific religious persecution/Male*).

More broadly, Nicaraguan women remain at high risk of domestic violence, although the introduction of new legislation to tackle this has been welcomed as a positive development ([Georgetown, Women Peace and Security Index 2021/22, p.29](#)).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Denied food or water; Denied/restricted healthcare; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Men and boys are, in general, more likely to experience visible forms of persecution than women. This is primarily linked to the roles that men and boys assume. Male youths are more likely to take part in demonstrations demanding the resignation of the president and suffer government retaliation. Reports suggest that male students have also been forced to participate in political events organized to show support for Ortega's regime, even without their parents' consent. The high level of political pressure in all spheres of life forces many "to leave the country to preserve their lives and this causes the family to fall apart," as a country expert explained.

Most church leaders (primarily Catholic) or ministry leaders in Nicaragua are male. When the government identifies a man associated with a church known for its opposition to the regime, he is more vulnerable to repression, and he will suffer pressure and hostility from state and non-state agents. "It has been known that banks and microfinance institutions had as a policy not to lend money to Christian ministers like pastors, even when it was to finance their own businesses and not necessarily [related] to their churches. They also tend to deny loans to Christian businessmen when they are targeted by government, or they are politically active," a source revealed.

Those who provided shelter and medical assistance to protesters in 2018 continue to experience government retribution years later, including slander, arbitrary investigations by government agencies, and unfounded charges. Catholic priests are especially vilified by President Ortega. As noted in the 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom by the US Department of State: "Throughout the year, President Daniel Ortega and Vice President and First Lady Rosario Murillo verbally harassed priests and bishops, labelled them "terrorists in cassocks" and "coup-plotters," and accused them of committing crimes" (IRFR 2021). Priests and parishioners have been taken hostage inside churches, denied water and

electricity, verbally abused, and physically beaten. Others have been abducted, or imprisoned where they face maltreatment, and are denied access to family members ([OAS, July 9, 2021](#)).

Considering these pressures, many men – particularly church leaders – have felt forced to flee the country, facing the dangers of possible capture by human traffickers and other criminal groups. Others who remain have been subjected to immigration restrictions and increased difficulty moving freely within the country. A country expert summarizes: “All possible obstacles are imposed because they not only want to harass the Church and the leaders they consider to be in opposition, but also because the ultimate goal is to prevent the spread of the faith.”

51) Kenya

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied food or water; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In the Muslim-majority regions of Kenya, Christian women and girls face multiple forms of pressure and violence. Although the Constitution fully establishes gender equality, cultural practices in some tribes (such as cleansing rites, widow inheritance, FGM, early marriage and polygamy) leave Christian women at greater risk of persecution if they oppose these practices. Widows can be disinherited and forced out of their homes if they object to traditional burial rituals. In addition, a lack of effective implementation of the Constitution has caused growing dissatisfaction among the Kenyan population. David Marage, Kenya’s Chief Justice, has [stated](#): “In my view the Constitution of Kenya is one of the best constitutions in the world, if only we could implement it.” (BBC News, 30 August 2020).

In the northern regions, Christian women and girls continue to face harassment and social rejection. Women and girls are forced to comply with an Islamic dress code. If they fail to do so they can be harassed, threatened and made to leave their school. Reporting on the scale of this discrimination, a country expert explained that it is widespread in all state schools within Merti. “In these schools,” he remarked, “all girls regardless of their faith and belief must [don] the complete Muslim attire. Christian pupils are discriminated against, mistreated and harmed by Muslim pupils and if reported no action is taken.” Married converts who refuse to wear certain cultural ornaments are also outlawed.

In traditional communities, women are considered to be on the same social standing as children. The strict regulations that follow this categorization, including not being allowed to run a business, save at the behest of a husband and on his behalf, place women at an economic disadvantage. These cultural inhibitions further exacerbate their vulnerability to persecution. According to a country expert, “Christian women are lured to marry Muslim men and bear Muslim children. The chances of conversion to Islam once a girl is married to a Muslim is almost absolute.” In addition, reports suggest that female Christian maids are at a high risk of sexual harassment and rape, especially Ugandan and Tanzanian girls. “If these house helps get pregnant, they are forced to abort and dismissed without pay. Some are even murdered”, a source disclosed.

Female converts to Christianity from Islam face a great variety of forms of pressure. The first measures taken are to isolate them from Christian community and put them under house arrest. If married, they risk being denied custody of their children and divorced. If single, and especially if young, they face the likelihood of a forced marriage – usually to a much older Muslim man.

In extreme circumstances, northern Kenyan women have reportedly been kidnapped or deceived by al-Shabaab fighters and forced to be sex slaves or wives ([UNODC, ‘Trafficking in Persons in the Context of Armed Conflict’, 2018](#)). More recently, internal sources revealed that new sex-trafficking routes to India have emerged, and there have been [reported cases](#) of Kenyan women being lured particularly to the Middle East with the promise of employment (USDS, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Forced divorce; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical

Group	Male Pressure Points
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian boys and men in the northeastern region face the greatest danger of physical assault, forced conscription and execution at the hands of radical Muslims and al-Shabaab. According to a country expert, men are mostly targeted and killed in attacks by [Islamic militants](#) (Africa News, 26 December 2022). Whilst instances are rare, men are also more likely than women to be imprisoned for their faith. Men and boys also face the threat of isolation and societal condemnation when they go against cultural norms. Those who oppose negative cultural practices in some tribes (such as funeral rites, FGM, early marriages, and polygamy) suffer varying levels of persecution. Their families are not accepted in the community as they are considered 'cursed', 'weak', or 'not real men' (if they opt for hospital circumcision) or excluded from family matters if they convert to Christianity. An country expert adds: "In African Traditional Religion, the men have to appease their fathers to get a good inheritance, especially those who are not firstborns. The pastoralist communities like Maasai, Samburu, and Pokot normally prefer the polygamous lifestyle for a man. They also prefer it when a man marries from his community. When a Christian man marries a Christian woman from another community, the elders will still insist that he gets a second wife from his own community. This places immense pressure on the man and in the cases where they do not conform to this request, they would normally be disowned and not allocated a good inheritance."

There are also reports that organized cartels mobilized by Muslim leaders use Muslim girls to entice Christians into conversion and lure Christian 'boda boda' riders into traps. Pastors and Christian leaders living in Islam-dominated regions and ATR hotspots face ethnic antagonism, ridicule and rejection because of their faith, including false accusations. According to one source: "Pastors, Christian leaders and their families working in northeastern Kenya and other Muslim dominated areas have been the special target of terror groups and in most cases, these leaders and their families are kidnapped by terror gangs who demand ransom for their release." Christian leaders who speak against illicit activities like drug trafficking and *khat* farming have also reportedly been denied entry or passage through certain gang territories. Several pastors have been threatened and even summoned to either stop preaching or face dire consequences, forcing many to flee. Certain members of parliament in Migori also reportedly sponsor gangs to threaten and intimidate Christian leaders in the region.

While Christian female converts from a Muslim background are at a high risk of losing custody of their children and divorce, male converts are particularly disadvantaged in cases where the child is very young. Wives of converts are also married off by their family members, mainly out of spite for the convert. According to a country expert, it is "more shameful for a man if he converts because this signifies failure and attracts ridicule and profiling." Converts from a Muslim background may also be denied their

inheritance rights, putting them in a weak financial position. As men are the main providers in Kenya, this also affects their extended family and all dependents.

52) Kuwait

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Many of the foreign domestic maids in Kuwait are Christian. This is significant in a country where the foreign population outnumbers the indigenous population. According to Kuwaiti delegates attending a [CEDAW review](#) in 2017, the ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, is a major issue. A country expert comments that these women are at a “heightened risk to domestic abuse and sexual assault”. As stated above (see: Violence, Christians attacked), statistics on the issue are scarce, as employers of abused maids or the perpetrators of the abuse have no interest in reporting. The maids themselves are often ashamed because of the abuse and do not want to be seen as 'dirty' within Kuwait or by their family at home.

House-maids working in Kuwait often face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become an internationally high-profile issue. Although not primarily faith-related, many Christian domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, experience sexual abuse.

According to [Chatham House](#), the passing of a new family protection law is “a major step forward for a country which has long suffered from high levels of domestic abuse” (Chatham House, 16 September 2020). Time is needed however to see how effective the implementation of this law proves to be in practice; COVID-19 lockdowns reportedly increased levels of domestic violence in the country ([HRW](#), 2022).

Female Kuwaiti Christian converts will encounter severe family pressure to reject their new faith. They may be put under house arrest, pressurized to marry a Muslim or sexually harassed (although there have

been no reported instances of forced marriage in the WWL 2023 reporting period). Women may also be threatened with the possibility of honor killings to restore the honor of the family following her conversion. If already married, female converts are vulnerable to being divorced by their husbands. Perhaps the most difficult law for Christian converts hoping to establish their own Christian household is that women from a Muslim background are restricted by [law](#) from marrying a non-Muslim (LOC, Prohibition of Interfaith Marriage, September 2015, p.12).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Among the small number of Kuwaiti Muslim converts to Christianity, most pressure comes from family and community – this would typically be felt most keenly by women and girls, followed by younger men and then older men, reflecting levels of status and freedom generally within the culture. In Kuwait, men who convert to Christianity fear the rejection of their immediate and extended families and the repercussions that would have on their livelihood. In this Islamic society, male converts are likely to be ostracized by their families, simultaneously losing their respect and their financial support. Often, this means that Christian men or boys are forced to leave the family home. Without family support, it is difficult for men to find or keep their job and marrying becomes almost impossible. Christian men are especially subject to discrimination and hostilities on the work-floor. The isolation of conversion is further amplified by the difficulty that converts from a Muslim background have in forming sustainable church groups.

53) Tanzania

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement

Group	Female Pressure Points
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Christian women in Tanzania face hostility both through subtle and violent means. In past years, this has included being denied access to communal resources such as community wells, being pressured to dress according to an Islamic dress code, and being verbally harassed. Women can also be sexually assaulted. For example, an expert explains that in some regions “women whose husbands have passed away, they are compelled to have affairs with another appointed person, as a means of what they call “purification” from an omen of death of her husband”. Christian women can be coerced into such practices against their beliefs.

Additionally, Christian women are sometimes intentionally targeted (deceived) by Muslim men who pretend to be evangelical Christians, with the intent of coercing them to recant their Christian faith. Furthermore, there is coercion to accept negative cultural practices such as widow inheritance in Mwanza, female genital mutilation, polygamous unions and early child marriages among the Maasai. Christian maids working for Muslims are required to wear the ‘Baibui’ (long black gowns) while working or risk losing their jobs. A country expert reports that Christian businesses are also boycotted once it is noticed that the vendors, especially women, are not dressed in accordance with Islamic regulations.

Women in Kigoma region have been subjected to sexual violence over the past years. The attackers – known locally as [Teleza](#), which refers to the fact that they cover themselves in oil – typically break into the homes of women in the night. They are often armed and threaten violence, sometimes leaving the survivors with life-threatening injuries (African Arguments, 10 June 2019). Women who have been subjected to this violence are afraid to speak out as the community then isolates them or they are subjected to social stigma, branded as prostitutes. Initially, these men only targeted single women, almost as though they wanted to punish them for not adhering to the norms of society by getting married. However, now even married women are being targeted, with women as old as 70 also being attacked. The attacks are centered around a need to control women. In some locations, this affects Christians more than others. It is unclear to what extent these attacks are still happening due to a lack of reporting.

Female converts to Christianity face the most intense persecution. They continue to face the prospect of forced marriage, forced divorce, expulsion from their homes and isolation from their families, denial of their inheritance and custody rights. Young female converts in particular are likely to be confined at home

with severe restraints on their movement. Reporting on the case of Aliyah*, a female convert who in late 2021 was locked up by her Muslim father, a source revealed: “He wanted Aliyah to remain a Muslim. When Aliyah converted, she married a Christian man. But after the marriage, he took her by force and locked her up to force a divorce. Aliyah remains at her father's home up till now neither going to church nor to the mosque.”

Due to such religious persecution, Christian Tanzanian women are often demoralized, traumatized and consequently unable to work effectively. This is reported to have a negative economic impact on the wider Tanzanian Church, as many women are unable to contribute, in part due to limited access to education.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men in Tanzania have in the past encountered discrimination and segregation in the workplace, particularly in Muslim companies, although this has not been reported in the 2023 reporting period. Their wages have been cut, and their overtime allowances unpaid. In addition, they have been forced to observe prayers during official prayer times and are commonly targeted by Muslims who wish to convert them. “Persecution for men is mostly economic, in the form of being kicked out of their jobs, physical attacks and denied inheritance,” an expert stated.

These pressures at work have placed a long-term economic burden on Christian men, as well as their families for whom they are the primary provider. The wider Tanzanian Church is further impacted, as without funds it struggles economically. It is also weakened in terms of attendance, as many men struggle to attend due to working hours.

Christian converts are affected by cultural and ethnic factors, particularly if from tribal backgrounds. If a Maasai warrior converts to Christianity, for example, and changes his hair from the traditional style, the tribal leaders (whose role is to preserve the culture of the tribe) often regard this act as a form of betrayal. Punishment may include physical harm with traditional weapons such as spears and arrows. Similarly, converts from a Muslim background will face harsh treatment and reprisals. Upon conversion, financial support is usually withdrawn. One convert recently stopped attending church because of the death

threats he was receiving from his family, and occasionally death can be a risk for Christian men. Many converts are forced to flee as a result of these pressures.

54) UAE

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In general, women are vulnerable in the UAE, as [domestic violence](#) and marital rape are permitted without legal consequence (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index: UAE”). The Georgetown [Women, Peace and Security Index](#) notes legal gender discrimination present; although the UAE has the best legal score in the MENA region, the region is the worst performing globally (Georgetown, 2021). Tribal society regards women as ‘inferior’ members of society in need of male guardianship and this also affects the level of persecution experienced by female converts from Islam to Christianity.

A female convert to Christianity will face immense pressure from her family to force her to convert back to Islam. If she does not, an imam may be called in to convince her of her sin, or she could be placed under house arrest. Even if a Christian man were willing to marry her, women who come from a Muslim background are [legally restricted](#) from marrying a non-Muslim (James Berry, 5 February 2017, ‘Overview of Mixed Marriages and the Law in the UAE’). Furthermore, a Christian man and a convert woman cannot simply have a Christian wedding ceremony outside the law. Since Islam does not consider marriage between a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman valid, both parties to such a union could be subject to arrest, trial, and imprisonment on grounds of engaging in an extramarital relationship, which carries a minimum of one year in prison.

Furthermore, for Christian women who are married to a Muslim man, the law grants custody of children of non-Muslim women to the Muslim father in the event of a divorce. By law, a non-Muslim woman who fails to convert is also ineligible for naturalization as a citizen and [cannot inherit](#) her husband’s property unless named as a beneficiary in his will ([OECD](#), 2019).

House-maids working in the UAE often face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become a high-profile issue at the international level.

Although not primarily faith-related, many Christian domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, experience (sexual) abuse.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In the UAE, men who convert to Christianity have been abandoned by their families and treated as shameful social outcasts. A convert is likely to lose custody of his children and his wife may divorce him. Familial rejection is not only an emotional blow felt by converts, it also represents a loss of social standing. Without the financial support of their families or the necessary connections to find or maintain a job, it can be extremely difficult to find employment in this network-based society. This can also lead to men being pressured into participating in non-Christian religious events, counter to his beliefs, in order to remain employed and keep social status. This has major implications for all his family members since men are traditionally the family providers. Furthermore, without a family and the accompanying social status, a man will be unable to find a family willing to give their daughter permission to marry him. Such pressure can cause some men to leave the UAE in search of greater freedom.

Migrant Christian men can also face challenges, such not being allowed to conduct any acts of worship within living quarters.

55) Nepal

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal

Group	Female Pressure Points
Technological	-

Although the multi-cultural society of Nepal was granted religious freedom in the 2015 Constitution, anti-conversion and blasphemy laws continue to remain in place. It is dangerous for converts to Christianity to reveal their faith. When their faith becomes known, female converts face a breath of pressures. “Initially they are emotionally tortured,” an expert explains, “then gradually physical torture starts to take place. Finally, they are subjected to being social outcasts from the family and community.” The immediate family members of female Christian converts may lock them up, often depriving them of basic needs and financial support.

On rare occasions, families make premarital arrangements to marry their daughters to a non-Christian man. This is done in order to save their family’s reputation. Within such marriages, women are highly pressurized to leave their Christian faith. If a woman is already married at the point of conversion and her husband is not supportive of her faith, she is unlikely to be aware of the legal possibilities of defending herself and her children and may be divorced. In such instances, conversion is often a “valid ground for refusal of custody of children,” according to an expert.

In the historically Hindu nation and culturally patriarchal society of Nepal, women and girls have less ability to exercise their rights. Perhaps the most difficult aspect is the persistency of the harassment for those who convert to Christianity, be it physical, emotional or sexual harassment.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied citizenship; False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men and boys are most vulnerable to persecution if they are recent converts, in public service, or church leaders of independent churches. Recent converts are particularly vulnerable to physical and mental torture from family and society, and are made to feel like social outcasts. Converts are often

denied access to ancestral property by immediate family members and denied basic legal rights to a birth certificate and citizenship by local government administrators. Furthermore, known converts face harassment in public places such as markets and the workplace. Christian men usually migrate to new cities or areas to set up afresh and avoid economic deprivation. Men and boys have also been victims of false charges and accusations, which have resulted in imprisonment on rare occasions.

According to Nepali law, citizens cannot be barred from public office because of their religious beliefs. However, Christians in public service, especially in the armed forces, have complained that in actual practice they are denied promotion because of their faith. In rural areas, it is reported that Hindus obstruct Christians from being a part of communal and other public forums. In the Nepalese army, government positions and police, Christians are forced to worship Hindu gods and observe Hindu festivals. This includes eating food offered to idols or putting vermilion powder on their heads during the Hindu festivities.

Local independent church pastors and leaders are the main targets of harassment for faith related reasons. Hindu radicals will focus their attacks on church leaders firstly to set an example to other Christians in the area, and secondly because they are regarded as being the main actors behind the increasing numbers of Christian conversions. A country expert explains: "Ethnic group leaders, especially in the northern and extreme southern regions of Nepal, have displayed religious intolerance. This resulted in several incidents, which were aimed to persecute Christian evangelists, pastors or newly planted churches." Pastors are also [falsely accused](#) of crimes, threatened with physical assault and on some occasions, forced to leave their communities (BBC News, 14 January 2023). Exemplifying the dangers, in May 2021 a church leader was falsely accused of drug smuggling and was kept in custody for 48 days where he was physically and mentally tortured by police. Because of the severity of the beating, he became paralyzed.

When men and boys are severely beaten and socially ostracized, they have fewer economic opportunities for supporting the family. Most men and older boys are the providers for the family, so this form of discrimination means that the whole family faces both economic troubles and social insecurity.

56) Djibouti

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement

Group	Female Pressure Points
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Those who are found to be converts in Djibouti face harsh treatment. Female converts in Djibouti are vulnerable to physical beatings and house arrest (particularly in rural areas). Although not common, reports in the past indicated that in some instances, Christian women have been abducted by radical Muslims and forced to marry Muslims without their consent. “When a Muslim converts to Christianity, his or her family abducts or forces him or her to marry. This situation has a disproportionate impact on women and girls,” a country expert confirmed. The majority of those who enter pre-arranged marriages do so under pressure from their families and local communities who are eager to see them return to Islam. Female converts may be forced to marry older religious leaders in an effort to influence their faith.

Converts who are already married face various forms of pressure from their spouse and extended families. If a newly converted Christian woman refuses to recant her new-found faith, she will likely face divorce. Whilst men in poverty-ridden Djibouti would normally want to escape the burden of looking after the children in a case of divorce, sources state that families of devoted Muslims will not allow the woman to claim custody and raise the children as Christians. According to a country expert, women automatically lose their custodial rights upon conversion as it becomes virtually “impossible to trust her with the children”. Whether they succeed in claiming custody rights or not, female converts are usually crippled financially without a stable income and by the denial of inheritance rights.

The wife is a pivotal member of the family unit in Djibouti, with women playing a major role in raising children and representing the family at societal events. The persecution of women and girls therefore has a significant negative impact on the wider family and community.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Violence – physical

Group	Male Pressure Points
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Although data is sparse, Christian men in Djibouti are at risk of physical attacks, verbal harassment and intimidation. Some can be forced out of their homes, leaving them displaced and economically vulnerable. Others pay an even greater price and have reportedly been killed on faith-related grounds in the past (although there are no recent incidents of killing). Christian leaders in Djibouti– the majority of whom are men – are at greater risk of persecution. A country expert remarks: “In Djibouti, pastors and church leaders are the principal targets of persecution. Officials and the general public keep track of whether or not they meet converts and preach the gospel in the neighborhood.” Being known in the country as a Christian leader also exposes family members to serious threats.

As men are typically the breadwinners in Djibouti, their absence throws the family into emotional and financial turmoil. It also compromises the family’s physical security, particularly in remote parts of the country, as a husband/father’s absence could lead to looting of the family property and attacks on his wife and daughters.

57) Palestinian Territories

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In the Palestinian Territories, male heads of household consider the choices and behavior of the women in their care to be deeply reflective of their leadership and personal honor. As such, women who stray beyond the culturally acceptable confines are at risk of retribution from their families. The [Amnesty International](#) country report has once again highlighted the suspected use of so-called 'honor killings' - mainly by male relatives - revealing the precarious position of women in this patriarchal society (Amnesty

International, 2021). This threat can be used to put pressure on women wishing to convert to Christianity. There is a strong sense of shame related to conversion from Islam; this has a significant practical impact on women and girls in particular because of their greater dependency within the family. Thus, they are more vulnerable to persecution from the family or close society, particularly in light of [insufficient legislation](#) addressing domestic violence and violence against women (UNFPA and UNDP, 2019, Gender Justice and the Law: Palestine).

Family members can almost always act without impunity against female converts. If a member of the younger generation converts to Christianity from Islam, families may turn to physical violence and forced confinement (house arrest) in order to persuade them to return. This is more often used for girls as the family cannot expel them like they can boys. A country expert summarizes: “Often, especially for girls, when it is known about their faith in Christ, they are placed in a house and deprived of communication with others or of meeting any of their friends.”

Christian girls and women are sometimes looked down upon by their Muslim neighbors (e.g. for not wearing a veil in public). Although not imposed by the government, there is a socially enforced dress code for Christian women, requiring them to cover themselves in public, except for their heads. They are also vulnerable to online harassment and abuse.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Palestinian men who convert to Christianity face a variety of forms of pressure and violence. Young male converts can be harassed, threatened and forced out of the family home. The Christian community struggles to accommodate these needy and often lonely individuals. It is also challenging for these men to marry a Christian, as both families will likely oppose the match. Such weddings would need to take place in secret and are rare.

As men are usually the main financial providers in Palestinian families, job discrimination against men serves to weaken the whole family. Some Christian men from a Muslim background have reportedly been exploited in the workplace and lost jobs on the basis of their faith (although there are no known incidents in the 2023 reporting period). As Palestinians operate in a context of Israeli dominance, this and the dire

economic situation can make Christian men in general feel powerless. Many Christian men want to leave the Palestinian Territories to find a job abroad and escape life under occupation. Such emigration seriously weakens the Palestinian Christian community, since only the more capable men have the necessary qualifications and financial means for finding a job abroad.

Church leaders in Palestine (usually men) are also reported to face verbal abuse, including from ultra-orthodox Jews. Others have received threats and on rare occasions been killed.

58) Azerbaijan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Azerbaijan is a typical Caucasian country where family traditions and rules are very strict, and disobedience to senior family members is unacceptable. Patriarchal norms and discriminatory gender stereotypes remain prevalent and women are expected to remain within the home and prioritize domestic and familial duties ([UN News, Jan 1st 2022](#)). Within this context, women are not free to choose their own religion and will face persecution upon conversion to Christianity.

Christian converts (typically from a Muslim background) are therefore most vulnerable to persecution - both as Christians and as women who dare to challenge the existing order. They are at a greater risk than non-converts of experiencing physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats, house arrest, discrimination and rejection by family and Muslim community. Female converts in conservative regions also run the risk of being abducted and forcibly married to Muslim men, with the aim of forcing them to return to Islam. This happens infrequently, typically in remote rural areas and in cases where premarital arrangements had already been made before the conversion.

The tight structure of society means that women are also targeted for persecution as a means of inflicting psychological harm on their husbands or other family members. The persecution of women can cause fear, anxiety and anger.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In Azerbaijan, male converts from Islam are at a greater risk than non-converts of experiencing physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats, discrimination and rejection by family and Muslim community. Known converts will be harassed and interrogated harshly by their family and community and some have been called to the police station for questioning. “There is extensive evidence,” an expert adds, “that converts in particular face severe economic consequences as one part of the larger persecution against them.”

Christian men – both converts and non-converts - are targeted for their role as heads of their families and primary financial providers. When a Christian man becomes a target of persecution (possibly losing his job) his whole family will suffer. If he is a church leader (contextually, usually men), the fact that he is suffering persecution will affect his church and can result in an increase of fear among church members. As a country expert explained: “The state regards pastors and church leaders as primary targets to control Christian activities. They are used as examples for the other Christians of what may be expected. When churches are raided, it is mostly the church leaders who are detained, interrogated, fined, and sometimes harassed. Muslims will hold church leaders primarily responsible for the conversion of their people; active convert leaders will even be attacked more fiercely.”

Christian men are also forced to partake in [mandatory](#) military service (World Population Review, accessed 9 February 2023). With no option for an alternative form of service for conscientious objectors, many men are forced to serve in the army despite their strongly held religiously-based objections to taking an oath or taking up weapons. Leaving the country on the grounds of faith is also extremely challenging for Christians in Azerbaijan, especially Pastors and Church leaders. “The state regulates and/or outright stops foreigners from meeting with local groups as well as locals from travelling abroad for religious educational reasons,” a country expert disclosed.

59) Kyrgyzstan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

While laws in Kyrgyzstan give equal rights to men and women, traditional Islamic culture places women at a level subservient to men within the family context. Women and girls are excluded from decision-making processes and exposed to violence in a breadth of forms, including domestic violence, bride kidnapping, early marriages and physical abuse ([Girls Not Brides, Accessed February 2023](#)).

Within this context, women are not free to choose their own religion and will face persecution upon conversion to Christianity. The tight structure of society means that women are also targeted for persecution as a means of inflicting psychological harm on their husbands or other family members. Over the years, Christian women and girls have been known to suffer from verbal and physical abuse, home detention, forced marriage, family violence and rape. An increase in domestic violence was reported across Kyrgyzstan following Covid-19 measures; local experts also reported a rise in family violence for female converts trapped in the home ([The Diplomat, 16 June 2022](#)).

As noted in previous years, Kyrgyzstan has a long tradition of bride-stealing; in rural areas, female converts in conservative regions run the risk of being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim. According to a country expert, “This happens most frequently in the countryside. This kind of pressure does not come from the state, but having said that, local councils will allow this to happen. So, in a sense they co-operate.” If already married at the point of conversion, Muslim husbands commonly divorce their wives and deny them access to their possessions.

Female converts from a Muslim background are also subject to house-arrest by their families as a common and socially accepted form of putting female converts under pressure. Access to social networks, specifically Christian networks, is restricted in the hope that the convert will return to Islam. Exemplifying these pressures, two sisters who came to faith at a Christian camp and started attending a church, met with resistance from their Muslim parents. Upon discovery of their faith, they became aggressive and

angry. The sisters, who were forbidden from contacting other believers, are reportedly now under house arrest and released only to attend school or college.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Male converts to Christianity face various forms of pressure and violence from family members and their local community. Over the years, Christian men and boys have been known to suffer from verbal and physical abuse, arrest, interrogation, fines, imprisonment, job loss, home detention, disinheritance, and exclusion from participation in communal institutions. According to experts, local authorities can cooperate with local Muslims to ensure access to communal forums are blocked. Furthermore, young converts dependent on their parents risk limited financial support which in the case of students, may be deleterious to their education.

Kyrgyz Christian men are most at risk when they are church and family leaders. When a businessman is known to be a Christian, the community may boycott or hinder his business. Men are usually the heads of their families and the main bread winners, so when a Christian man loses his job or business because of his faith, his whole family will suffer. When churches are raided, it is mostly church leaders who are detained, interrogated and fined. Muslims will hold church leaders primarily responsible for the conversion of their people. There have been instances where Kyrgyz Christian leaders could no longer continue with their ministry because their (non-church) business was attacked. The persecution of a church leader (contextually, usually male) impacts the wider congregation, instilling fear and anxiety. During the 2023 reporting period, there was only one recorded case of an Orthodox Christian killed by a Muslim man. The details of the incident remain unclear which, according to a local source, is typical as cases of Christian-related deaths are “very underreported on a community level.”

Christian men face daily discrimination, be it in the workplace, army or local community. Pressure is highest in rural areas, away from large cities. There are reportedly a couple of Christians in government bodies, an expert explains, “to give the impression that all is well.”

60) Chad

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Women are subservient to men in Chadian society. Reflecting these norms, Chad remains one of just three countries in the world where married women require permission from their husbands to open a bank account – an estimated [15%](#) of women have their own bank account (Georgetown, “Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/22”). Within this predominately Islamic, patriarchal context, Christian women are vulnerable both on account of their religion as well as their gender.

Christian women in Chad face both violent and non-violent persecution for their faith. Christian women are also vulnerable to sexual violence at the hands of Islamic militants. An expert explains, “There have been reports of Christian women being kidnapped and forced into marriage across parts of the nation where Boko haram militia have wreaked havoc.... particularly in rural areas and in Internally displaced people's camps.” Women and girls who have been raped and consequently impregnated typically suffer ongoing psychological distress and low self-esteem. Traumatized rape victims sometimes view their children as a perpetual reminder of the crime committed against them. Local sources report that the wider society around them, too, is unsympathetic to their plight, viewing them as tarnished. More generally, sexual and gender-based violence has been exacerbated by forced [population movement](#) in the country, including the worsening socio-economic situation and shrinking [humanitarian support](#) (UNOCHA: Chad Situation Report, 15 January 2021; UNHCR, 25 November 2022).

Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background face strong pressure from their family and local community, the aim being to make them recant. The practice of forced marriage is widespread across Chad, particularly in rural areas ([67% are married by 18; Girls Not Brides](#)). Parents of converts may forcibly marry them to a Muslim, with the aim of restoring them to Islam. According to a country expert, girls who refuse these marriages can face serious repercussions, including violence from their parents and other

members of their family or community. If already married at the point of conversion, the husbands of female converts are often pressured by their families and society to divorce them and deny them access to their children, to punish the ‘unfaithful’ and pressurize them into giving up their Christian faith. Gender-based violence in such marriages is commonly reported. Reflecting on the ramifications of these pressures on converts, an internal source explained that “due to the vulnerabilities resulting from females being deprived of the basic necessities because of their conversion, some of these females resort to prostitution and other unwholesome practices to survive. Homes become broken and lack maternal care as a result of mothers being forcefully divorced or being deprived of contact with their children.”

Women and girls may also find it difficult to access Christian community or attend church services, as they can easily be subjected to house arrest by their family. Some parents will restrict them by more indirect means, loading chores on to them to prevent them from leaving the house. Women and girls may also suffer physical beatings, or disinheritance.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men and boys in Chad are most vulnerable to persecution from Islamic militant groups such as Boko Haram. Some have reportedly been abducted, forced to convert to Islam and forcibly recruited into the ranks of jihadist groups to serve as fighters. According to a source, men and boys, particularly in Eastern Chad are "forced to organize self-defense groups, arming themselves primarily with spears, knives, poison-tipped arrows, etc., in order to discourage and defend against militia attacks in the absence of any substantial military or police presence provided by the Chadian government. Boys are also compelled to sleep in the open fields and watch over animals so they are not stolen by armed militias.”

Initiation rituals in the Southern regions of the country are also a cause for concern. These initiation rites usually take place every seven years and reportedly include floggings, sexual indignities, drugging, burning with coals and mock burials ([Open Doors USA, 16 Aug 2018](#)). Christians who do not flee will be forced to participate, and children of pastors will be especially targeted. Pastors who speak out against the dangers of these rituals have historically faced reprisals. In one case in 2018, Christians belonging to a church that

had been vocal against the rituals were stripped, whipped and held in the woods until fines were paid. Upon return, these men struggled to look after their family due to the physical and mental trauma experienced. To prevent family disintegration, such men require support and education to reintegrate into Christian community. In areas like Bitkin, Pastors are the targets of verbal abuse and other severe forms of persecution.

In addition, men and boys also face challenges at work, being denied jobs and promotions. This is, in part, due to the fact that they are required to make a public religious oath in order to attain a job in State offices. Christians are, therefore, hindered from attaining positions of influence and pushed into tighter economic circumstances. Senior military and government positions are dominated by Muslims, and Christians are finding it increasingly difficult to attain such posts. Families of Christian men and boys forcefully recruited into radical groups are also likely to suffer financial distress. A source explains: "Usually in the actions of armed militia groups, men and boys who do not have sufficient protection end up getting killed. Especially for Christian families, the loss of a father or son who is usually the breadwinner of the home is very devastating and can break up the family and throw other family members into economic hardships."

For male converts, when their conversion has become known, they have been isolated by family and local community. Some have also had their property burnt and damaged, been disinherited and expelled completely from their families, although no incidents have been reported in the 2023 reporting period. This places them in a difficult long-term economic position.

61) Russian Federation

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

The most vulnerable Christian women in Russia are converts from a Muslim background. In Russia's Muslim regions, daily life is based on Islamic culture which gives women an inferior status. Traditional culture based on Islamic teaching puts women lower than men and requires obedience and [submission to men](#) in the family (CEDAW, 2015, "Concluding Observations on the Eighth Periodic Report of the

Russian Federation”). For that reason, a woman cannot freely choose her own religion and will be persecuted if she converts to Christianity. If her faith is discovered, the first thing her family will do is lock her in the home and put high levels of pressure on her to return to Islam. In the northern Caucasus (and to a lesser extent in the mid-Volga region) converts also run the risk of being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim, particularly if premarital arrangements were made prior to the conversion. Such instances are, however, relatively rare.

Converts may also face threats, verbal insults, physical abuse and sexual assaults, all of which are unlikely to be reported due to a widespread culture of domestic violence, stigma around sexual violence, and impunity for perpetrators ([HRW, 8 March 2021](#)). A married Christian woman may experience beatings from her husband who can divorce her because of her faith, although no specific instances were reported in the WWL 2023 reporting period.

Those leaving the ROC to join another Christian denomination also face challenges from the community they were once a part of. They are typically excommunicated and isolated (particularly if they marry outside of the ROC), which can traumatize Christian women.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied communal resources; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

The range and forms of discrimination and persecution faced by Christian men in Russia mainly affect Christians from a Muslim background in the predominantly Muslim regions. They may be threatened, beaten, verbally harassed and denied access to communal platforms. Men are considered the heads of their families and are also usually the main financial providers; this means that when a Christian man loses his job due to persecution for his faith, his whole family will suffer. Businesses whose owners are Christians may also experience occasional problems. For example, more frequent visits from officials are not uncommon (e.g. from fire-brigades, health departments etc.).

Men also experience economic pressure through being forced to pay fines and being imprisoned. The state regards non-ROC pastors and church leaders (contextually, mostly men) as primary targets to make a strong impression on the wider Christian community. When churches are raided, it is mostly the leaders

who are detained, interrogated and fined. This often has a negative effect on whole congregations and can result in fear spreading among church members. Typical charges against church leaders include "distributing religious literature" and "carrying out unspecified missionary activity".

62) Sri Lanka

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

While Sri Lanka has made recent positive steps to address the protection of women (such as establishing the Office on Missing Persons and Office for Reparations), the risk of sexual violence remains high and perpetrators frequently enjoy impunity (Report of the UN Secretary General, July 2020, "[Conflict-Related Sexual Violence](#)", p.43). Sexual assault is a weapon used against all women, regardless of religion. A Christian woman, however, is doubly vulnerable because of her faith. When Christian women and girls - not just converts - are subjected to this kind of persecution, their families are more reluctant to allow them out for any church-related work again. In recent years there have been few reported cases of rape, but sexual harassment has remained an ongoing issue. A country expert summarizes: "If there has been any kind of sexual assault due to their faith, most often it would be considered as a shame towards the whole family. This also in extension impacts their prospects for marriage." This means that although sexual assault continues to be an issue, such cases are rarely reported.

Female converts are also at risk of being denied access to Christian religious materials and teaching, and can be cut off from churches which are a source of community and fellowship. One of the most common forms of persecution that affects female converts to Christianity is isolation and/or house-arrest. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable in light of Sri Lanka's patriarchal society. As a result, many female converts find it more difficult to follow their faith than new male converts and to overcome the verbal harassment they receive from their families and communities. A country expert comments: "Sri Lanka is a patriarchal society. Although women do play important roles in families, they are often expected to submit to the authority of their husbands and fathers. When pressure arises for women/girls who convert from their husbands/fathers, the community and family see their resistance as being stubborn and

disrespectful, which creates an environment where they will receive more hateful comments and rejection from people around them.” On rare occasions, they may even be divorced by their husband due to their conversion.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied communal resources; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian leaders often bear the brunt of attacks against a church. As men are often in such roles, they are most often the victims of physical attack and threats (although Sri Lanka has a comparatively high number of female church leaders). Pastors and Christian leaders (and their family members) who have a ministry or church in Sinhalese-dominated areas are frequently targeted and harassed by Buddhist monks and villagers for faith-related reasons. Pastors have been targeted and intimidated in their own homes and communities.

Sri Lanka is a male-dominated, patriarchal society. As such, when a male gets physically assaulted, it also creates a sense of shame within rural close-knit communities. They can also be targeted by the authorities. A pastor shares: “Pastors in [some] areas are not given the deeds to the land they live in by government officials to make sure they do not build churches ... Pastors also face challenges when trying to get building plans for their houses approved from the relevant government office. Officials would be reluctant to approve the plans and often suspect pastors of trying to build a church.”

The persecution of men and boys particularly affects the livelihood of Christian families. Especially in rural communities, males are the financial providers of the family, so losing a job or livelihood financially affects the whole Christian family and creates fear. It is mostly men who experience verbal harassment in the workplace. Reports indicate that businesses have been damaged and that Christian men have been denied jobs.

63) Rwanda

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Despite Rwanda boasting the [largest female](#) parliamentary representation in the world (Statista, 5 August 2022), patriarchal attitudes continue to dominate culture. As noted in a [2017 CEDAW periodic review](#), “there is a general lack of acceptance of women in decision-making positions and reluctance to implement decisions made by them.” These cultural norms can be exploited for the purpose of religious persecution against women.

In a country where forced marriages are common mostly in rural areas and [refugee camps](#), some forced marriages are fueled by religious motivation (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index: Rwanda”). Parents of female converts are known to marry them off to Muslims to try and restore them to the Islamic faith. A country expert also contends that the economic position of both Christian and Muslim parents is a contributing factor, especially in the case of minors: “Forced marriage is a crime and is punishable under the law. However, it does occur, and when it does it is in respect of minor children and often than not, poverty is the motivation for same as opposed to religion beliefs.”

Converts from a Muslim background are also vulnerable to physical, sexual and verbal attacks. Sexual abuse has been widely cited by regional experts as the primary challenge facing female converts. If they are already married when they become a Christian, women from a Muslim or Animist background will most likely be expelled from their homes, divorced, and subsequently refused custody of their children. Additionally, converts are often denied their inheritance rights, which can be hard for them to endure.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement

Group	Male Pressure Points
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Gender-specific persecution against Rwandan men and boys on faith-related grounds is not widely reported. When it does occur, it usually takes the form of physical violence or imprisonment. Pastors in particular are vulnerable to being detained. Arbitrary detentions reportedly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, “this has been the tactic for years,” a country expert added. The pressure on church leaders in Rwanda and difficulties in registering churches has led to many migrating to Uganda and Tanzania.

Converts from a Muslim background are also exposed to persecution; they may encounter discrimination from family, in the workplace, or even lose their job. If men are persecuted, their role as family provider may be compromised and his dependents will also suffer. Likewise, if converts are forced out of their family home because of their faith, they will be vulnerable economically.

64) Venezuela

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Within the context of Venezuela’s ongoing complex humanitarian emergency, Christian women face several vulnerabilities. Young girls are trafficked and can end up trapped in prostitution networks, exchanging sex for food or medicine ([USDS, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Venezuela](#)). Christian women are reportedly better paid because their purity is presumed, and desired. As a country expert explained: “In the past it was known that Christian women are better paid because their purity is presumed, however there are no recent indications about this. In this difficult context, desperation might cause moral boundaries to be ignored in order to survive.”

Many young women are choosing to escape Venezuela in light of economic and social factors. Within the context of displacement they are exposed to organized trafficking and exploitative criminal groups, where once again, their presumed purity can increase their perceived economic value.

While many women and girls are leaving Venezuela, it is primarily young men that depart to seek economic opportunities, including those from Christian families and communities. Left alone, women become more vulnerable and at increased risk of prostitution as a means of survival. State support is not a viable option; given that most government services are only offered to those who belong to the ruling party; Christian families who refuse to align with the government do not receive state support and as a result fall into destitution ([El Pais, 20 April 2021](#)).

In summary, Christian women and girls are vulnerable to exploitation in all contexts in Venezuela – whether on the move when fleeing the country, upon arrival in new countries, or when left alone and vulnerable by absent male family members. Wives of political prisoners for instance, are subjected to mistreatment. A local source explained: “They are subjected to strong pressure that has even led them to pay 'supposed' fines (extortion) so that their husbands do not suffer physical harm.”

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied/restricted healthcare; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Within Venezuela’s context of extreme violence and instability, Christian men and boys face a greater breadth of pressure than women and girls. Most notably, young men are at particular risk of being targeted by criminal gangs and guerrilla groups, especially along the Colombian border. They are also more likely to be recruited into the ranks of the Bolivian Guard or Venezuelan army, enticed by the promise of food and medicines. “These criminal groups make tremendous economic proposals to the youth, but the pastors try to dissuade the youth from joining in a very [covert] way because if the criminal leaders find out about their opposition, they will disappear,” an expert explains.

In light of such pressure and exacerbated by the economic and political crisis, many men and boys are forced to leave the country in order to find work to support their families. While on the move, they are vulnerable to being captured and exploited by organized crime groups ([International Crisis Group, 9 August 2022](#)). Their families who they leave behind also become vulnerable, as highlighted in the female gender profile above.

Church leaders, who are predominately male, suffer the highest levels of persecution, especially at the hands of the government with Catholic leaders typically most vulnerable. A country expert explained: “In this context, those who oppose based on their faith-based points of view are also victims of the regime, religious leaders have been discredited or defamed, attacked verbally and physically, religious activities have been disrupted, religious practices such as burials have [also] been interrupted. In general, there is persecution from the ruling party against Christians whenever they openly denounce the injustices and irregularities of the regime.” The Bolivarian National Intelligence Service officials continued to intimidate church leaders who criticized Maduro in their sermons (US State Department, IRFR 2021).

Church leaders also face threats and economic exploitation from criminal gangs, particularly if they are involved in outreach efforts to young people, which could threaten gang recruitment levels. Pressure is greatest in areas on the country’s border, where criminal groups fight for territorial control. An expert disclosed that “in the territories controlled by criminal groups, especially in the border area of the country, collections of passage, extortion, are a way of controlling the area. Religious leaders must make these payments not only to enter the territories in which they carry out their activities, but they must also have the leader’s authorization.”

Reflecting the seriousness of threats against church leaders, in the WWL 2023 reporting period several were killed and many more were forced to flee their homes.

65) Burundi

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

A country expert reports: “Girls and women are often victims of clan oppression and age-old practices. For example, they are often hunted as witches and are subjected to repressive cultural practices and norms like forced and child marriage, as well as crimes like rape and defilement. This eventually affects their esteem, education, confidence and their faith eventually, is eroded due to hopelessness”. Faith-based persecution compounds and exploits the existing societal pressures on women and girls in Burundi, especially those that arise from ongoing political instability and from women’s low status in society ([BBC News, 4 November 2022](#); [World Bank, 28 November 2022](#)). Poor living conditions and human rights violations also contribute to the growing [human trafficking](#) networks in Burundi – one of the major source countries for victims of human trafficking in Africa (Global Organized Crime Index, 2022). According to one source: “Internal trafficking poses a larger problem than transnational trafficking, with most victims being subjected to labor exploitation and sexual exploitation.” Although there has been no established correlation with religious persecution, human trafficking remains a potent threat to Christian women and girls in Burundi.

In the previous reporting period (WWL 2022), a young Christian from a Muslim background experienced abuse at the hands of her landlord, who had discovered her faith. This young girl had already experienced persecution by her parents in 2019 and had been expelled from the family home, hence the reason for her living in rented accommodation supported by her church. Now living with her pastor’s family, she is reportedly living in fear of future harassment. Female converts to Christianity face severe pressure for their faith. They may be rejected by their families and husbands, denied their inheritance and possessions, evicted from the home, forced into an arranged marriage with a Muslim, forcibly divorced, denied custody of their children and in rare instances, put under house arrest. Arranged marriages affect women who have converted to Christianity from Islam as well as 'converts' from the traditional majority Christian denominations such as Catholicism. Women are also vulnerable to sexual harassment by their relatives and local community.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men in Burundi commonly face challenges in the workplace on the basis of their faith. An elderly man recently lost his job after deciding to join an evangelical church, and now struggles to provide for his five children. Given Burundi's high unemployment rates - exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis - it is challenging for men to survive economically without the support of the family unit (World Bank data profile).

Converts to Christianity may also become victims of physical attacks. Upon discovery of their faith, converts risk being expelled from their homes by families and threatened harshly.

Christian men also risk being detained by state forces. During the COVID-19 crisis, the rate of arrests increased. A country expert commented: "Government officials are drivers of persecution against Christians mainly in the form of the facilitation and practice of corruption. In addition, the government is very repressive and high-handed against Christians who criticize or speak out against the government. They are liable to be arrested, detained or imprisoned on false charges." Church leaders are particularly vulnerable to being detained, as detailed by the United States Department IRFR 2021. Reflecting on the actions of the government in the previous reporting period (WWL 2022), a source stated: "The state actively monitors the activities of churches for political reasons. The state is paranoid about activities of churches especially those that are deemed to be opposed to government. Churches and church leaders or Christians that are vocal against the government face the risk of arrest and detention or even imprisonment."

Christian men and boys are also at risk of forced recruitment by non-state and government-affiliated militias due to ongoing conflict within the country.

66) Bahrain

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Despite some moves towards legal equality, women and girls continue to [be viewed as inferior](#) in Bahraini society (Wilson Center, 8 March 2020). Among the small number of converts to Christianity, pressure is

most keenly felt by women and girls, followed by younger men, then older men (reflecting levels of status and freedom within the culture). Women must dress like Muslim women to avoid harassment and discrimination.

A key challenge that women from a Muslim background experience is the legal marriage restriction that prevents them from marrying a non-Muslim; only Muslim men are permitted to marry a non-Muslim. A marriage between a formerly (and still officially registered) Muslim woman who has converted to Christianity to a non-Muslim will [not be recognized](#) (Article 11 of Law No.19, 2009). If a Christian woman is married to a Muslim man, her custody and inheritance rights will also [not be considered](#) (OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index, Bahrain, 2019).

In addition to these challenges, female converts face oppression from their families. They are likely to be beaten by families, placed under house arrest, and may be threatened with honor killing (although no such cases have been reported in the WWL 2023 reporting period). They can also face other violent threats, such as that of forced marriage. Financial dependence on male family members, which can be common among female Bahrainis, provides another opportunity for persecution.

The ill-treatment of foreign workers, including sexual abuse, remains a major issue. House-maids working in Bahrain often face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill-treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become a high-profile issue at the international level. Although not primarily faith-related, many Christian domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, experience (sexual) abuse. More broadly, there is also pressure to adhere to Islamic style of dress in order to avoid harassment.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Persecution of male Christian converts in Bahrain typically manifests itself in the workplace. Men may lose out on promotion, or in some instances, lose their jobs altogether. This can lead to serious economic hardship which has major implications on the whole family, as the man is normally the financial provider of the family. Converts may also be ostracized from their families, threatened, beaten, intimidated and

expelled from the family home. Their status and role in the family will come under threat. In light of such pressure, it is extremely challenging for Christians from a Muslim background to meet for fellowship.

67) Honduras

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Irrespective of religion, it is dangerous to be a woman in Honduras. According to reports by the Violence Observatory, there were 240 reported violent deaths and homicides in 2022 ([CDM, Accessed 26th January 2023](#)). Rape and domestic violence are widespread, although women are slow to report abuses due to high rates of impunity granted to perpetrators– only about 13% of homicide cases end with a conviction ([ASJ, April 2020](#)). An expert disclosed that Pastors live in constant distress over their daughters “because as the gang members are looking for a way to continue fleeing to the north (United States), they want to take the girls to prostitute or sell them and thus obtain some financial gain. “

Increasing numbers of women and girls are fleeing Central America amid reports that criminal gangs are systematically targeting young girls for sexual enslavement ([US Department of State, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Honduras](#)). However, the majority of migrants fleeing Honduras are men, meaning many households in Honduras are being led by women.

Within this context of violence and instability, Christian women and girls can face additional challenges on the basis of their faith. There have been several reports of teenage daughters of pastors being victims of rape, sexual harassment and coercion to engage in pornographic activities at the hands of [gang members](#) (La Prensa, 5 March 2017). “Christian girls are the object of greater attention,” an expert explains that in the last reporting period, “7 cases of girls and adolescent daughters of Pastors were reported who were victims of attempted rape, sexual harassment, acts of lust and coercion to engage in pornography activities. Pastors think they were chosen because of their obedience and purity, and as way of reprisal for the pastoral work of their parents.” They are systematically targeted as a means of blackmailing or intimidating their families, in order to stop missional activity occurring in gang territory.

Some girls have been abducted and killed for refusing to engage in sexual relationships with gang members. Survivors are left both physically and psychologically traumatized.

Finally, Christian women and girls are psychologically impacted by the extreme pressures on Christian men and boys, as detailed in the male gender profile below.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

High rates of criminal activity and the presence of [notorious gangs](#) such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 also pose daily security threats to Christian men and boys (ABC News, 24 November 2022). Church leaders are particularly vulnerable to attacks and threats, especially those involved in missional activities or seeking to stop the trafficking of narcotics. Extortion through fines and threats are commonplace. In the past reporting year, there have been several reports of pastors being violently abducted and killed (For example, see: [El Herald, 10 August 2022](#); [Vatican News, 4 March 2022](#)). In February 2021, Edwin Arellano, a pastor of a youth group in an evangelical church was shot to death. His family suspect he was targeted for his outreach work to gang members ([La Prensa, February 8th 2021](#)).

One of the greatest threats facing young Christian men and adolescents is forced gang recruitment. Whereas women and girls are commonly victims of sexual and gender-based violence, young men are exploited for criminal purposes, including drug trafficking. According to an ex-gang member who lives in a church retreat, his life is in grave danger. “If the gang doesn't kill me, those who want revenge will kill me....It's what I have to resign myself to.” ([El Confidencial, 1st November 2018](#))

Some gang members are permitted to leave gangs upon conversion to Christianity (particularly Evangelical Christianity), however will come under close scrutiny and monitoring from both their old gang as well as rival gangs. Any signs that they are not actively living out their faith can result in their death. Ex-gang member converts additionally face assimilation challenges; police and military who identify them as

former gang members – typically by tattoos or scars - can submit or stop them at any time for suspected crimes.

In light of these pressures and cycles of violence, many Christian men and boys choose to flee Honduras, although remain vulnerable while displaced. As an expert explains, “The harassment and terror that being chosen by the gangs means and not wanting to do so is a little-explored phenomenon, but it not only implies leaving the place where one lives alone or with the family, but sometimes not being able to continue studying, being insulted in the streets, being isolated, in the case of Christians, not even having the opportunity to go out to congregate because it can be a risky act.”

68) Angola

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children
Security	-
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Although women are generally expected to be subservient to men in Angola, faith-specific, gender-specific persecution is not widely reported. According to one source, girls in Angola are vulnerable to sexual crimes like rape and early marriage, including the “negative societal perceptions which discriminate against women and girls.” However, there were no reported cases of sexual violence against Christian women and girls in the WWL 2023 reporting period.

In some remote parts of the country, female Christians who have left Catholicism or African Traditional Religions (ATR) may be disinherited or lose custody of their children.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced to flee town/country

Group	Male Pressure Points
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Gender-specific religious persecution against Christian men and boys in Angola is not widely reported. Church leaders are most vulnerable in such cases and may be mentally abused for faith-related reasons and targeted by security forces. Some have reportedly had to go into hiding to escape arrest by the police. Operating a church without a license and open criticism of government policies are often the main factors behind the government targeting church leaders. A country expert commented: “The activities of unrecognized churches like Pentecostal churches are occasionally monitored and spied on under the suspicion of being opposed to government policies. The government always monitors unregistered churches. Government security agents show up regularly and at times arrest the pastor or priest.” People from the local community - including church officials from the dominant denominations - are known to act as government informers.

The government’s strict registration policies and protracted registration processes often leave religious leaders hard-pressed, especially leaders of Christian minority groups. “This is particularly true for the church groups who have been disfranchised by the action of the government. Churches are left without any option than meeting in places that are technically places of worship. Even in those circumstances, the government monitors what these priests and pastors are saying,” a source disclosed.

69) Uganda

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied food or water; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

According to local sources, women in Uganda are generally viewed as inferior to men. In some tribes, women are not allowed to eat certain foods, such as chicken or eggs, which can lead to disproportionate malnutrition among women and girls. According to UN [statistics](#), about 30% of 15- to 49-year-old girls experienced physical or sexual violence in 2022 (UN Women, 2022). [Very few rape](#) cases result in convictions, fostering a culture of impunity, as demonstrated by the 2019 [International Justice Mission](#) study (Save the Children, 1 March 2019; IJM, 2019, pp 21-27). Within this context, Ugandan Christian women face pressures both on account of their gender, as well as due to their faith.

Christian women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, including rape. There were several reports of sexual violence over the past few years. In the 2022 reporting period, one example was given of four women being raped on their way home from evening prayers. In secondary schools, a number of [gang groups](#) are reported to be fast rising. Notable groups include the "Virgin Hunters", who particularly target virgin girls or those who are presupposed to be innocent Christian girls (URNM, 23 Oct 2019). Sexual attacks leave victims feeling ashamed, embarrassed and unwilling to re-tell their ordeals.

In the Northern regions, forced marriages and widow inheritance practices are also widespread. Female converts separated from their husbands, or women previously married to converts who lose their husbands are often deposed from the family business. In extreme cases, Christian women married to Muslims are closely monitored and not allowed to leave their homes. Women who reject harmful customs like female genital mutilation (FGM) prevalent among [the Sebei people](#) face similar limitations (UNFPA, 27 October 2022). "Christians who refuse to be circumcised are discriminated from the community. You're not supposed to move with your husband to any function. He, instead, is allowed to go with any circumcised woman to represent you," a country expert remarked.

Female converts from Islam face intense familial and societal hardships, at risk of being subjected to forced marriage, forced divorce, house arrest, imprisonment, domestic violence and abandonment by their families. Forced marriages to Muslims often occur as an attempt to return a convert to Islam. Others are enticed more subtly into marriage by financial incentives or the promise of scholarships. In Bufumbo, Mbale, a Muslim dominated area, boys reportedly elope with Christian girls, impregnate them and eventually force them into marriage. Once in these marriages, women have little power to access fellowship as a Christian.

The impact of the trauma of persecution on women has a long-term impact on them, their family and their community. An expert summarizes: "When [women and girls are] displaced by persecution, there is a generational effect upon the children and community. Children are likely to suffer secondary stress, malnutrition, and other infant diseases."

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Ugandan Christian men face both violent and non-violent forms of pressure for their faith. This typically ranges from disinheritance, verbal abuse, threats from family members and discrimination in the workplace – employees are marginalized and denied promotions unless they convert to Islam. More overtly violent challenges include physical assault, abduction, imprisonment, forced conscription into armed militia groups, and the confiscation of property. Pressures are particularly high in the east of the country. A country expert explains: “Boys and men are primary targets for recruitment as fighters in ADF and other radical groups, especially the Tabligh’s.”

Church leaders are especially targeted. They have been falsely accused of crimes, physically beaten and threatened. One pastor was abducted by officials and interrogated about his supposed involvement in terrorism. “The use of smear campaigns against Christian leaders, the alienation and side-lining of Christians in politics as well as the manipulation of systems by non-God-fearing individuals has become a source of persecution to the Church,” a source remarked. Converts to Christianity, too, face considerable pressure from their families and surrounding communities. They may be forced out of their family home and be completely rejected by their parents.

Whilst women are usually the victims of trafficking, men and boys are also susceptible due to an increased [unemployment rate](#) (World Bank, 2 January 2022). Fraudulent job opportunities are used to lure vulnerable men and boys into forced labor ([USDS, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)). Finally, Christian men are commonly affected by enforced participation in traditional ceremonies. Among the Gishu, for example, Christian boys are forced to perform certain rituals during the circumcision rites even when it is against their Christian faith.

70) Togo

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

As is the case for men, women and girls in Togo may find themselves involved against their will in traditional rites and practices, such as voodoo or 'generation parties', depending on the communities in which they live. An expert explains: “The patriarchal law that subjects them to male authority makes women and girls vulnerable to persecution. The financial precariousness of women makes them vulnerable. The girl's lack of schooling easily exposes her to persecution... She has no right to personal choice.” These vulnerabilities inadvertently expose economically disadvantaged women and girls to sexual exploitation by illicit networks— many of them are sold into sexual slavery without their consent ([USDS, 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report](#)).

Converts from Muslim and Traditional African Religion backgrounds face additional challenges for their faith. Forced marriage is a common method of preventing female converts from leaving their parent’s religion. Some Muslim families have deliberately forced their daughters to marry a strict Muslim husband to prevent them from living as practicing Christians. They are prevented from marrying another Christian of their choice, as the family will oppose the marriage based on religion. Animist parents have been known to act similarly.

Local sources report that there is a high intolerance to converts from Islam to Christianity especially in the central and northern regions; only widows and outcasts are allowed to become Christians. “Many women are expelled from their homes because of their conversions in the north and far north. In some cases, after several months or years they have the opportunity to see their children again but rarely to return to their homes,” a source disclosed. Female converts characteristically face physical beatings, abandonment, sexual abuse including rape, verbal abuse, disinheritance, eviction and threats. If already married,

significant pressure is also applied on their spouse to divorce them and refuse the convert custody of their children. It often occurs that an unmarried convert is forced to accept a marriage arranged by her parents to a non-Christian. If she refuses, this may lead to her being abducted and forcibly taken to the home of the intended man. Despite Togolese law stipulating that both parties must consent to marriage, forced marriages such as these continue to take place in [several regions](#) across the country (HRW, 17 November 2022; [OECD](#), 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index: Togo”). In extreme cases, forms of sexual slavery have been reported.

Church leaders and pastors encourage new converts to keep their distance from their families in the light of these harsh responses. Christian women who leave Catholicism can also face many of the aforementioned pressures.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Forced divorce; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied food or water; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men and boys can be affected by cultural traditions such as voodoo, which sometimes results in traditional practices inflicting suffering on children. This is particularly prevalent in rural areas. They can also be [forcibly recruited](#) by Islamic extremists for domestic terrorism or, by criminal gangs for drug trafficking (VOA, 13 July 2022). Christian leaders who speak out against the government risk being arbitrarily arrested and harassed by state agents. Sources report that communications of church leaders are closely monitored by the government in a bid to intimidate and repress critical voices. An expert explains: “The increased use of electronic surveillance software to spy and intercept communications of Christians and senior church leaders is eroding all the remaining [safe] spaces that citizens had. The surveillance software used is able to access phone microphones without the knowledge of the owner. Increasing arbitrary arrests are also leading to self-censorship.” Pastors who do not engage in politics or encourage their followers to the regime are disapproved.

The harshest persecution, however, is experienced by converts. Male Christians from a Muslim or Animist background can face physical abuse, verbal harassment, rejection, disinheritance, reduced food, threats

and stigma because of their faith. Some men and boys are forced to flee as a result. Reports further indicate that Christians may be denied property lettings for a business, or let go in favor of a Muslim employee.

Male converts come under harsh scrutiny in their local communities and can face intimidation and threats on a daily basis, including forced divorce. “Christian converts who are men report that once their families find out about their new faith, their wives and children are taken from them,” a source revealed.

71) Guinea

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied food or water; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In Guinea, female converts to Christianity are especially vulnerable and are at risk of being abducted, isolated and cut off from their family. They might additionally be physically beaten, removed from school, placed under house arrest or, in some instances, be forced out of the family home. With the same intent, others are forcibly married to Muslims, particularly in Islamic strongholds such as Labe and Fouta. According to a country expert, forced marriages, in part, stem from deeply held views that “a woman’s salvation depends heavily on her degree of total submission to her husband” and “the practice of total submission to one’s parents.” If already married, female converts face the possibility of being divorced by their husband and being denied custody of their children. Considering such pressure, many converts are economically vulnerable and emotionally damaged. Occasionally converts flee their homes, and indeed Guinea, for safety.

Christian women are also affected by cultural and tribal norms; the women’s secret society, [Sande](#), for example, shuns Christian women who have chosen not to join the society on faith-related grounds

(Britannica, “Sande: African Secret Society”, accessed 4 January 2023). A source revealed: “Our young people are forced to participate in female circumcision.”

Daughters of pastors are also targeted by Muslims for the purpose of marriage. While a Muslim woman cannot marry a Christian man (making female converts further vulnerable to forced marriage to a Muslim), a Muslim man can marry a Christian woman. Indeed, he is encouraged to do so in order to spread Islam.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian converts to Christianity face the greatest challenges for their faith, often being condemned by their families, harshly threatened and forced from their homes and towns. Some can be whipped, which brings great shame upon them, as well as their wives. In instances where the husband flees his home to escape such pressure, his wife and children are left in an economically vulnerable position.

Additionally, In the same way that Christian women in Guinea face pressure from the female secret-society, Sande, men face persecution from the male secret-society, the [Poro](#) (Britannica, accessed 4 January 2023). Non-members are excluded and looked down upon.

According to reports, there is a growing repression of church activities and increased surveillance of church leaders; the majority of whom are male. A country expert explained: “In the Middle and Upper Guinea regions, Christians are repeatedly prevented from organizing Christian activities outside. The Secretariat General of Religious Affairs (SRA) issues weekly themes for Sunday sermons in churches. Many church leaders think such monitoring serves mainly to silence any government criticism taking place in churches.” The families of Christian leaders are also harassed in schools and public places, a source revealed.

72) South Sudan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Targeted Seduction; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In South Sudan, the prolonged civil war has been a major instigating factor for the [increase in sexual violence](#) against women (Human Rights Watch, South Sudan: Events of 2021). According to a [report](#) from the Secretary-General to the Security Council (UN, 3 June 2020, pp.27-28), sexual violence in Sudan has reached "appalling levels of brutality" and is "often committed with political and ethnic undertones". The report further noted that perpetrators often enjoyed impunity for their actions.

Against this backdrop of complex ethnic and political tensions, it is difficult to discern the exact motivations behind the violence experienced by Christian women and girls. It is clear, however, that the use of rape as a weapon in armed conflict makes women and girls more susceptible to religious persecution by those opposed to their Christian faith, which mimics the war practices in the country. Regional experts indicate that rape and [gender-based violence](#) is the most common form of persecution affecting Christian women and girls (HRW, 14 December 2022). An expert explains: "Sexual violence is an issue in South Sudan. Sexual slavery, rape, abductions and forced marriages are among the types of sexual violence suffered by South Sudanese [women]." The trauma experienced prevents many of these women from forming stable relationships.

Furthermore, South Sudan is one of six countries in the world which has not specified a minimum age for marriage hence leaving a loophole for early and forced marriages. It has the [eighth highest rate](#) of child marriage in the world, with 52% of girls marrying by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides, accessed 4 January 2023). The prevalence of this practice, most often carried out because of extreme poverty and to secure much-needed assets for families, (including cattle, money, and other gifts via the payment of a bride price), creates an obvious avenue of repression and control of young female converts. Elders and ethnic leaders have reportedly forced young girls to marry people that they have never met. Within these marriages, women and girls are exposed to domestic and sexual violence.

Women are also impacted by the killing of men and forceful conscription of boys as child soldiers, as are left without any way to fend for themselves while mourning the loss of their husbands and sons (see below).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

The South Sudanese civil war that lasted for about seven years, from 2013 to early 2020, contributed to the mass recruitment of males, particularly of boys who were halted in their education and targeted instead to become [child soldiers](#) (FP, 8 January 2022). Within a context of ongoing fragility and insecurity, [exacerbated further by Covid-19](#), recruitment as a means of repression and control has become the most common form of persecution affecting men and boys (UN News, 23 June 2020). Whilst exact figures are lacking, thousands of children are believed to have been recruited into armed forces and groups by both sides of the conflict since 2013, with aid organizations fighting for their release ([UNICEF, 18 Nov 2021](#); [World Vision, 6 May 2022](#)).

Men also run the risk of being killed by government forces upon suspicion of being part of rebel forces. Reports indicate that religious leaders and Christian workers are particularly in danger. As a regional expert writes, “Religious leaders have been singled out for criticism by both the government and the opposition, using media reports and social media accounts. In certain circumstances, this has resulted in interrogations, security intelligence summonses, and even incarceration. As a result, freedom of expression has been restricted, and public debate has been silenced.”

The killing of men and forceful conscription of boys as child soldiers has a catastrophic impact on families and communities. As an expert explains, “Women are left without any way to fend for themselves while mourning the loss of their husbands and sons. The resultant anguish greatly weakens their capacity to do anything either economic or development related.”

73) El Salvador

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Gender-specific religious persecution in El Salvador must be understood within a context of perpetuating cycles of violence, insecurity and criminal activity. Daily life is heavily impacted by the presence of gangs such as [MS-13 and Barrio-18](#), which reportedly took advantage of COVID-19 security measures to expand their criminal activity (BBC News, 27 March 2022). According to reports, numerous political leaders have been accused of collaborating with gangs in criminal operations, or negotiating with them for personal gain ([Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023: El Salvador](#)). Gang activity is far from being eradicated, either because of state and police complicity, or because they simply do not have means to stop them due to a lack of state control in areas co-opted by criminal gangs ([The Advocates for Human Rights, March 22, 2019](#)).

Within this context of violence and impunity for perpetrators, Christian women and girls fear a breadth of pressures, most notably being forced into relationships with gang members or raped. Refusal is not an option and may result in them being killed, or family members being threatened. Daughters of pastors who actively work in gang territory are particularly targeted, both for their perceived purity and assumed obedience, and secondly as a way of intimidating the victim's parents and halting pastoral activities in their gang territory. Sexual violence as a weapon of punishing girls, their families and wider society is reportedly common across El Salvador ([Center for Gender and Refugee Studies, accessed 26th January 2023](#)).

In addition to the pressures described in the previous answer, women and girls continue to suffer from stereotypes and prejudices about the role of women in the family and society. Women are slow to report domestic abuse, as the authorities consider such matters as marital problems, rather than a matter for the police. Finally, Christian women and girls are psychologically impacted by the extreme pressures on Christian men and boys, as detailed in the male gender profile below.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied/restricted healthcare; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Adolescent boys are particularly vulnerable to forced recruitment into gangs. Within these groups, they are forced to participate in initiation crime practices, run drugs and extort victims. Should he refuse, he puts his life - as well as the lives of his family members - at risk. In addition to being forced into gangs, Christians are commonly victims of gang violence. They are special targets of harassment, especially if they conduct activities that endanger the power and influence of gangs in certain areas. Pressures most commonly include threats, extortion, beatings and killings.

Pastors and church leaders, usually men, are particularly vulnerable. As many church leaders have used their position to actively speak out against the activity of gangs, or to minister to gang members, they have faced threats and reprisals. In the WVL 2023 reporting period, several leaders have been fined, harassed, threatened and assassinated. Exemplifying the dangers, in March 2022 an evangelical pastor was murdered in front of his minor child ([TVM, 27 March 2022](#)). Church leaders have also been arbitrarily detained and questioned by State agents due to their ministry work with active and former gang members.

Gang members who convert to evangelical Christianity have historically been allowed to leave the gang on the grounds of their new religion. This is one of few possible pathways for members to leave gangs. According to one such member, there are [three options](#) available to young men in El Salvador: “You join the gang, you join the evangelical church. Or you leave El Salvador” (Insight Crime, 15 June 2022). Gangs have however, become more reticent to allow converts to leave in 2020; having lost members through the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict with police, they have been slow to let remaining members go. New converts who are allowed to leave will be constantly monitored, both by their old gang as well as rival gangs, to make sure that they do not join a new gang. In addition to being monitored by gangs, converts

also experience challenges trying to reintegrate into society as Christians, particularly as many are visibly marked by scars and tattoos that indicate their former allegiance, making them more vulnerable to suspicion and arrest. Several reports of re-arrests of former gang members, including pastors, were recorded under the [protracted](#) State of Emergency, which has seen more than 60,000 people detained, amid [widespread](#) human rights violations (Al Jazeera, 12 January 2023, HRW, 7 December 2022).

In light of these pressures and constant threats, many Christian men choose to flee El Salvador.

74) Ivory Coast

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Targeted Seduction; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied food or water; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In general, the number of forced or early marriages, polygamy and acts of female genital mutilation (FGM) is [high](#) in Ivory Coast (CEDAW, 30 Jul 2019, “Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Côte d’Ivoire”). In strongly Animist areas, women and girls are affected by the existence of female secret societies (such as the Sande society) and are sometimes forced to become members. If Christian women and girls, who live in communities where these societies are actively present, refuse to be members or participate in ceremonies like ritual baths due to their Christian faith, they are often isolated from female-related activities.

Converts from Muslim and Animist backgrounds face the greatest breadth of pressure. Persecution takes forms of deprivation, as well as enticement and denied educational support. “The girl who converts to Christianity is often subject to abandonment, rejection and mockery. Very often, she is forced to stop studying,” an expert remarked. A female convert may be divorced and denied custody of their children. The pressure on her spouse to divorce her often comes from Muslim relatives or friends who see her Christian faith as a source of dishonor. If a Christian convert remains a Christian while married to a Muslim,

she will not be permitted to raise her children as Christians. She may also face physical and psychological abuse. [The lack of legislation addressing domestic violence](#) leaves women easily exposed in this regard (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index, Côte d'Ivoire”).

Unmarried converts may be forced into marriage to older, rich Muslim men. An expert explains that this may be done “to stop them from expressing their faith.” Sources indicate that the parents of convert girls sometimes threaten them with the prospect of abduction and forced marriage in order to pressure them into returning to Islam. These cases are very common in the Northern regions of the country, particularly in Boundiali, Bouna, and Khorogo — the practice of levirate and sororate marriage is also reportedly prevalent in these areas. Some women and girls (including non-converts) are targeted for marriage by more subtle means. Young Muslim men are reportedly encouraged to marry Christian girls.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

As is often the case in the region of West Africa, male Christians can be particularly subjected to hostility and forced membership into secret societies (such as the Poro), especially if they live in rural communities. If they refuse, they will be excluded from male-related activities and isolated. An expert explains: “Most of the time, it is the heads of non-Christian families who persecute family members who have converted to Christianity. They can go so far as to threaten Christian leaders in worship on Sundays, or, they join forces with the services of the marabouts to spiritually attack, bewitch or poison those targeted by persecution. This can happen to the Pastor or any member of the Church, as long as it terrorizes the rest of the faithful.” Pastors—the majority of whom are male – are also primary targets of persecution for their faith as well as their families. They are among the most vulnerable to attacks, especially during conflicts.

Converts from Muslim and Animist backgrounds have generally faced the most intense forms of persecution. They may be verbally, physically or emotionally mistreated by their families, who may reject them entirely, evict them and threaten them with violence. They are also discriminated against in terms of their education; Muslim youth receive more opportunities to study abroad, and parents will often stop financial support, halting the progress of their education. Upon discovery of their conversion, men may

also be discriminated against in the workplace, possibly even losing their jobs. Shops have reportedly been targeted and boycotted because they belonged to Christians. As men are usually the financial providers of the family, these economic pressures harm their wider families and dependents. Married converts also face peculiar forms of persecution. According to a regional expert, wives of converts “do not hesitate, on the advice of their relatives, to consult marabouts and spiritists, to bring their husbands back to the Muslim faith, by bewitchments. Some go so far as to seduce Christian leaders to bring them down, and to deny their faith.”

In rare instances, converts may be killed for their faith, but no incidents were reported in the 2023 reporting period.

75) Gambia

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied food or water; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

While the Gambian State Constitution ensures that women are of equal legal standing to men and grants equal rights, [in practice](#) Gambia is a patriarchal society where men are the head of the household and women and girls are socialized into assuming a subordinate status (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index, Gambia”). In a country where over 90% of the population are Muslims, it is challenging for Christian families to live according to Christian values. In a context of widespread child marriage and poor education for women and girls, female converts face additional vulnerabilities on the basis of their faith and gender ([Girls Not Brides, Accessed 6 January 2023](#)).

Female converts to Christianity face the greatest pressures for their faith, both those from a Muslim and animist background. When converts share their new-found faith with their families, they may face physical and verbal abuse, disinheritance, abandonment and threats for betraying their parent’s religion. “New converts to Christianity are subjected to house arrest to suppress their new-found faith and could sometimes if not all the time, be denied food and water for days.” an expert comments. Forced marriage is also used as a weapon to apply pressure on converts, to encourage them to reject Christianity. Due to cultural norms, women are forced to convert to the religion of their husbands. An expert explains: “A

Christian woman that marries a non-Christian will have to convert to the husband's religion and raise the children in accordance with his religion. This results in a somewhat coercive conversion.”

Families may incentivize girls to enter these marriages freely by finding wealthy Muslim men who can provide for their material needs, or alternatively threaten them with the prospect of kidnapping and forced marriage. If already married, converts may also be divorced and have their children removed from them, in order to ensure the children do not grow up to be Christians. While no such instances have been recorded in the past reporting year, these remain live threats. Any family or church community that receives rejected women and girls will automatically become an enemy of those who evicted and disowned them.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Persecution in Gambia for Christian men and boys often occurs in the form of physical, psychological, and verbal abuse for their faith. Converts are most at risk and can face severe punishment for betraying the religion of their Muslim or animist families. Pastors and church leaders are also subject to harassment, mockery, and death threats for their faith. In addition, Christian men may face discrimination at the workplace or be denied promotions. These forms of persecution negatively impact his wider family, as the man is usually the financial provider.

76) Belarus

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	-
Social and Cultural	-

Group	Female Pressure Points
Technological	-

Women in Belarus face considerable expectations to care for children and the elderly ([UNDP](#), 8 March 2021). While Belarus has ratified international legal frameworks related to gender equality, it has no specific legislation addressing female empowerment and equality, and sexual and gender based violence is still a significant risk ([UN Women](#), 2019). Currently, there are very few gender specific pressures recorded for female Christians in the country. However, if persecution escalates in Belarus, the gender inequalities listed above could become potential avenues for persecution.

The main recorded incidents for women are being detained at a prayer meeting for the mothers of young men serving in Belarus’ armed forces, as they were praying for an end to the war in Ukraine.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	-
Security	Violence - psychological
Social and Cultural	Violence - verbal
Technological	-

Men in Belarus face social expectations to financially provide for their families ([UNDP](#), 8 March 2021). They can face fines related to their faith, which can then affect the financial stability of their families. In a context of increasing state repression, some male Christian leaders have faced detention by the state. The state can view “Christian activists as the threat to its regime,” as explained by one country expert. In the course of detention, Christian men may risk physical and psychological violence.

A country expert explains the risk for ordained clergy: “At the local level, Orthodox clergy and believers will target non-Orthodox leaders, but they will also defrock Orthodox clergy who are critical towards the regime.”