Open Doors

THE CHURCH ON THE RUN

IDP & REFUGEE REPORT 2022



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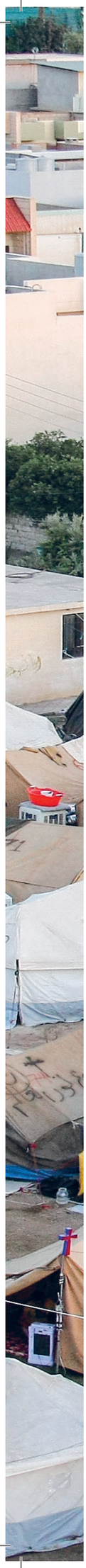
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This report is part of a series of Specific Religious Persecution (SRP) reports of the SRP Unit of World Watch Research. These reports seek to contribute to the understanding of persecuted Christians' experiences in especially vulnerable and complex situations.

We would like to thank contributors from within and outside of Open Doors for their time and insights on this topic.

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Key findings

This preliminary report found a multifaceted relationship between religious persecution of Christians and the life-altering situation of becoming an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) or refugee:

1. **A deliberate strategy of religious persecution is the displacement of Christians from their homes or communities.**

   While displacement is sometimes perceived as an unintentional by-product of persecution, in many instances, it is intentional and can be part of a wider strategy to completely eradicate Christianity from the village, region or country. In some instances, the strategy is overt and public, in others it is covert and informal.

2. **The global picture of religious persecution will only ever be a partial view if just the static church is considered.**

   Severe religious persecution does not necessarily stop at borders. Christians forced to be on the move can be subjected to religious persecution at any stage of the displacement journey and consequently face challenges to their faith.

3. **Displacement breaks individuals and families away from social and community networks.**

   Loss of community can be one of the greatest threats to the resilience of Christians and their sense of identity. They have lost not only their homes, but their practical networks for social or financial support and protection. Separation from family members is a further challenge.

4. **Christian IDPs and refugees face ongoing and new challenges in the context of displacement; primarily psychological violence and physical insecurity.**

   While all IDPs and refugees face these challenges, the form and intensity can be shaped by their Christian faith and activity. This can range from violent religious groups targeting displaced Christians, to the trauma that converts can carry with them due to family rejection and violence.

5. **The experiences of displaced Christians are shaped by their unique layers of additional vulnerability, which compound religious persecution.**

   A person's age, gender, belief background, ethnicity or public position can influence the intensity and form of persecution experienced.

6. **The primary agents driving religion-motivated displacement are family units, government officials, community members and violent religious groups.**

   Multiple agents can act in tandem to create a tapestry of pressure from different sources, forcing people to leave. Agents can also vary depending on the individual's belief background.

7. **A greater knowledge of, and sensitivity to, the challenges facing Christian refugees and IDPs is required in order to better meet their protection needs.**

   While this can be due to unintentional neglect, in some cases, governments and international organizations (or their representatives) can be actively complicit in the discrimination and disempowerment of displaced Christians.



Introduction

Christians report being forcibly displaced from their homes in **58 of the top 76 World Watch List (WWL)[1] countries** because of their religious identity, either as a sole or contributory factor. Recent figures demonstrate the scale of global displacement: there are **currently a record 100 million people forcibly displaced** worldwide from all religions and beliefs, the **majority of whom are IDPs.[2]**

This sharp rise in displacement represents in part escalating conflict and violence. Such escalation puts additional pressure on Christians and other religious minorities who already face a breadth of challenges because of their religious identity or activity.

The story behind why each individual flees is unique, typically a consequence of conflict, natural disaster, persecution and a host of other factors. **Religion is part of a complex tapestry of reasons why people flee.**

WHAT IS A REFUGEE?

Persons outside of their country of origin who are "unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."

1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.[3]

From 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021, 27 WWL countries had an estimated 100 or more people leaving due to religious reasons. In nine countries, the numbers go into the thousands.[4] These numbers cover both instances of internal displacement as well as migration over national borders.

Religious persecution is not an isolated source of vulnerability; it is regularly compounded by factors such as ethnic tensions, political involvement and gender vulnerabilities.[5]

CONTEXT: UNHCR AND IDMC FIGURES[6]

There is a clear overlap of IDP- and refugee-origin and refugee-hosting countries with Open Doors WWL top 76 countries.

Where	How many *(millions)*	WWL 2022 ranking
Syria	6.7	15
Afghanistan	5.7	1
DR Congo	5.5	40
Colombia	5.2	30
Yemen	4.3	5

46% of IDPs originate from the following five countries (both due to disasters, as well as conflict and violence):

Where	How many *(millions)*	WWL 2022 ranking
Syria	6.8	15
Venezuela	4.1	65
Afghanistan	2.6	1
South Sudan	2.2	74
Myanmar	1.1	12

68% of refugees originate from just five countries: 39% of refugees are hosted in just five countries, all of which bar Germany appear in WWL 2022:

Where	How many *(millions)*	WWL 2022 ranking
Turkey	3.7	42
Colombia	1.7	30
Uganda	1.5	69
Pakistan	1.4	8
Germany	1.2	-

[1] In WWL 2022, there were 76 countries identified where Christians face high, very high or extreme levels of persecution. Details concerning WWL 2022 can be found in the WWL documentation: 'WWL 2022 Compilation of all main documents.' Open Doors International, February 2022. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WWL-2022-Compilation-of-main-documents-February-revision.pdf> The persecution situation in each of the 76 countries can be found in the Full country dossiers. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/country-dossiers/> [For each, password: freedom.]

[2] 'UNHCR: Ukraine, other conflicts push forcibly displaced total over 100 million for first time.' UNHCR, May 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/press/2022/5/628a389e4/unhcr-ukraine-other-conflicts-push-forcibly-displaced-total-100-million.html> Accessed 25 May 2022.

[3] 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-us/background/4ec262df9/1951-convention-relating-status-refugees-its-1967-protocol.html>

[4] Note that the UNHCR figures reflect refugees 'under UNHCR's mandate', excluding internal displacement figures. This demographic and geographic breakdown relies on the most recent delineated data from 2020; 2021/2022 delineated figures have not yet been released. These figures were recorded prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and also exclude Palestinian refugees under the mandate of the UNRWA (relating to the latter: 5.7 million; Palestinian Territories are ranked 57th in WWL 2022.) 'Figures at a glance.' UNHCR, June 2021. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html> Accessed 16 May 2022. The IDP figures are taken from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 2021 data: 'Global Internal Displacement Database.' IDMC, 2022. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2022/> Accessed 30 May 2022.

[5] Those nine countries are: Afghanistan (both IDPs and refugees), Democratic Republic of the Congo (predominantly IDPs), Eritrea (predominantly refugees), Iran (predominantly refugees), Mozambique (predominantly IDPs), Myanmar (both IDPs and refugees), Niger (predominantly IDPs), Nigeria (both IDPs and refugees), Pakistan (predominantly IDPs).

[6] Edghdamian warns against reductionism. She observes, "Reductionism should be avoided. The tendency to look at one particular feature of refugee identity in isolation can result in reducing and explaining all refugee experiences in relation to that identity. To do so is to mistake a complex reality by a single categorization." 'Religious Identity and Experiences of Displacement: An Examination into the Discursive Representations of Syrian Refugees and Their Effects on Religious Minorities Living in Jordan.' Eghdamian, K., 2017. Journal of Refugee Studies, 30(3). <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/30/3/447/2566846?login=false>

The 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees recognizes five forms of persecution that might cause an individual to flee and qualify them for refugee status: race, **religion**, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.[7]

Despite long-standing recognition that religious persecution is a driver of displacement, **the meeting point of forced migration and faith remains poorly understood,** in part due to the historical unease and ongoing tensions between secular humanitarianism and religion.[8]

Given the strong overlap between refugee-producing countries and countries that are known as the world's worst religious freedom violators,[9] **it is vital to gain a better understanding of the role that religious identity plays** in order to better meet the needs of persecuted religious communities.

This preliminary report aims to contribute to bridging these gaps in knowledge, finding that in many contexts, **Christians are more likely to be forced out of their homes/countries, and more likely to experience psychological and physical violence once displaced on account of their religious identity and activity.** Their protection needs are often poorly understood, or even willfully ignored.

While findings focus primarily on the experiences of refugees and IDPs, the report makes wider observations in relation to the experiences of migrants who don't fall neatly into these categorizations. These are preliminary findings, which therefore highlight areas for future exploration and analysis that is necessary to enhance the global understanding of an under-explored field of research.

WHAT IS AN IDP?

An Internally Displaced Person.

"Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border."

1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement[10]

LIST OF ACRONYMS

- IDP = Internally Displaced Person
- SRP = Specific Religious Persecution
- FoRB = Freedom of Religion or Belief
- FBO = Faith Based Organizations
- LFC = Local Faith Communities
- MENA = Middle East and North Africa
- UNHCR = United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- WWR = World Watch Research
- WWL = World Watch List



Nigerian Christian refugees near Yola town.

[7] The Convention defines a refugee as a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him — or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution. See Article 1A(2), –'The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.' UNCHR. <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-us/background/4ec262df9/1951-convention-relating-status-refugees-its-1967-protocol.html>

[8] 'Religion and forced migration.' In The Oxford handbook of refugee and forced migration studies. Hollenbach, D., 2014. <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/religion-and-forced-migration>; p.3, Faith, secularism, and humanitarian engagement: Finding the place of religion in the support of displaced communities. Ager, A. & Ager, J., 2015. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9781137472144>; 'Faith and the Politics of Resettlement.' Fine, S., 2014. Forced Migration Review, 48. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/b6d0eed674e097476e8a1447211cfd37/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=55113>

[9] 'USCIRF Statement on World Refugee Day and Link Between Religious Freedom and Displacement.' USCIRF, June, 2019. Accessed 25 May 2022. <https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscirf-statement-world-refugee-day-and-link-between-religious-freedom>

[10] 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/199808-training-OCHA-guiding-principles-Eng2.pdf>

Drivers of Displacement

Tipping the scales of displacement

Either religious persecution by itself, or the combination of multiple layers of pressure **can push a person past a tipping point** where they feel that there is no other option than to leave their home.

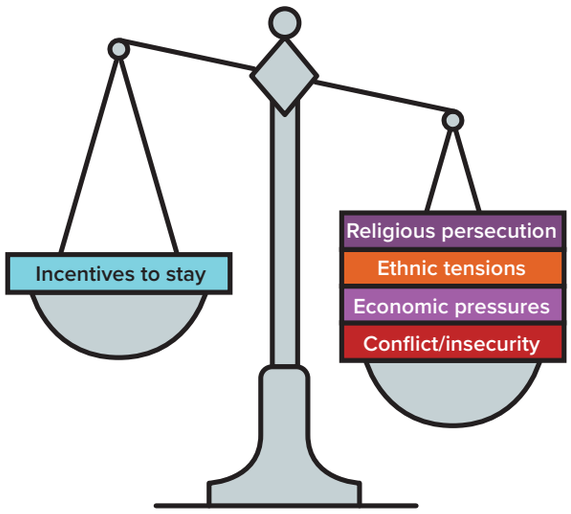
Religious persecution is not the only challenge that most displaced Christians face. Ethnic tensions, disasters, economic pressures, and conflict or other forms of insecurity all combine in layers of pressure that weigh upon the scales of decision-making and ultimately contribute to displacement.

These pressures can build up over several years. As noted in a report by Minority Rights Group International that examines migration and displacement, "even in cases where violence or conflict have triggered mass displacement, this has usually been preceded by a long process of exclusion."[11]

Complicating efforts to understand the drivers of displacement, **there are huge challenges involved in distinguishing in which cases, and to what degree, displacement is caused by religious identity and/or activity.** Opinions vary when it comes to determining what level of restrictions on religious practice are deemed acceptable, and what degree of pressure amounts to persecution.[12]

Conscious of these complexities, as well as the lack of research to date, the following preliminary findings illustrate how religious identity can contribute to a person's decision to flee.

The role of religion as a driver of displacement remains poorly understood, as noted previously. Limited attention has been paid to the complex dynamics that result in people fleeing their homes for religious reasons; academic works to date have mainly addressed religion-based asylum claims in the context of the country processing the asylum claim.[13] However, a recent publication by USCIRF does highlight some of the key persecution dynamics that have driven religious communities to flee in a range of countries.[14]



What causes Christians to flee?

In instances where religious persecution was a clear factor that drove Christians from their home, this research found that the nature and source of the persecution varied. On a global level, there were **four primary groups of agents driving the displacement of Christians.** [15]

Top 4 agents driving displacement
Family (both immediate and extended)
Government officials (local and national)
National citizens and local community (including mobs)
Violent religious groups

[11] 'Minority and Indigenous Trends 2018: Focus on migration and displacement.' Minority Rights Group International, 2018. <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/September-2018_MR_Trends_Report_170x240_WEB_FINAL-1.pdf>

[12] 'The Boundaries of Religious Persecution: Refugee Law and the Limits of Permissible Restrictions on Religion.' Cheung, S., 2018. Hum. Rts., 13. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/hurighs13&div=18&g_sent=1&casa_token=> In comparison to other organizations' definitions, WWL methodology employs a broad definition of persecution: "Any hostility experienced as a result of one's identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide." See: p.7, 'Complete WWL Methodology.' Open Doors International, November 2021. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Complete-WWL-Methodology-November-2021.pdf>

[13] See for example: 'A Fresh Approach To What It Means To Be a Religious Refugee.' Bagaric, B. & Svilar, J., Pepp. L. Rev. 577. 2021. <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/plr/vol48/iss3/1>

[14] 'Factsheet: Overview of Refugees Fleeing Religious Persecution Globally.' USCIRF, May 2022. <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/2022 Factsheet - Refugees Fleeing Religious Persecution Globally.pdf>

[15] Researchers utilized the list of drivers recorded in the 2021 Complete WWL Methodology, p18. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Complete-WWL-Methodology-November-2021.pdf> See *Appendix A (page 23)* for a global summary of the agents driving religious-motivated displacement, and the number of countries reporting each.

While these primary agents play key roles in forcing people to leave, it is also recognized that **agents can work alongside each other, weaving a tapestry of persecution** that drives Christians to flee. In some cases, the top two or three agents driving persecution will be influenced by one another. For example, a family might force a Christian convert to leave their home, in order to avoid action by government officials or the community which could negatively impact the family.

Furthermore, **some agents driving displacement end up targeting some groups more than others.** Violent religious groups and government officials may single out individuals who are most visible in the community, such as **church leaders**, seeing them as a negative influence on the local community and a means of warning others not to follow them. Regional experts report that the departure of a church leader can be the trigger for other Christian families in the community to move, which may be the desired strategic outcome.



FAMILY PRESSURE

Converts to Christianity widely reported being **ousted by their families, being threatened to the point of death, and put under such extreme pressures that fleeing was deemed their only option.**

When a young man became a believer in Uzbekistan, he encountered immediate persecution from his family. The harassment he experienced was so strong that he fled to Russia, where he was able to find work, join a church and start to study the Bible. He hasn't told his family where he is; if they knew, he believes that they would track him down and punish him.

Even in the face of unbearable family pressure, **it can be more difficult for women and girls to leave.** The prevalent use of house arrest against female Christians illustrates their lack of freedom to flee as they can literally be locked into place.[16] Gendered family dynamics, and, in some contexts, inadequate or unimplemented laws, often result in (male) family members being able to exert more control over women and girls in the domestic sphere.[17] There can also be additional external barriers to leaving for women and girls: restrictions on travel or limitations on living arrangements.



STATE PRESSURE

Government agents at both national and local levels **have the power and resources to exert harm on Christians**, including the use of laws that cover issues such as blasphemy, marriage and freedom of assembly. They can additionally **fail to protect Christian communities** from harm, whether intentionally or not, and foster a culture of impunity for perpetrators of religious freedom violations.

An Iranian 47-year-old pastor was forced to flee together with his family after ongoing harassment from local authorities. Intelligence agents began by raiding their home in January 2021, confiscating Bibles, mobile phones and other personal possessions. He was then later summoned for questioning, interrogated for eight hours straight, then threatened with a long prison term.



COMMUNITY PRESSURE

Beyond the immediate family, **the local community can also represent a powerful and constant source of pressure**, particularly as they often control access to community resources.

Several Christian pastors, along with their families, have reportedly been forced to leave their homes in India following intense community harassment. Accused of forcibly converting others, they were arrested, physically attacked and threatened over their church activities. For their own and their family's safety, leaving the area was the only option.



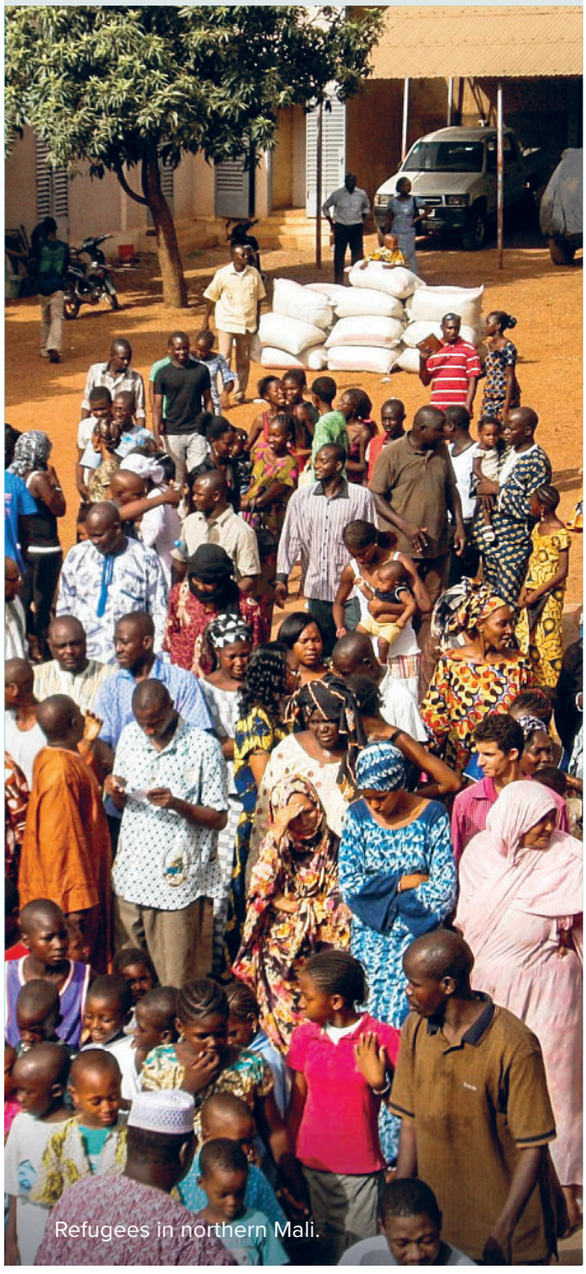
VIOLENT RELIGIOUS GROUPS

In countries across the globe, violent religious groups **continue to target and terrorize religious minorities** such as Christians, often in an attempt to eradicate them altogether from the region in which they operate. These groups proliferate in contexts characterized by conflict, insecurity and lawlessness.

[16] 'Incarceration by family (house arrest)' was the 5th highest Gender SRP Pressure Point used against female Christians in the 2022 reporting period. 'Invisible: The Gender Report 2022.' Open Doors International, March 2022. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Gender-Report-2022-DIGITAL-PDF.pdf> [password: freedom]

[17] Methods of control can vary in context, ranging from customary male guardianship systems to legal marital rape to use of digital apps to monitor location and online activity. See, respectively: '"Everything I Have to Do is Tied to a Man": Women and Qatar's Male guardianship rules'. HRW, March 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/03/29/everything-i-have-do-tied-man/women-and-qatars-male-guardianship-rules>; 'The World's shame: The Global Rape Epidemic'. Equality now, 2021. <https://live-equality-now.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/EqualityNowRapeLawReport2017_Single_Pages_0-compressed.pdf>; 'Runaway Saudi sisters call on Google and Apple to pull 'inhuman' woman-monitoring app'. The Guardian, April 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/25/runaway-saudi-sisters-call-for-inhuman-woman-monitoring-app-absher-to-be-pulled-google-apple>

Christians in northern Mali and neighboring countries face a barrage of threats from radical Islamists; this means these Christians have little choice but to leave for somewhere safer. The urgent need to respond to COVID-19 has meant that attention by government officials has been diverted; Islamic militants have taken advantage of this distraction to regroup, and this has increased the levels of fear among Christians in the region.



Refugees in northern Mali.

Regional analysis of drivers

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA:

Primary Christian refugee/IDP producing countries: Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Nigeria.[18]

Top 3 agents driving displacement in Sub-Saharan Africa

- Violent religious groups (13/22 countries)
- Family pressure (9/22 countries)
- State pressure (7/22 countries)

Violent religious groups, primarily Islamic extremists, create highly insecure and dangerous environments for Christians. Such groups include al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) and other more localized jihadist groups.

Producing the highest number of IDPs and refugees in the region, **Nigeria especially faces extremely high levels of violence.** Multiple extremist groups target Christians, resulting in thousands being displaced both internally and in neighboring countries over the past few years.[19] A regional expert expands on Boko Haram's strategy: **"They don't just attack, they attack in order to uproot."**

Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso have been noted in particular for the power and reach of Islamic terrorist groups.[20] Using not only physical and sexual attacks, but **the targeting of property, livestock and land** by violent religious groups means that Christians are not only forced to leave because of the physical risk, but also because of the destruction of their homes and livelihoods. The extreme and complex forms of violence within these Central Sahelian countries means that vulnerability to attacks by violent religious groups can also be **layered with insecurity due to multiple conflict dynamics** which can differ regionally within and across countries.

While family and state pressure do drive incidents of forced displacement of relatively small numbers of Christians in multiple countries across the region, **violent religious groups are primarily responsible for incidents of mass displacement of Christians**. A notable exception to this is the case of Eritrea, where there are extreme levels of state pressure. For example, the notorious forced military conscription of youth (without

[18] Countries represented produced the highest numbers of Christian refugees and IDPs in the WWL data from 2019-2022. This includes the use of symbolic numbers; for further explanation of these see: p. 30, '2021 Complete WWL Methodology.' <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Complete-WWL-Methodology-November-2021.pdf> *(The full list of countries under study can be found in on the inside back cover.)*

[19] Extreme levels of violence seen in 79% of the recorded killings of Christians globally being in Nigeria alone in the 2022 reporting period. 'WWL 2022: Compilation of all main documents.' Open Doors International, February 2022. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WWL-2022-Compilation-of-main-documents-February-revision.pdf>

[20] 'Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the impact of Terrorism.' Institute for Economics and Peace, March 2022. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web.pdf>

the option for Christians to conscientiously object on the basis of faith) drives many to flee.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA):

Primary Christian refugee/IDP producing countries: Iran, Syria.

Top 3 agents driving displacement in MENA

- Community pressure (10/14 countries)
- Family pressure (9/14 countries)
- State pressure (6/14 countries)

Christians leaving countries in the MENA region for primarily faith-based reasons are **often converts from a Muslim background, for whom community and family members can pose the most threat**. A regional expert summarizes: "If you are female, and convert to Christianity from Islam, the risk of abuse skyrockets."



A refugee camp some 35 kilometers from Mosul, Iraq.

The honor and shame that rests on a family's status within a community in MENA's family orientated cultures means that conversion from the majority religion can have a significant wider effect. As such, families and communities can react harshly towards converts, with some reports of families in Iran and Iraq threatening believers from Muslim backgrounds even when they've already left their home country.

Christians leaving as a result of state actions **may flee as a response to direct state intervention, such as arrest, interrogation and imprisonment.** Alternatively, the buildup of indirect state pressure, for example through **the strategic use of fear and surveillance**, can also drive someone to flee. While this can be seen in several MENA sub-regions, the stability of governments generally found in the Gulf means this driver is particularly seen in this region. One characteristic of a stable government is increased capacity and political motivation to implement and manipulate surveillance systems for the purposes of population control, magnifying pressures on Christians.

This region is also home to **several protracted conflicts** such as in Syria and Iraq *(see: Iraq: Decades of a fragmented church, page 13)* that have, in the past decade, had particularly severe consequences for minority Christian communities and forced them to leave in large numbers.[21] These ongoing conflicts are multifaceted; for example, recent Turkish attacks in northeastern Syria have displaced Christian communities that have had a presence in the wider region for centuries, under the pretext of combatting militants belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).[22]

ASIA:

Primary Christian refugee/IDP producing countries: Afghanistan, Myanmar and Pakistan.

Top 3 agents driving displacement in Asia

- Family pressure (12/15 countries)
- Community pressure (9/15 countries)
- State pressure (8/15 countries)



A refugee camp in Northern Afghanistan.

[21] Other religious minorities in the region have been similarly targeted, and in some cases to more extreme levels. Examples include the Yezidi and Alevi communities.

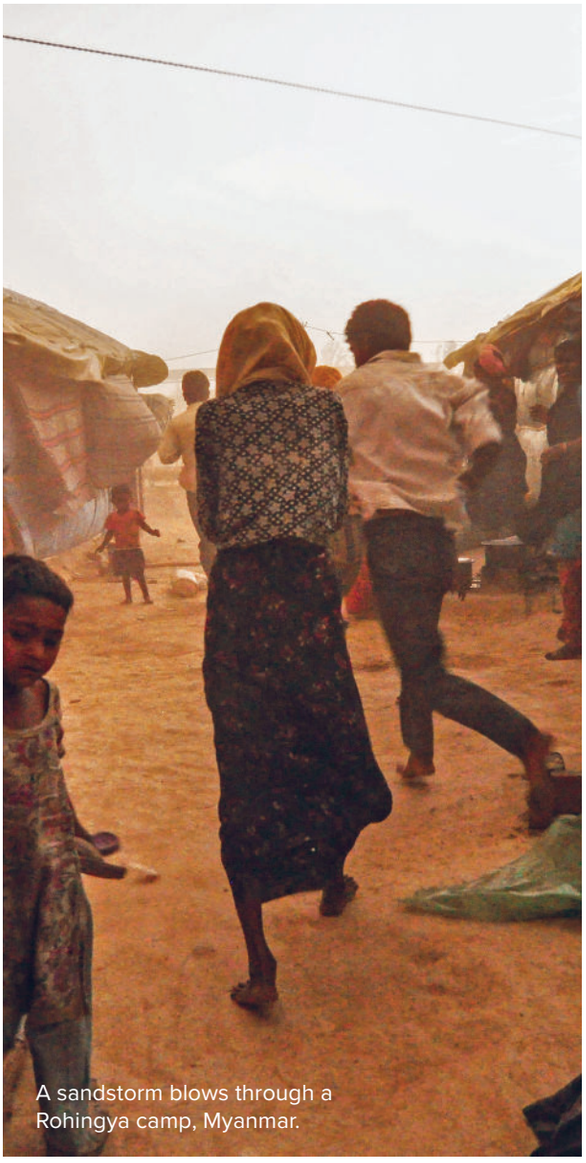
[22] For example, see 'Christian village in Syria bombed by Turkish air force.' Barnabas fund, August 2021. <https://www.barnabasfund.org/gb/news/christian-village-in-syria-bombed-by-turkish-air-force/> Accessed 26 May 2022.

Across Asia, **the predominant sources of pressure driving people from their homes are the family and local community**, with pressures highest on believers from a non-Christian belief background. Such pressures are particularly visible in Pakistan, where **religious minorities live under the shadow of apostasy and blasphemy laws**.[23] Conversion to Christianity is unacceptable, and a threat to the honor of the family unit. To avoid the threat of beatings, forced marriage and honor killings, many converts are forced to flee, or to live in places where they are not recognized. The targeting of young girls for the purpose of forced conversion and marriage has also driven many families into hiding, fueled by community acceptance for such practices and state inaction.[24]

Political instability and the rise of religious extremist groups fuels displacement further across the region, most notably in Myanmar. These groups work together with, and in parallel to, the top three agents to displace Christians within and across its borders higher than any other country in the region.[25] Ethnic tensions, inter-communal conflict and political instability have caused thousands of to flee to neighboring countries, or become IDPs, including those from other minority groups such as the Rohingya. **Since the military takeover in 2021, persecution against Christians has reportedly intensified** and caused widespread displacement, particularly in states such as Karen, Chin, Kayah and Kachin.[26] While Buddhist monasteries sheltering displaced Buddhists have also been destroyed by crossfire in conflict areas, a regional expert explains that "churches remain the primary target, as believers seek and take shelter there."

Christians in Myanmar have also faced pressures from the **Ma Ba Tha, a religious extremist group** that has risen in power. According to a regional expert, the Ma Ba Tha have a saying that "to be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist"; covertly fueled by religious ideology, they pursue what is presented as a political agenda. **Within Afghanistan on the other hand, the Islamizing agenda of the Taliban was overt** when they came back into power, causing Christians to flee or go deeper underground.

In North Korea, where no religion is permitted, escapees search for greater freedom in neighboring China or South Korea. Opportunities to flee have become even more scarce since the introduction of measures intended to curb COVID-19. In a 2018 report, **a higher number of defectors were found to be women**; as government monitoring is focused on the male heads of the households, men have little opportunity to escape the watchful eye of the State.[27] According to a regional expert, North Korean men also face challenges finding work in China and can live under the constant threat of their employer reporting them to the North Korean authorities. Women are more likely to be able to stay in China, although this often comes at the cost of being trafficked.



A sandstorm blows through a Rohingya camp, Myanmar.

[23] '"As Good As Dead" The Impact of the Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan.' Amnesty International, 2016. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa33/5136/2016/en/>

[24] 'Invisible Targets of Hatred: Socioeconomically Excluded Women from Religious Minority Backgrounds.' Tadros, M., 2020. <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/15614>

[25] UNHCR estimates that there are currently 1.2 million persons of concern in Myanmar. This figure includes 810,000 internally displaced persons and 600,000 stateless Rohingya, of which 148,000 remain displaced. 'Myanmar.' UNHCR, accessed 17 May 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/myanmar.html?msclkid=5160c524c56211ecadca10c8caa5b300> There are no accurate figures that capture the number of Christian refugees leaving Myanmar or of Christian IDPs, but World Watch researchers estimate that there are tens of thousands in both categories.

[26] 'Suffering of Karen Christians Intensified by Recent Coup.' International Christian Concern, December 2021. <https://www.persecution.org/2021/05/12/suffering-karen-christians-intensified-recent-coup/?msclkid=c55506a5c56311eca4ee6cf43dc30773> Accessed 17 May 2022.

[27] 'North Korea: Full Country Dossier.' Open Doors International, January 2022, p37. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/North-Korea-Full-Country-Dossier-January-2022-FINAL.pdf> [password: freedom]

LATIN AMERICA:

Primary Christian refugee/IDP producing countries: Colombia, Mexico.

Top 3 agents driving displacement in Latin America

- Organized crime groups (5/7 countries)
- State pressure (9/22 countries)
- Revolutionary/Paramilitary groups (7/22 countries)

Christians in Latin America are **primarily affected by insecurity and crime**. As highlighted by the 2022 Gender Report, *[In]Visible*, young men choose to flee the region, fearful of being **recruited into gangs and trapped in cycles of violence**, while women and girls risk being targeted as objects of sexual violence.[28]

While all community members are affected by the presence of gangs and criminal activity, **vocal Christians are targeted – particularly pastors – if their faith motivations cause them to speak out against the authority of local gangs or conduct outreach to gang members**. According to a regional expert, gangs see Christians "as their number one enemy and actively seek to make life difficult for them." **They are warned that they, together with their family members, must flee the country or local area, often under pain of death.**[29] Christians also leave due to the ever-present threat of extortion. For example, criminals approach pastors offering to repair their churches or homes, a regional expert explains, but many pastors refuse, knowing that this offer is a front for money laundering. Refusal makes them a target.

Church leaders and vocal Christians also **face persecution from government agents in authoritarian countries** such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, particularly if they have had a significant public presence or participated in protests against the government. According to a regional expert, outward expressions of faith also impact ordinary congregation members in Nicaragua. Under the pressures of continued surveillance, harassment and the denial of civil rights, both leaders and church members choose to flee the country in order to find safety.

Converts to Christianity also face community pressure. According to a regional expert, **indigenous Christians in Mexico and Colombia lose their right to a voice in the community upon conversion and are considered "second-class" members of the community.** They risk being expelled from their homes and communities.[30] "It is considered a betrayal and a dishonor," an expert expands, "particularly if they tell their story and make their testimony known." Such tensions can also arise for Christians who change from one denomination to another.



A displaced family, Colombia.

[28] '[In]Visible: The Gender Report 2022.' Open Doors International, March 2022. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Gender-Report-2022-DIGITAL-PDF.pdf> [password: freedom]

[29] 'Amenazan a pastores y a otros líderes religiosos de la zona Norte de Bucaramanga.' Vanguardia, December 2020. <https://www.vanguardia.com/area-metropolitana/bucaramanga/amenazan-a-pastores-y-a-otros-lideres-religiosos-de-la-zona-norte-de-bucaramanga-IN3186857>

[30] In an interview with CSW, a protestant Christian shared about his experiences of living as a Christian in the Cuamantox community, in Hidalgo state: "Over the years, tensions rose, on 8 November 2018 the community cut off our electricity and on 25 November they cut off our water. All this led to what happened on 28 July 2019 when my family and I were expelled from the village for being Christians and not wanting to participate in the Catholic religious festivities. [Community leaders] then looted and destroyed my home." 'Waiting for action: An interview with a victim of forced displacement in Mexico.' CSW, September 2020. <https://forbinfull.org/2020/09/14/waiting-for-action-an-interview-with-a-victim-of-forced-displacement-in-mexico/>

Neither IDP nor refugee: Migrants

WHAT IS A MIGRANT*?

"An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons."[31]

**There is no universally accepted definition of the term 'migrant,' and interchanging the terms refugee and migrants can lead to a poor understanding of the challenges and protection needs of different groups.*

International Organization for Migration[32]

Christians may leave their homes for reasons that don't fit into the conventional definitions of IDPs and refugees. Those such as migrant workers or international students, while not falling under the label 'IDP' or 'refugee', can face their own specific challenges due to the combination of their movement and faith.

The enmeshing of faith with other factors means the exact role of religious persecution in precipitating these challenges is unclear.

In countries in MENA, some reports indicate that **Christian migrants are economically exploited, harassed, physically and sexually attacked, and sold into modern slavery**. This is not primarily faith-related, but enabled by multiple layers of vulnerability. In addition to religious identity, factors include: gender, position in society, legal status, race and job situation. The Middle East, particularly the Gulf states, are home to one of the highest global proportions of migrant workers, in part given the concentrated levels of wealth.[33] While the majority of preliminary findings relating to the persecution of migrants were located in this region, it is not an issue solely affecting MENA.

There are, however, **challenges in gathering information.** A regional expert on Asia explains how sharing information about this topic carries economic risk for the families of migrants: "Once a family has bid farewell to someone who moves to the Middle East, they don't want to lose the source of money that is providing for their family."

The extremely precarious situation that migrants can be found in suggests that **more attention needs to be paid to the role religion plays in the experiences of migrants across all regions**.

Abduction risk as a migrant:

A regional expert talks about the risk of abductions in Yemen: "Yemen is a particularly dangerous place for Christian migrants (in a manner similar to Libya or Niger) from Africa. There is a racial component to this (commonly, Yemeni Arab tribes view 'black Africans' who are not Muslims as both racially and religiously inferior) as well as a practical component to this (to raise revenue for ransom)."



A Yemeni family in Sana'a the capital of Yemen.

[31] At the international level, there is no universally accepted definition of the term 'migrant.' For the purpose of this report researchers have used the definition provided by the International Organization for Migration: 'Glossary on Migration.' International Organization for Migration, 2019. <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf>

[32] International Organization for Migration <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf>

[33] 'World Migration Report 2022.' International Organization for Migration, 2021. <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022>

Iraq: Decades of a fragmented church

Displacement can change the face of a country for generations to come. According to estimates, **there are now just 166,000 indigenous Christians in Iraq**.[34] Before Saddam Hussein came to power there were over a million Christians, but this number dwindled during his rule.[35] Persecution reportedly rose sharply after 2003, following the invasion that toppled Hussein,[36] with pressures coming to a head in 2014 when the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) declared that they must leave the country, convert to Islam or pay a tax.[37]

> **"Everyone is slowly leaving, and often times no one knows they have gone. It happens quietly, but it is happening every day. People pack up their things, lock their doors, and leave behind their entire lives. Sometimes I will run into people I know here [in Jordan] and I'm surprised to see them. I think there is a sense of shame associated with emigration, even though we all know none of us had another choice."**
>
> INTERVIEWEE FEATURED IN REPORT BY ASSYRIAN POLICY REVIEW, 2019

This **overtly strategic attempt by ISIS to rid Iraq of Christianity caused thousands to flee overnight**, packing what possessions they could. Their homes, left abandoned, were soon commandeered and occupied.[38]

IDP camps sprung up in safer regions, while thousands fled the country altogether to neighboring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Despite misconceptions that Christians were favored in the asylum process, few Christians were granted places on resettlement countries via the UNHCR.[39] Instead, **Christians faced life in limbo**, awaiting the opportunity to return home, resettle in a third country, or integrate into their new host community.

Once displaced, Christians faced additional challenges based on their faith. For example, **Christians reportedly did not feel safe seeking sanctuary in Iraqi IDP camps and Jordanian refugee camps**. Due to fears of religious discrimination, Christians in Jordan report being forced instead to rent homes in urban neighborhoods where they were vulnerable to **economic exploitation, verbal harassment and discrimination**.[40] Within these settings, women and girls were at high risk of sexual assault, both from exploitative landlords and employers. Sadly, the threat of sexual attacks also reportedly persisted in Christian IDP camps.



Tereze was born in a IDP camp in Karamles when her parents fled ISIS. The family has since returned to re-build their life.

[34] 'Iraq: Media and Advocacy Dossier WWL 2022.' Open Doors International, 2021. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Iraq-Media-Advocacy-Dossier-ODI-2021.pdf> [password: freedom].

[35] 'In Iraq's Biblical lands, scattered Christians ask 'should I stay or go?'' Reuters, February 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/pope-iraq-christians-int-idUSKBN2AQ0QJ>

[36] 'Lives on Hold: Assyrian Refugees in Jordan.' Assyrian Policy Institute, June 2019. <https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/6ae567_cefe833fce8a4c81b8625c5e9dc69cf1.pdf>

[37] 'Iraq's Christians told to convert or leave as church leader fears for future.' Christian Today, July 2014. <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/iraqs.christians.told.to.convert.or.leave.as.church.leader.fears.for.future/38943.htm>; 'Nearly all gone.' The Economist, July 2014. <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2014/07/26/nearly-all-gone>

[38] 'Hundreds of Christian-owned homes taken over in Ninevah Plain.' Asianews, November 2018. <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Hundreds-of-Christian-owned-homes-taken-over-in-Nineveh-Plain-45500.html>

[39] 'Lives on Hold: Assyrian Refugees in Jordan.' Assyrian Policy Institute, June 2019, p39. <https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/6ae567_cefe833fce8a4c81b8625c5e9dc69cf1.pdf>

[40] Ibid, p43.

Despite the military defeat of ISIS in Iraq in 2017, relatively few Christians have returned to their homes. While the reasons behind this are multifaceted, three key barriers can be identified:

1. **A lack of safety:** According to regional experts, returnees fear the presence of armed groups at checkpoints, who demand payments from those seeking to return home.[41] One priest reportedly "took down the cross and all parts of his garment that would reveal him as Christian to be able to pass checkpoints by the official Iraqi army and forgo harassment," according to a regional expert. Raids on Christian homes by Internal Security Forces, as well as the fear of Turkish forces also prevent a mass return. Reports indicate that Turkish bombings have intentionally targeted Christians,[42] and according to a regional expert, are driven by "an anti-Christian motivation or ideology." As highlighted by a recent USCIRF report, renewed attacks by ISIS in 2022 have also sparked fresh fear among religious and ethnic minorities.[43]

   Christians from a Muslim background are most unlikely to return to Iraq, due to the ongoing family and community pressures facing converts. For them, their greatest source of pressure has not disappeared.[44] A 20-year-old Kurdish girl in Iraq faced immediate reprisals from her devout Muslim family when her conversion to Christianity was discovered. According to a regional expert, her father asked an uncle to come from Turkey to "help him deal with her," after having already beaten and threatened to kill her. She managed to escape before her uncle arrived and is now on the run.

2. **There is little to return to:** According to a 2021 report, many choose not to return due to diminished services and education opportunities.[45] Access to property also prevents many from returning; there is currently little government support for Iraqi Christians to reclaim their property seized during the past decades of conflict.[46] Making life additionally challenging, Christians face ongoing difficulties accessing economic opportunities, a factor that is reportedly causing many young Christians to seek new opportunities in the West.

3. **The community has been permanently fractured:** On a societal level, too, life is not easy for those who return. Ongoing tensions persist with Muslim neighbors, many of whom Christians felt betrayed by during the mass exodus of Christians in 2014. Tensions also exist between Christians who stayed in Iraq and those who fled. They "feel as though they should have stuck it out or gone underground," a regional expert explains.

While the mission to eradicate Christians from Iraq ultimately failed, **the Iraqi church remains deeply fragmented and has experienced a collective trauma**. Although a minority have returned to their homes, eager to rebuild their lives and sense of identity, others now look elsewhere for their futures. Whether they chose to stay or go, return or remain, each Christian has faced significant challenges and requires support going forward to regain a sense of home.



Refugee camp in the yard of St. Elia Church in Erbil, Iraq.

[41] These reports are corroborated by USCIRF's '2022 Annual Report.' April 2022, p54. <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/2022 USCIRF Annual Report_1.pdf>

[42] 'Turkish bombardments add to Iraqi Christians misfortunes: Dozens of families displaced and 10 churches closed.' Kirkuknow, July 2020. <https://kirkuknow.com/en/news/62735>

[43] 'Factsheet: Overview of Refugees Fleeing Religious Persecution Globally.' USCIRF, May 2022, p4.

[44] This was recently evident as news of the death of 20-year-old convert Maria made the news; the 20-year-old convert from Erbil, who openly shared about her new-found faith, was killed by two family members. 'Maria, 20, killed in Erbil by relatives for converting to Christianity.' Asianews, September 2022. <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Maria,-20,-killed-in-Erbil-by-relatives-for-converting-to-Christianity-55319.html>

[45] 'Trapped in a vicious cycle: Factors of instability in the Ninevah Plains.' Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', May 2021, p22. <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/factors-of-instability-in-the-nineveh-plains.pdf>

[46] 'Iraq's Christians 'close to extinction'.' 23 May 2019, BBC. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-48333923> The Iraqi and Kurdish governments have since set up committees to tackle this issue, but according to local experts little has been accomplished to date.

Life as a displaced Christian

Christians do not leave religious persecution behind them when they flee.

All refugees and IDPs face a breadth of challenges and are subject to multiple heightened vulnerabilities simply by nature of being displaced. These challenges include ongoing physical insecurity, a lack of resources and shelter, trafficking, abduction, physical attacks and sexual assaults, as well as the psycho-social challenges stemming from the trauma they have fled and continue to face.[47] Displaced persons are further impacted by their location, for instance, whether they are in a rural or urban setting, a structured camp or a private rental. Many IDPs for example live in informal rescue situations - such as with family members or distant contacts - where they face ongoing security risks and could be forced to move on with little notice.

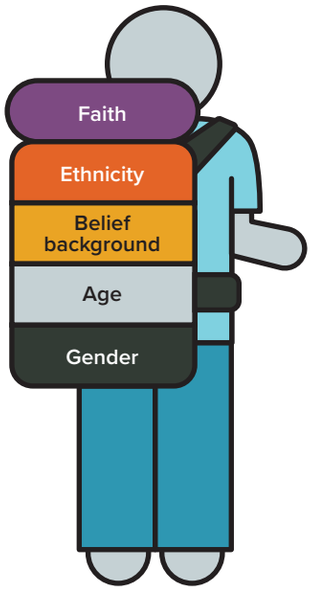
But is there an extra layer of vulnerability for religious minorities? What are the specific additional challenges Christians face because of their religious identity?

Being a Christian has both a negative and a positive impact on the experience of being a refugee or an IDP. On the one hand faith represents a **source of hope and resilience** for those in limbo, on the other hand it can **continue to expose an individual as a target, threat, or person of perceived lesser worth.**

The following table highlights some of the key differences between refugees and IDPs:

	Refugees	IDPs
Right to work	Refugees typically do not have the right to work until they have been granted asylum	IDPs maintain this legal right even if they have limited employment opportunities available
Protection body	UNHCR (if granted access)	The host government
Global legal frameworks	1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol related to the status of refugees (legally binding)	1998 UN Guiding Principles on IDPs (not legally binding)

A unique story for each person



There is no set linear trajectory of persecution within the displacement journey. Agents driving displacement may change during different stages of a person's journey *(see Appendix C: The Displacement Journey, page 26)*, as well as the nature of pressures faced. Individuals can become Christians at any stage of their journey, just as they can encounter religious persecution at any stage. Some may have been driven from their home for reasons altogether separate from religious persecution, but then find themselves targeted for their faith once in a camp or new country. As such, religious persecution can impact Christians in a myriad of ways and to different degrees of intensity. Sadly, the pressures that IDPs and refugees face, including religious persecution, can also drive some individuals to leave or question their faith.

Gender inequality in Latin America:

Venezuelan Christian women leaving the country for economic and social reasons are especially targeted by traffickers for sexual exploitation. A regional expert explains that "their presumed purity can 'improve' their economic value."

The form and nature of challenges faced varies according to multiple layers of vulnerability. This might include their age, their gender, their belief background, where they are living, their ethnicity and how open they

[47] See UNHCR's 'Basic Needs Approach in the Refugee Response' for a breakdown of the primary initial needs that programs seek to address. UNHCR, October 2016. <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/590aefc77/basic-needs-approach-refugee-response.html?msclkid=0495ae54c56b11ec9d2d39785281f89e>

are about their faith. The experience of a female North Korean escapee who has just become a Christian on the Chinese border after reading the Bible for the first time will be vastly different to that of a young Christian boy fleeing the clutches of gangs in Mexico.

Challenges for indigenous communities in Latin America:

For indigenous Christians, the impact of displacement is broad. "They not only lose their land as a means of subsistence," a regional expert explains, "they also lose their family and social ties...their entire environment is in the geographic area from which they are taken." In Colombia, some indigenous families are even removed from the indigenous census by their local ethnic authorities, which leaves them without access to health and education.

Although vulnerability is inherent to the experience of being forcibly displaced, IDPs and refugees can carry extra layers of vulnerability throughout their journey and beyond. As such, while some key challenges are presented in this chapter, **it is clear that each displaced Christian has a unique story to tell.**

Gender inequality is one such key vulnerability. For example, interviewees indicate that **forcibly displaced Christian women and girls are being especially targeted with sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).** While sexual violence is widespread in displacement contexts, it can also be targeted towards minorities due to their identities, including religious identity.[48]

Other interviewees highlight the experiences of **Christian children and youth** who have been forcibly displaced **being harassed in education settings because of their faith or denied access to education altogether.** Education is identified by migrant and refugee children as both highly valuable and negatively impacted by migration; it is also a key tool and location for Christian persecution more generally.[49]

In a context of displacement of marginalized ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Rohingya in Myanmar, converts from the minority's main faith may find themselves facing an extra layer of vulnerability.

Vulnerability for converts in Asia:

In the large-scale displacement of the Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh (the majority of whom are Muslim), there are a small number of Christian converts who face an extra layer of vulnerability because of their faith. This can range from physical attacks by Muslim community members, to their neighbors creating difficulties for them in practicing their faith and accessing essential support services.



Rohingya refugees recieveing relief aid in Bangladesh.

[48] 'Minority and Indigenous Trends 2018: Focus on migration and displacement.' Minority Rights Group International, September 2018. <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/September-2018_MR_Trends_Report_170x240_WEB_FINAL-1.pdf>

[49] Respectively, 'A Right to be Heard: Listening to children and young people on the move.' UNICEF, December 2018. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/youthpoll/>; 'Children and Youth Specific Religious Persecution 2021: Preliminary findings from 50 countries.' Open Doors International, September 2021. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Children-and-Youth-Specific-Religious-Persecution-September-2021-revised.pdf>

The most common challenges facing displaced Christians

Physical insecurity and psychological challenges are the primary forms of pressure facing Christian IDPs and refugees.[50] As already stated, factors such as gender inequality and age discrimination can shape the intensity and nature of their experiences of persecution.

These challenges can be **compounded by a lack of understanding and effective responses from humanitarian actors** (such as NGOs, international organizations and states responsible for the IDPs in their country). This can **range from unintentional neglect to strategic targeting and disempowerment** of individuals and communities.[51]

State neglect in Sub-Saharan Africa:

"[Christian IDPs in Nigerian camps] end up with double persecution; from the people who attacked you in the first place, then your own government. The government hasn't been able to demonstrate that they care equally." Interview with a Nigerian aid worker.

INSECURITY:

Christians are vulnerable to physical attacks both when on the move and when hosted in places such as camps and urban settings. **Armed groups, including extremist groups and human traffickers, can operate with impunity in unstable settings to abduct, traffic, and sexually and physically assault IDPs and refugees.** While this is a risk for the forcibly displaced in general, in some contexts Christians can face heightened levels of vulnerability due to a combination of factors, including the presence of extremist groups who have a radicalization agenda, and the targeting of minorities, including religious minorities, by human traffickers.[52]

Insecurity in North Africa:

"Christian migrants and refugees in Libya are at particular risk of abuse from armed groups aiming to impose their own interpretation of Islamic law. People from Nigeria, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Egypt have been abducted, tortured, unlawfully killed and harassed because of their religion." As shared by an expert on North African religious persecution.

Demonstrating this risk, cases of physical violence were widely reported.[53] While various types of armed groups were suggested to be the primary perpetrators, in some contexts, **violence from host communities or within displaced populations is also a risk**. The level of danger within refugee camps has been perceived to be so high as to lead some Christians to avoid camps altogether in countries such as Iraq and Jordan.[54]

Physical insecurity is also a barrier to Christians returning home. In Nigeria, a few Christians that attempted to return to their homes and start to rebuild were attacked again.[55] A regional expert summarizes: "Everyone wants to be back home, but the assurance of safety when they return is what makes it difficult to go back." Those who take the risk to return home can face being displaced again if violence re-escalates; the emotional impact of being displaced multiple times and never being able to settle can be considerable. Similar issues have been reported in countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Iraq.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT:

Forms of psychological violence were some of the most widely reported faith-specific pressures experienced by Christians in the context of displacement.[56]

Psychosocial challenges can face all those forcibly displaced at every stage of the displacement journey,[57] and faith can add an extra layer of vulnerability to the experience of psychological violence. **On the other**

[50] Findings related to insecurity were drawn from the Pressure points: *abduction, physical violence, sexual violence, trafficking and violence – death.* Findings related to psychological impact were drawn from the Pressure points: *denied access to social community/networks and psychological violence.* For more information on Pressure points, see Long Methodology: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/idp-refugee-specific-religious-persecution/> [password: freedom].

[51] For country-specific examples of this, see: 'Factsheet: Overview of Refugees Fleeing Religious Persecution Globally.' USCIRF, May 2022. <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/2022 Factsheet - Refugees Fleeing Religious Persecution Globally.pdf>

[52] 'Lessening the Risk of Refugee Radicalization: Lessons for the Middle East from Past Crises'. Rand Corporation. 2015. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE166.html>; 'Trafficking in Persons Report 2021.' Department of State, United States of America. June 2021. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

[53] Representing this, *physical violence* was the Pressure Point reported in the second highest number of countries. For more information about Pressure Points, *see Methodology, page 21.*

[54] Reported by regional experts, similar examples have been recorded by USCIRF in Jordan and Egypt: 'Factsheet: Syria.' USCIRF, July 2013. <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Syria Factsheet - July 18.pdf>

[55] This report from a regional expert aligns with conclusions about the insecurity of returning refugees in Nigeria by HRW: 'They Forced Us Onto Trucks Like Animals: Cameroon's Mass Forced Return and Abuse of Nigerian Refugees.' Human Rights Watch, September 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/09/27/they-forced-us-trucks-animals/cameroons-mass-forced-return-and-abuse-nigerian>

[56] Representing this, psychological violence was the Pressure Point reported in the highest number of countries. For more information about Pressure Points, *see Methodology, page 21.*

[57] 'Mental health and psychosocial support for resettled refugees.' International Organization for Migration, 2021. <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/documents/mental-health-for-resettled-refugees-guidelines.pdf>

hand, faith can be a source of resilience and has the potential to contribute to helping IDPs and refugees cope with their various traumatic experiences.[58]

Forcibly displaced Christians can face a range of psychological pressures, including **coercion** to participate in other religious practices, threats levelled against themselves and family members that may have remained behind, and **ostracization** on the basis of faith.

Community ostracization in Sub-Saharan Africa:

Christian IDPs from other belief backgrounds especially can face ostracization. "[For IDPs] a major problem is with protection and being welcomed by the communities that receive them. They are often rejected, because they don't align to the majority Islamic religion in that area." Interview with an expert on Sub-Saharan Africa.

Christians can be ostracized because of the preconceptions or historical experiences of the host population, potentially creating a lack of trust towards newcomers. Communities may also be wary of sharing already scarce resources, including humanitarian or government aid, or fearful of the security threat that new arrivals could pose. Such dynamics may be compounded by religious differences.

Psychological challenges can also follow IDPs and refugees from their homes and communities. **If religious persecution contributes to driving displacement, this can be a source of considerable trauma, the psychological effects of which Christians do not leave behind when they flee.**[59] In addition, the context of displacement may make accessing professional support services (such as trauma counselling) and personal support networks even more challenging.



HAMID'S STORY

Hamid* fled Afghanistan decades ago as a refugee, spending time in two countries of perceived safety. It was in the second country, where he currently lives, that he learned about the Christian faith for the first time and converted from Islam. His wife didn't share his new faith and chose to leave him, taking their children with her. Hamid also began to encounter harsh persecution from Muslim communities he shared his new faith with, who felt that he had betrayed them.

His family later returned; however their differences of belief created a gulf so wide that he and his wife could not find a way to share their lives again. With his children remaining in his care, Hamid continued to evangelize in the streets and in refugee camps. As a result, Hamid endured physical violence such as beatings, knife attacks, and threats toward his family. His Bible was torn apart. Upon receiving photographs of the school his children attend, alongside threats to kidnap, rape and kill them, he went to the police but their response did little to help. He was told that if anything happened to his family, he would be responsible because he continued to publicly share his new faith: "They told me I wasn't forced to become a Christian, so it's my problem, it's my fault."

Fortunately, when Hamid became a Christian, he found a church and community of Christians who helped by praying and welcoming him and his family with open arms. Hamid is now re-married and, together with his new wife, actively involved with a ministry helping refugees. He sees similar experiences from Christians who come from a Muslim background. While he found a Christian community, he recognizes that many new Christians rejected from their home nation don't often find the same welcome. "New believers are very fragile when it comes to their faith and need more growth," he shared, adding that "churches are often more focused on reaching Muslims rather than coming alongside those who have converted."

Hamid's experience as a Christian, and as a refugee, were some of the darkest times of his life. "I allowed myself to see these times as an opportunity, for my faith to strengthen and refine like gold through fire." He stood on the promises of scripture, that God is faithful and works through the most difficult situations. "I have even more love to share with the Afghan people and will continue to share the word of God even through these times."

**name changed for security reasons, image sourced from ©IMB.org*

[58] See for example: '"We Pray as a Family": The Role of Religion for Resettled Karen Refugees.' Muruthi, B.A., et al., 2020. Journal of Family Issues, 41 (10) pp.1723-1741. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0192513X20911068>

[59] 'Psychological violence in Gender SRP' in 'Invisible: The Gender Report 2022.' Open Doors International, 2022, p14. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Gender-Report-2022-DIGITAL-PDF.pdf> [password: freedom]

Implications and Conclusion

Gaining a complete picture of religious persecution requires study of both the static and the displaced church. Given the preliminary findings of this report, there is added value in paying greater attention to the religious dynamics at play both in driving people to leave their homes or countries, as well as in displacement settings. The challenges of working with a transient and massively heterogenous population makes identifying every abuse due to faith even more complicated than when marginalized faith populations are in their home settings.

The endgame of religiously motivated displacement may not be simply the removal of the unwelcome faith community from a certain locality. It may be done with the aim that the harshness, ongoing persecution and new forms of isolation throughout the displacement journey will cause the person of faith to question their religious convictions.

The **division of families through displacement also creates challenges that impact the emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing of children and youth**. With or without their family members, many children can be displaced for years, and even for their entire childhoods.[60] These (often highly traumatic) experiences and the restriction of opportunities available to them can directly shape their futures. Furthermore, where children are separated from Christian parents through displacement, this can remove a source of religious education, as well as the emotional support essential to the child's upbringing.[61]

Unfortunately, **organizations focused on forced displacement can be ill-equipped to identify and respond to faith-based persecution in displacement contexts** and, in some cases, this can lead to organizations unknowingly becoming complicit in or enabling discriminatory practices and harassment. Such practices may happen for a number of reasons which are possible to address.

One reason may simply be the result of **ignorance**. It is hoped that this report will contribute to increased understanding of the compounding vulnerabilities of displaced marginalized faith group so that all organizations which work alongside the displaced can be even more tailored in their efforts. For example, in efforts to address the physical needs of IDPs and refugees, **their spiritual needs should also be considered**. Given the potential of religious beliefs and communities to be a source of resilience for those forcibly displaced, the deliberate targeting of access to religious materials, practices, and/or communities for Christian IDPs and refugees should be taken seriously.

In addition, some oversights may be a consequence of the historical tensions between religion and secular humanitarianism, resulting in humanitarian organizations being wary of religion as a distinguishing factor.[62] **Greater awareness of the legitimacy of religious identity as a UN-validated factor of displacement and ongoing vulnerability is important**, as well as the implications for bias among individual actors within NGO or government bodies. For example, in some interviews, serious concerns about religious bias have been raised about individuals acting under the auspices of the UN bodies.[63]



Refugee Camp for people from the Nuba Mountains, Sudan.

[60] 'Global Report on Internal Displacement 2022: Children and Youth in Internal Displacement.' Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/IDMC_GRID_2022_LR.pdf>

[61] 'Children and Youth specific religious persecution 2021: Preliminary findings from 50 countries.' Open Doors International, 2021. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Children-and-Youth-Specific-Religious-Persecution-September-2021-revised.pdf> [password: freedom]

[62] 'Negotiating rights and faith: A study of rights-based approaches to humanitarian action in Pakistan.' Borchgrevink, K., 2022. Disasters, 46(2). <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/disa.12480>

[63] UNHCR's approach to religious minorities has been critiqued by several authors, including: 'Religious Plurality and the Politics of Representation in Refugee Camps: accounting for the Lived Experiences of Syrian Refugees Living in Zaatari.' Eghdamian, K., 2014. Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration, 4(1). <https://www.academia.edu/7542475/Religious_Plurality_and_the_Politics_of_Representation_in_Refugee_Camps_Accounting_for_the_Lived_Experiences_of_Syrian_Refugees_Living_in_Zaatari>; 'Humanitarianism and Religious Inequalities: Addressing a Blind Spot.' Allouche, J., et al., 2020. CREID Working Paper. <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/15718/CREID_Working_Paper_4.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

Appreciation has grown for the role of l**ocal faith communities (LFCs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs)**, with recognition of the significant and positive role they can play, alongside their often-global networks and considerable capacity and resources.[64] The support that they can provide to the forcibly displaced means they are well placed to contribute to the protection needs of marginalized religious communities, as well as offer insight into the experiences of those communities. In conjunction with other protection actors, **the church has a powerful role to play in supporting all displaced persons, not just Christian refugees and IDPs**.

Exemplifying this, in the Central African Republic, local churches hosted people of all faiths in compounds and helped to protect them from attacks by rebel groups.

Displacement fractures communities; this represents one of the greatest threats to the resilience of displaced Christians. **For those who have lost their homes and networks it is vital that – in addition to their practical needs – they find a welcome and a community** that can help them to move forward, and to which they can contribute. In particular, efforts should be made to ensure that converts to Christianity from another belief background are integrated into LFCs wherever possible, particularly as they may face additional challenges on account of their conversion.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY FROM AFAR

Forced displacement does not always mean a total separation with Christian communities and families left behind. **Especially in a digital age, relationships do not have to be lost when people leave.**

Just as each person has a unique story around their decision to leave, **the decision to stay is also complex.** They may not have been targeted at the same level of intensity as those who have left. They may be physically unable to leave due to infirmity or disability. Some may have wanted to flee, but lacked the freedom or resources to so do. In contexts where restrictions on movement are related to gender inequalities, for example, women or men may face extra challenges if attempting to flee.

Christian refugees and IDPs can be a valuable support to those still in their home communities. For example, one Afghan refugee manages to keep in touch with some believers who are living under the Taliban and are facing even more difficulties – even death. He hears how these believers are forced to attend the mosque every day and recite Islamic prayers, and if they don't show up, how they risk imprisonment. Even their homes are no longer safe, with many believers hiding Christian literature in the mountains. The Afghan refugee does what he can to support them from afar, encouraging them not to give up.

IDPs and refugees should be viewed as people with agency, not just victims. One regional expert commented that the church in Iran was "enriched by having connections with believers from a Muslim background outside of the country." **Those Christians who had left contributed to supporting and building the capacity of the church that remained.** Consideration of the material and non-material needs of displaced religious minorities (or marginalized communities) must be balanced with a recognition of the wealth of knowledge, skills and experiences that those displaced can offer.



A young refugee man living in one of the ITS (informal tent settlements) in Lebanon, originally from Syria.

[64] 'Local Faith Communities and Promotion of Resilience in Contexts of Humanitarian Crisis.' Ager, J., et al., 2015. Journal of Refugee Studies, 28(2). <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/28/2/202/1547290?login=false>

Methodology

For this preliminary 2022 IDP & Refugee-specific religious persecution report (SRP), the SRP Unit of Open Doors World Watch Research (WWR) gathered data using a mixed methods approach. Comprised of quantitative and qualitative data, the approach runs parallel to the methodology used for other SRP research such as the Gender report and Children & Youth report.[65]

Method

During the reporting period for 2022 (1 October 2020 – 30 September 2021), Open Doors WWR monitored religious persecution dynamics in more than 100 countries. The authors of this report studied data from the top 76 countries where persecution is very high or extreme. The SRP Unit collected data through three primary sources of information: WWR questionnaires, desk research and interviews with regional experts from Open Doors and other organizations.

WHAT IS PERSECUTION?

While there is no universally accepted term of persecution, 2022 WWL Methodology defines persecution as: "Any hostility experienced as a result of one's identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians."

"This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide."

Open Doors Analytical, Discussion of Key Themes.[66]

SRP analysts carried out extensive desk research to find key literature within the field of forced migration studies and the relationship with religious identity.

The WWR questionnaire responses were coded through a dual categorization framework. The responses were first coded through an adapted version of the SRP Pressure points framework to reflect the refugee and IDP lens of persecution. While Pressure points were recorded, the terminology used in the report refers mainly to 'pressures' that refugees and IDPs face, as preliminary Pressure point data was inconsistent *(see: Limitations)*. The term 'Pressure point' refers to both the pressures and violence faced in religious persecution and this analysis revealed the frequency of which pressures refugees and IDPs experienced. Analyzing Pressure points enables an understanding of overall trends emerging from the experiences of persecuted Christians while retaining contextual descriptions. Three new Pressure points were added to this report: *discrimination/harassment within the asylum system, forced family separation and refoulement (forced return).*

The filtered questionnaire responses of forced to flee were secondarily coded through the WWR drivers of persecution categorization. These results formed the chapter on Drivers of Displacement. Desk research and the interview process verified and consolidated their research findings.



North Korean refugee Hee-Yol*, now living in South Korea. **name changed for security*

[65] 'Invisible: The Gender Report 2022.' Open Doors International, 2022. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Gender-Report-2022-DIGITAL-PDF.pdf> ; 'Children and Youth specific religious persecution 2021: Preliminary findings from 50 countries.' Open Doors International, 2021. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Children-and-Youth-Specific-Religious-Persecution-September-2021-revised.pdf> [For both, password: freedom]

[66] Open Doors Analytical, Discussion of Key Themes <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/WWL-Discussion-of-key-themes-October-2021.pdf> (password: freedom)

Interview process

Interviews were carried out with regional researchers, external organizations and WWR analysts to gather qualitative data and explore different experiences across the regions studied. Through identifying people connected to the Open Doors network internally and externally, further interviewees were identified. In total, 19 interviews were carried out with 33 regional experts contributing, including representatives from four external organizations and multiple departments and regions within Open Doors International. The interviews followed a framework of set questions prepared in advance to address the primary research topic and adapted to suit the relevant region or country of the interviewee/s.

Limitations

Some limitations were experienced throughout the course of research and study, including inconsistent levels of information across countries. Solely using the Pressure Point methodology with inconsistent levels of information provided a data set with results primarily useful on the country and regional level, rather than the global, so the information gathered through interviews helped to consolidate gaps in knowledge and corroborate Pressure Point data. To address this, in future research there can be a greater inclusion of refugee and IDP experiences through adapting questions and research methods. While one of the interviewees had directly experienced forced displacement themselves, a greater focus on interviewing refugees and IDPs may provide more detailed primary data and include multiple direct voices of those who have experienced displacement. However, this must be balanced with considerations of security and research ethics.

A more detailed methodology can be found at Open Doors Analytical, including an in-depth outline of the Pressure Points framework and an exemplary interview framework.[67]



Outdoor refugee Church, northern Mozambique.

[67] For a full list of Pressure Points and more detail on the methodology, see Long Methodology: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/idp-refugee-specific-religious-persecution/> [password: freedom]

Appendix

Appendix A: Global summary of agents driving religion-motivated displacement

The top agents driving religion-motivated displacement of Christians were reported in 58 countries (see the inside back cover for list of countries). Some countries reported more than one agent, with family (both immediate and extended) being the most reported agent globally.

These have been categorized by the drivers used by the WWL methodology.[68]

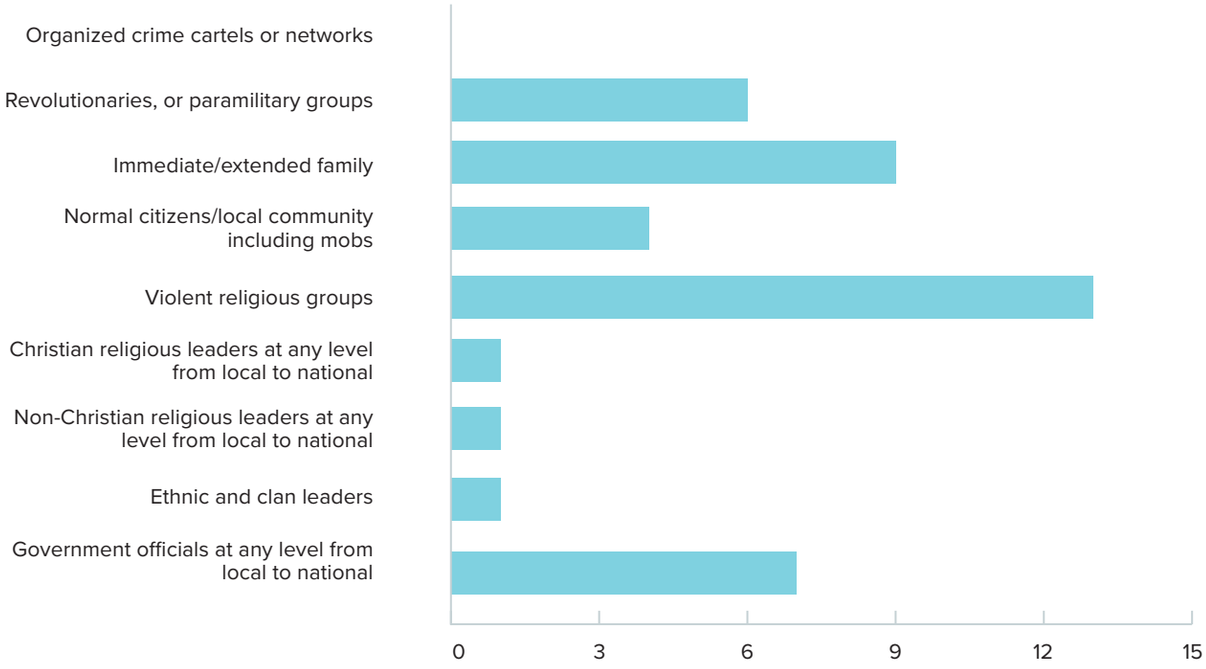
Agents driving displacement by order of # of countries reporting		X/58 countries reporting displacement
1	Family (both immediate and extended)	31
2	Government officials (local and national)	26
3	National citizens and local community	25
4	Violent religious groups	21
5	Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	10
6	Organized crime cartels or criminal groups	5
7	Ethnic and clan leaders	5
8	Non-Christian religious leaders (local and national)	4
9	Christian religious leaders (local and national)	2

[68] Researchers utilized the list of drivers recorded in the 2021 WWL methodology:, p18, 'Complete World Watch List Methodology.' Open Doors International, 2021. <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Complete-WWL-Methodology-November-2021.pdf> [password: freedom]

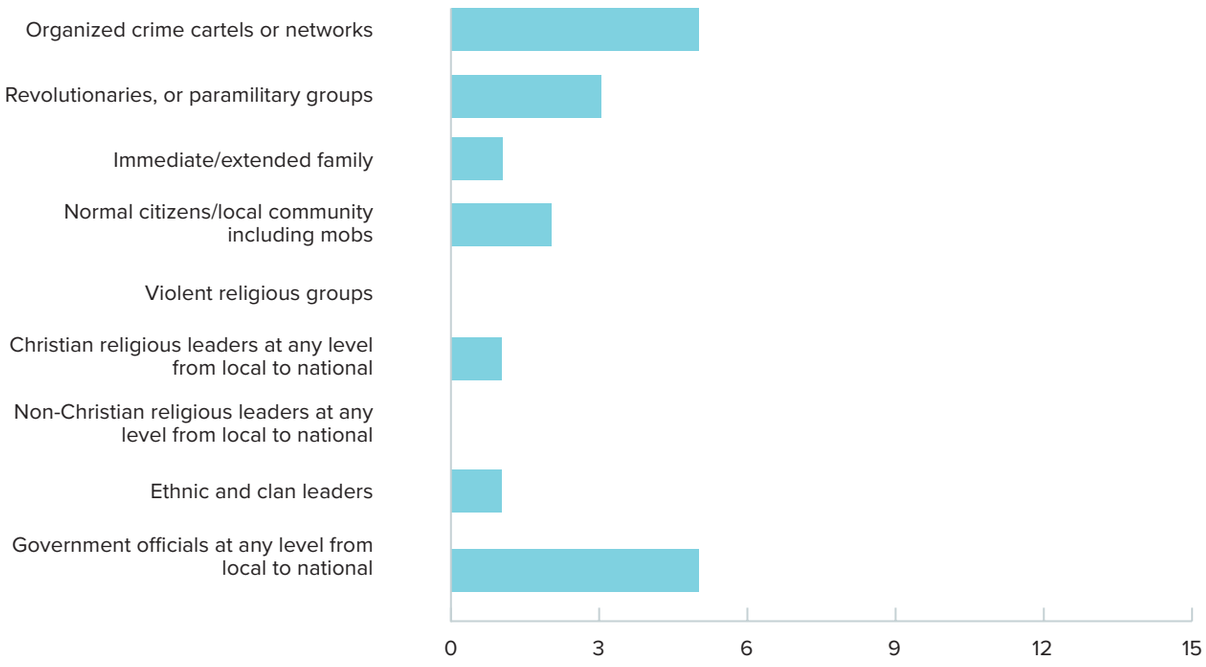
Appendix B: Regional Agents of displacement

The following charts show a regional breakdown of the agents driving the displacement of Christians around the world, and how many countries each driving agent was recorded in. It should be noted that individuals are often affected by multiple agents, rather than just one. It should further be recognized that with further analysis and access to additional country information, additional drivers could be found that were not identified with the level of information currently available.

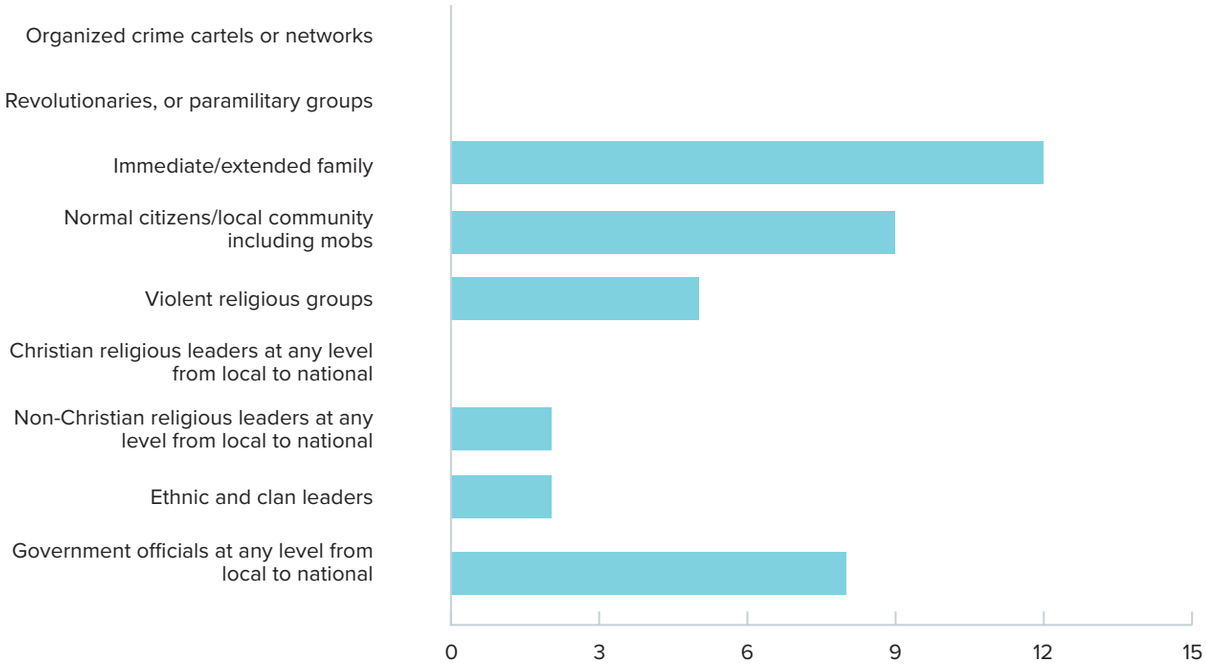
AGENTS DRIVING DISPLACEMENT OF CHRISTIANS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



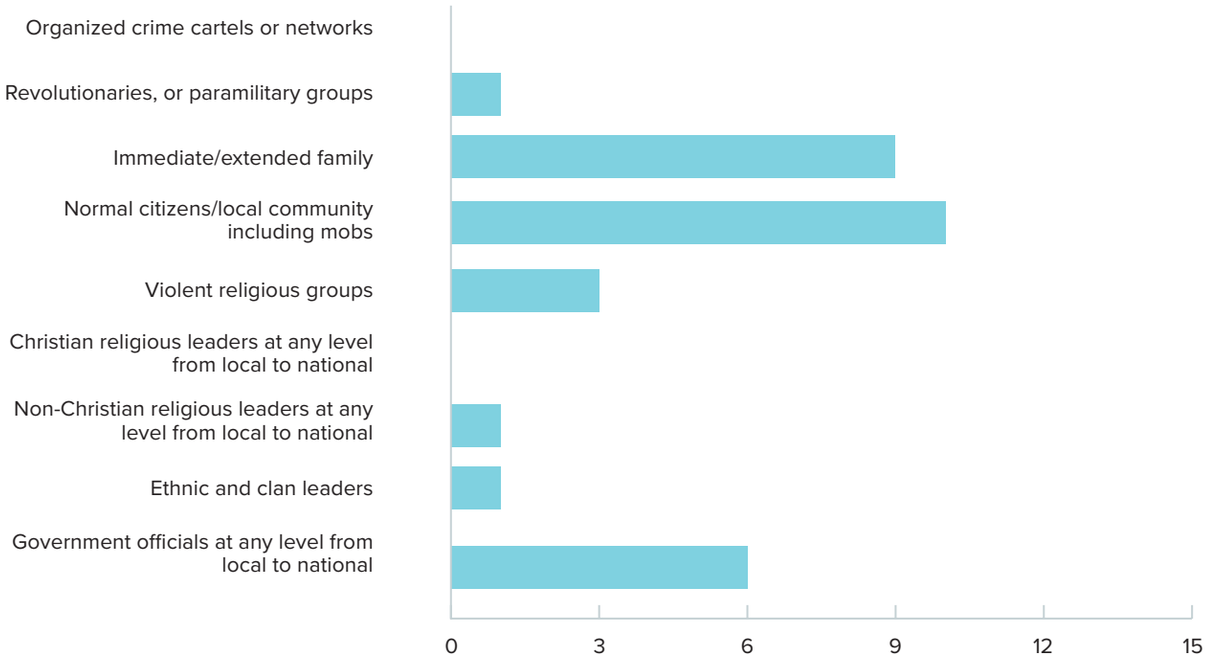
AGENTS DRIVING DISPLACEMENT OF CHRISTIANS IN LATIN AMERICA



AGENTS DRIVING DISPLACEMENT OF CHRISTIANS IN ASIA



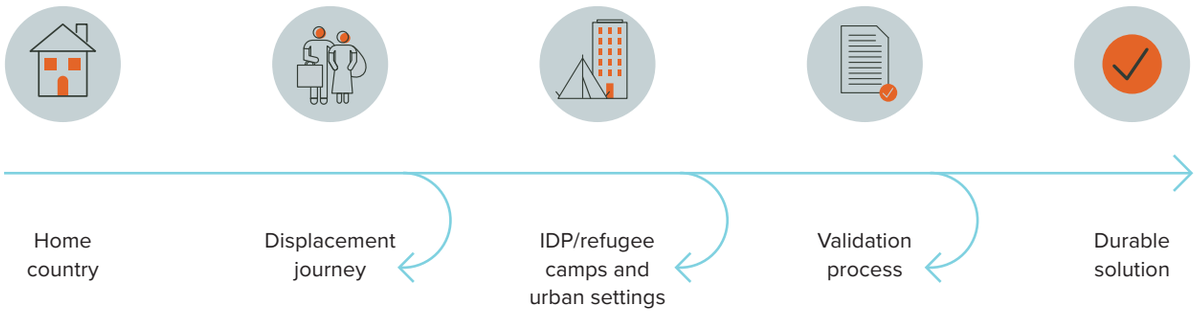
AGENTS DRIVING DISPLACEMENT OF CHRISTIANS IN MENA



Appendix C: The displacement journey

There is no set linear trajectory of the displacement journey, as illustrated by the arrow below. Individuals can become a Christian at any stage of the journey and experience religious persecution at any stage. Some could spend the majority of their lives in a refugee camp, others might choose to return to their homes due to restrictive asylum procedures, whereas others might be fortunate enough to be granted a space on an official resettlement scheme to a third country.

There are understood to be three durable solutions to protracted refugee situations. These are voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement.[69]



Appendix D: Pressure Points of displacement 2022

The following Pressure Points were found in contexts of displacement. They are ranked in order of how commonly they are found across the WWL top 76 countries within the WWL 2022 reporting period. Due to the preliminary nature of this data, exact scores for each country have not been included.

Pressure Point	Ranking
Violence – psychological	1
Violence – physical	2
Discrimination/harassment via education	3
Abduction	4
Denied communal resources	5
Denied/restricted healthcare	5
Violence – death	5
Violence – sexual	5
Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites	9
Trafficking	9
Violence – Verbal	9

[69] 'Solutions.' UNHCR, accessed 17 May 2022.

Regional breakdown of countries under study

A breakdown of which countries reported 'forced to flee' as a Pressure Point from the coding of WWL questionnaires. There are a total of 58 countries that reported this particular Pressure Point out of the 76 countries currently on the World Watch List. This is out of a study of the 76 countries that fall under the WWL and the full methodology can be found on Open Doors Analytical <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Complete-WWL-Methodology-November-2021.pdf> *(password: Freedom).*

LATIN AMERICA

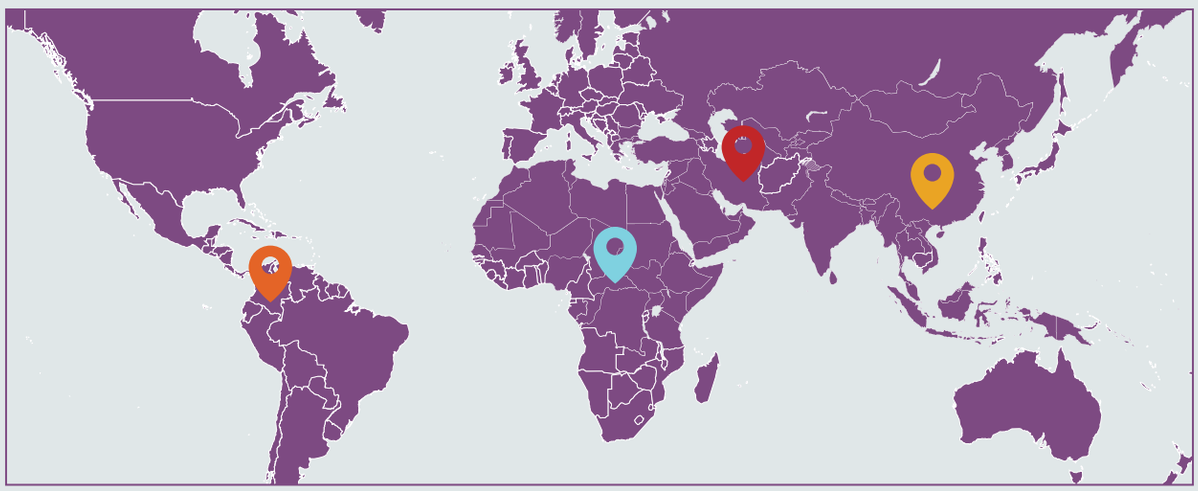
7

Colombia
Cuba
El Salvador
Honduras
Mexico
Nicaragua
Venezuela

AFRICA

22

Angola
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cameroon
Central African Republic
Chad
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Eritrea
Ethiopia
The Gambia
Kenya
Mali
Mozambique
Niger
Nigeria
Rwanda
Somalia
South Sudan
Tanzania
Togo
Uganda



MENA

14

Egypt
Iran
Iraq
Israel
Jordan
Libya
Mauritania
Morocco
Oman
Palestinian Territories
Saudi Arabia
Syria
Tunisia
Yemen

ASIA

15

Afghanistan
Bangladesh
China
India
Indonesia
Laos
Maldives
Myanmar
Nepal
North Korea
Pakistan
Sri Lanka
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan
Vietnam

Recommendations

To address the faith-based harassment, marginalization and vulnerabilities experienced by refugees, Open Doors makes the following recommendations to the International Community:

- Ensure the integration of FoRB principles of "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion" and "everyone has the right to manifest his or her religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching" in all anti-discrimination programs designed for protecting and promoting refugee rights
- Ensure meaningful participation by refugees who have fled religious persecution in designing, assessment and implementation of targeted programs and aids
- Include religion as a factor of vulnerability in any assessment made in planning and programming for refugees
- Involve local faith-based organizations from both the host countries and the countries of origin to participate in the refugee protection and assistance discussions. Many of them are situated within the affected communities and are well placed to articulate their needs properly. Design strategies on how to best address those needs
- Ensure that asylum providing countries as well as host countries safeguard and uphold the obligation of non-refoulement as laid down in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol and do not forcefully return a refugee fleeing religious persecution to the country of origin unless it has been declared safe by the relevant authorities
- Provide training to humanitarian aid workers to assess and identify harassment of refugees based on religion within the larger refugee community for rapid response
- Encourage programs to support evidence generation in relation to the layering of religious persecution with other compounding factors such as ethnic tensions, political involvement and age, ability, or gender vulnerabilities.

To alleviate the conditions of IDPs who have fled their homes because of their Christian faith, Open Doors recommends the following to the International Community:

- Conduct assessment of IDPs from minority religions facing discrimination and marginalization within the larger IDP community in order to protect and provide for those displaced
- Encourage active engagement of IDPs from minority religions in designing and implementing target programs and aids
- Provide financial and technical support to local faith actors working with IDPs from minority religions in their endeavors to access basic public services, documentation and employment and income-generating opportunities, without discrimination.

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