



# A Generation at Risk

CHILDREN & YOUTH REPORT 2022

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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. It is based on background research carried out for the World Watch List 2022.*

Design by Kate Lehane.



**ISOLATING. HARSH.  
IDENTITY-SHAPING.**



## Key findings

### **Restricting and redirecting the future pathways of Christian children and youth ensures limited opportunities for them to develop and thrive.**

The persecution experienced in childhood and adolescence shapes these young people's future opportunities in their personal and professional life. This limiting of options is frequently achieved through discrimination within education and exclusion from communities and opportunities, and feeds poverty cycles both for the individual and the faith community.

### **Christian girls are deliberately sexually groomed in 22% of countries where Christians face acute persecution.**

Members of majority religions or criminal gangs aim to assimilate or humiliate young female Christians through targeted seduction. This can result in sexual violence, forced marriage and ultimately forces conversion, leading to powerful associations of shame and stigma.

### **Denying children and youth access to a Christian parent prevents them from learning about their Christian heritage and deprives them of their primary source of emotional and developmental security.**

In 84% of countries, Christian children are likely to be separated from their Christian parent(s), most commonly when their parent's conversion to Christianity has met with resistance from the wider family and has resulted in loss of child custody and access. This source of long-term trauma for children and youth can cause both psychological distress and practical harm, resulting in dissuasively painful associations in a child's mind with Christianity.

### **Specific religious persecution of children and youth fractures intergenerational relationships.**

While still at a formative stage of life, children and youth face harsh forms of persecution that can inhibit or sever their sense of belonging and attachment to their local faith and/or social communities. This can yield resentment, misunderstanding and distrust, which damages relationships between generations, especially in instances where children have been targeted as a means of punishing their parent(s) or actively turned against their parents by extended family members.

### **Young adults identify solutions, calling for interdenominational community, psycho-social support and equal opportunities in society so that they can stay in their countries.**

While religious persecution, conflict and economic pressures often leave Christians feeling hopeless, many young adults in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) nonetheless report feeling called to stay in their home countries and contribute to building up their local church, but say that to do so they need the support of both the local and global church.

# Introduction

Childhood does not provide a shield against religious persecution; neither does adolescence buffer against the pressures to conform to the majority religion. Indeed, **age can heighten vulnerability** due to the dependency of children throughout a formative time of life.<sup>1</sup>

By shining a light on the unique stories and experiences of young Christians around the world, this report seeks to deepen understanding of religious persecution across generations, specifically, **to explore the tactics used by persecutors against children and youth, and the impact that this has on the wider church.** Young people who either have a personal Christian faith or are merely associated with Christianity are specifically targeted in order to prevent their generation from wanting to – or being able to – identify with or contribute to the Christian religion or community.<sup>2</sup>

According to Articles 14 and 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), **children have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; they can neither be forced to adopt a religion or belief, nor be forced to stop following one.**<sup>3</sup>

In the 76 countries where World Watch Research (WWR) recorded high, very high or extreme levels of persecution in 2022, however, children and youth's freedom of religion or belief is being **regularly challenged and denied**, despite all of the 76 countries under study having ratified the UNCRC.<sup>4</sup>

The ways in which this happens for young people is visible in a number of ways and cannot be directly compared to the religious persecution experienced by adults. Two of the most distinct forms for children and youth will be spotlighted in the sections targeted seduction and denied access to a Christian parent. Patterns of persecution also vary considerably by region, shaped by socio-political dynamics and security factors.<sup>5</sup>

Children and youth's dependent status in all spheres of life also means that they can be vulnerable in the schoolyard, within their family or within the broader community. Pressures originate from a breadth of sources, including from individuals who ought to be their primary figures of protection and safety, such as their teacher(s) or parent(s).

Children and youth often lack status, independence, and a voice. As such, they may accumulate multiple layers of vulnerability, including their status as a minor, religious identity, economic vulnerability and ethnic identity. Therefore, the first vital step to understanding the often-hidden religious persecution which they face is **for concerned adults to listen to children and young people's lived experiences.** The second crucial step for practitioners is to integrate children and youth in developing responses to their needs including, in some contexts, in leadership and decision-making roles and **recognizing their agency and capacity to resist, adapt and overcome challenges.**

Local faith actors and those in policy-oriented work have an important role to play in increasing youth-participation and confronting powerful oppression. Policy recommendations in this report offer concrete ways of increasing protections for children and youth of minority faiths.

While religious persecution may seek to deprive children and youth of their futures, it cannot strip them of their true identity and worth.



<sup>1</sup> Children and youth are dependent on their parents or legal guardians for basic material and psychosocial needs; additionally, authors recognize that in some systems, concepts of legal guardianship may be ambiguous or the topic of legal debate.

<sup>2</sup> Authors recognize that in many instances it is difficult to determine the depth of knowledge that a child has about Christianity, or what they would personally consider their faith to be. For the purposes of this report authors include the experiences of children whose affiliation to Christianity increases their vulnerability to religious persecution (such as belonging to a predominately Christian family or community), regardless of their personal convictions.

<sup>3</sup> 1989 UNCRC Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 14 and 30.

<sup>4</sup> OCHCR Status of ratification, Interactive Dashboard [accessed 31 August 2022].

<sup>5</sup> This report offers greater detail as to the characteristics for four different global regions as compared to Open Doors International's preliminary 2021 'Children and Youth Specific Religious Persecution report,' which only covered comprehensive data from three regions.

# Global findings

**Children and youth continue to face specific and intense forms of persecution and discrimination** because of their belief identities, in ways which are consistent with 2021's Children and Youth Specific Religious Persecution report preliminary findings on children and youth SRP.<sup>6</sup>



In India, a child holds up a candle and reads their Bible at Christmas.

Religious persecution of children and youth may not necessarily be a consequence of their personal faith choice or heritage, but instead might occur as **an opportunity to punish their parents**, especially if their parents are church leaders, converts, and/or another marginalized group within their society. The pain from the direct violence that children and youth experience ripples outward to produce suffering in other generations.

One of the **characteristics of children and youth SRP is the harshness<sup>7</sup>** of the persecution that they face. **Physical, psychological, sexual and verbal violence were found in the 2022 top 10 Pressure Points** in addition to the Pressure Points with implicit violence, such as abduction and forced marriage. Given that children and youth may still be undecided about their beliefs, or in a formative stage of faith, the harshness of their experiences may be a compelling deterrent against choosing a marginalized faith.

Targeted persecution of children and youth impacts both their short-term formative experiences and the long-term trajectory of life choices. **Persecutors seek to manipulate the gateways and pathways to children's adult identities and futures.** Access can be denied to family members, friends, schoolmates, school itself, bibles or other Christian materials, religious teachings or even legal identities as Christians, thereby **restricting or redirecting Christian children and youth away from certain future pathways.**

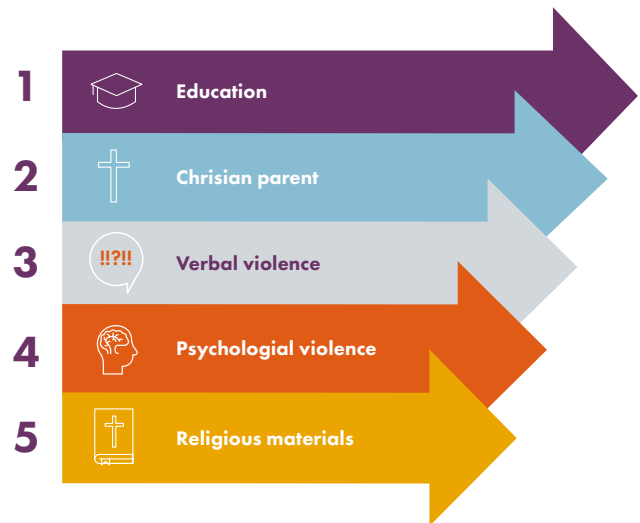
**Education is a key tool and location for the persecution of Christian children and youth**, with the Pressure Point *discrimination/harassment via education* found in 49 of the WWL top 50 countries.<sup>8</sup> This is key to shaping their identities as well as influencing what options are available to them in adulthood.

**"Children are often confused and traumatized,"** an expert in Asia shares, "because the values taught at home are different to the ones taught in schools ... they are taught by society that it's illegal or morally wrong to be Christians."

Children and youth SRP is also **shaped by gender**. Girls encounter harassment and violence that targets their sexual purity, and in some contexts, principally their virginity.<sup>9</sup> Boys are more likely to be targeted in ways that conform with expectations around the physical and economic threat that they pose in adulthood.<sup>10</sup>

The multiplicity of experiences facing children and youth all affect the relationships between generations of the church, as well as between Christian children and youth and their peers of other religions or beliefs.

## TOP CHILDREN AND YOUTH PRESSURE POINTS<sup>11</sup>



<sup>6</sup> ["Children and Youth Specific Religious Persecution."](#) Open Doors International, September 2021.

<sup>7</sup> This characterization of children and youth SRP was first identified in the 2021 'Children and Youth Specific Religious Persecution Report.' *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> In some countries, such as North Korea and China, this can start as early as nursery school age, which can make a difference to the level of influence upon a child's development.

<sup>9</sup> The top 3 Pressure Points for girls are *sexual violence, forced marriage and abduction.*

<sup>10</sup> The top 3 Pressure Points for boys are *physical violence, psychological violence, and military/militia conscription/service against conscience.*

<sup>11</sup> See bar chart in Appendix 2 for full breakdown of global children and youth Pressure Points.

# Targeted seduction

*Targeted seduction*, used to describe incidents of ideologically motivated sexual grooming, was reported in 22% of the top 50 2022 WWL countries.<sup>12</sup> Teenage Christian girls were found to be disproportionately impacted as **sexual grooming exploits the overlapping vulnerabilities of a girl's age, gender and religious identity in contexts of acute persecution**. Additionally, these acts can often be carried out against a marginalized religious group with impunity. Either the law does not provide equal protection, or the society has so disempowered families and individuals from these groups that they neither have the means nor the courage to pursue a case against perpetrators.

Ideologically motivated sexual grooming is often carried out by members of a dominant religion or criminal gang targeting girls from a marginalized religion.<sup>13</sup> In these contexts, **sexual grooming is meant to result in either sexual relations or a 'marriage'** giving the pretense of a valid and freely consenting relationship. The Coalition on Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) clarifies that "the intent here is not only sexual predation (as is common among all forms of sexual grooming) but also the **'conquest' of a woman from a religious minority and 'claiming' her for the majority religion,**" a dynamic often overlooked.<sup>14</sup> It further represents a longer-term goal to control the religious identity of her potential future children.

Grooming for the purposes of conversion can be seen in Egypt, Malaysia, and Syria, among others. A regional expert on Malaysia observes how girls "were often lured with romantic gestures by the Muslim men, which **resulted in conversion due to marriage**. This is a tactic reportedly used in Dakwah 'missional' activity to convert Malaysian locals – they stay married for a year or two before divorcing the women/girls."<sup>15</sup> This can have significant social and emotional impact. If stigmatized for the rest of her life, a girl's security within her community and hope for a future family can be compromised.

Targeted grooming is not always associated with dominant religions preying upon marginalized groups; pious **Christian girls can also be deliberately seduced by members of criminal gangs**, particularly in Latin America. Daughters of church leaders may be specifically groomed to punish her parents, especially if they are involved in conducting outreach in gang territory. A perception that a Christian background means girls will be more obedient or more likely to be sexually pure (thereby increasing their economic value to criminal gangs selling them) leads to their religion putting them at greater risk.<sup>16</sup>

## HOW ARE GIRLS COERCED INTO RELATIONSHIPS?

Adolescent girls might initially have positive experiences with perpetrators and develop a trusting relationship with them.<sup>17</sup> These men then use blackmail or promises of better finances and lifestyles to manipulate their targets. There is often an **exploitation of vulnerability and power**; in environments of severe persecution, a significant age difference between the girl and the man reinforces the power of the perpetrator, because her trust and obedience may be culturally demanded of her.<sup>18</sup> Men who belong to the dominant religion may also perceive that they can act with impunity towards girls of the marginalized religion – such as in Pakistan where Christian and Hindu families do not have the same agency as Muslim families to protest or challenge such behavior. The use of manipulative techniques, whether emotional, psychological and/or financial, can result in the **charade of a consensual relationship**, making cases more challenging to discern.<sup>19</sup> The absence of violent forms of coercion, such as abduction, makes it socio-culturally easier for **significant levels of blame** to fall onto the girls targeted by sexual grooming.

Grooming of marginalized Christian girls often **leads to sexual violence, forced (child) marriage, and occasionally deliberate impregnation**. The impact of sexual grooming in these scenarios is that girls are directed onto a pathway that leads to **a confluence of physical, emotional and spiritual abuse** resulting in endemic penury and social exclusion. A regional expert on Egypt speaks of some cases where young girls are manipulated through a psychological conflation of rape and love. "Girls fall in love with Muslim boys or men, who then convince the girl to join him to visit his mother or sister, [instead] taking her to an unknown apartment and raping her." Such events can then be twisted as the rape is reinterpreted as physical longing for the girl: "They are convinced of the 'true love' of their groomer and often see no other way than to marry the rapist, especially when pregnant."

Entrapment into marriage can also be facilitated by **contexts where a high value is placed on virginity**, adding extra pressure onto girls who have been raped. In addition, sexual abuse in childhood can have longer term effects beyond the initial trauma, including a **greater risk for some to sexual revictimization in adulthood**.<sup>20</sup> It also creates great fear, suspicion and shame in the wider community who are left behind when the girl is taken, even if she is returned.

<sup>12</sup> Rates of *targeted seduction* could be higher than recorded due to difficulties reporting. Social, emotional and psychological mechanisms surrounding this practice make this particularly difficult for teenage girls and their families. A reluctance to report can also often be due to associated stigma.

<sup>13</sup> Reports of *targeted seduction* were analyzed to identify the primary perpetrators.

<sup>14</sup> 'It is time we recognize how ideologically motivated sexual grooming targets women from religious minorities,' Tadros, M., August 2020, p.4.

<sup>15</sup> 'Dakwah' refers to the communication of knowledge about and the invitation to Islam. For further explanation, see 'Role of Social Media in Disseminating Dakwah,' Omar et al, 2015, in *Islamic perspectives relating to business, arts, culture and communication* (pp. 43-55). <Financing-Higher-Education-Students-in-Malaysia-Using-Islamic-Student-Loan-Backed-Securitization-An-Empirical-Analysis.pdf (researchgate.net)>.

<sup>16</sup> '[In]Visible: The Gender Report 2022,' Open Doors International, March 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Winters, G.M., et al., 2022. 'The Sexual Grooming Model of Child Sex Trafficking' in *Victims and Offenders* 17(1) (pp. 60-77).

<sup>18</sup> 'Coercive consent? Unlocking the truth behind 'disappearing' women in Pakistan,' Tadros, M., February 2021.

<sup>19</sup> 'It is time we recognize how ideologically motivated sexual grooming targets women from religious minorities,' Tadros, M., August 2020.

<sup>20</sup> 'Sexual Revictimization,' National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2012, <Coercive consent? Unlocking the truth behind 'disappearing' women in Pakistan - Institute of Development Studies (ids.ac.uk)>.

## Denied access to a Christian parent

Across the globe children are separated from their Christian parents in a variety of ways, most commonly due to a parent who has converted to Christianity being denied custody of – or access to – their child.<sup>21</sup> Separation also occurs when either the parent or child is physically removed from the family unit, be it through imprisonment, abduction, forced recruitment or being forced to flee.<sup>22</sup>

The denial of custody represents an **intentional and calculated act of separation**, intended to sever the influence the parent has over the child.<sup>23</sup> Such instances represent a direct violation of rights enshrined within the UNCRC.<sup>24</sup> In cases of parental imprisonment, abduction or forced recruitment, familial separation may not be the primary focus of the persecutor's strategy. Nonetheless, the consequent separation of parent from child is one that serves their agenda to weaken the Christian community.

Severing access between children and their Christian parents **constitutes one of the most explicit means of ensuring that the next generation does not grow up into a knowledge and an embracing of their parents' faith.**

Pressure against converts primarily stems from the community and family spheres, who work hard to ensure that the perceived damage and shame attached to conversion is limited to a single generation. **Extended family members step in and exercise a perceived right<sup>25</sup> and responsibility**

**to re-socialize children to the dominant religion.** “Children are not considered a part of the nuclear family, but under the direction and ownership of the larger family,” an expert on the MENA region shares. “So children may be taken away from their parents to stop the spreading of Christianity in a family.”

“Their children are taken away from them, or they have to flee and lose contact with their children. Also, when Christian women are widowed, Muslim relatives sometimes take the children to turn them into Muslims.”

An expert in Burkina Faso describes the experiences of convert parents

This perception that a broader family unit has ‘rights’ over the child can result in children being **used as pawns of punishment against their parents.** Regardless of whether the young people have themselves embraced Christianity, they pay a heavy price for being associated with the faith group. Separation can cause a young person to have painful associations with the choice to identify as a Christian. They may question why their parent considers this faith so



In Iran, and the wider MENA region, children may be taken away from their Christian parents and re-socialized into the dominant religion.

<sup>21</sup> Instances were recorded in 47 of the top 50 WWL countries.

<sup>22</sup> In Eritrea, there are reportedly thousands of Christians imprisoned in detention centers, for no other reason than being Christian. As noted in the [2022 Gender report \[In\]Visible](#), girls are also targeted for abduction and forced marriage, while boys can also be forcibly taken to join the ranks of militias and extremist groups.

<sup>23</sup> Female converts from a Muslim background are most likely to be cut off from their children. This is in part enacted through legal means, as laws favor the rights of men in relation to custody, particularly in Islamic countries.

<sup>24</sup> [1989 UNCRC Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 7, 9, 10 and 18.](#)

<sup>25</sup> While individuals within a family may hold specific rights as legal guardian of a minor, the broader family collective does not hold actual legal rights; the sense of ‘rights’ and their exercise stems from socially-reinforced expectations based on specific family and household traditions.



important that it means they are willing to lose access to their own child. Children may ask themselves: **“Why not give up Jesus instead of me?”** Such subtle psychological and spiritual pressure has the potential to sow almost unbearable emotional pain and doubt in a young psyche.

Efforts are also made to ensure that new families cannot be formed, and that children are not exposed to the influence and teachings of a non-dominant religion. In countries such as Jordan and Iran, Christians are not allowed to adopt if their faith is known.<sup>26</sup> **This further ensures that Christianity is not spread to a next generation of children, whether biological or adoptive.**

In one instance, Christian parents were ordered to give up their adopted child.<sup>27</sup> Lydia was just three months old when she was adopted by Iranian Christian converts. Just before her second birthday, a court ruled that she must be taken away from her adoptive parents as **they were converts and therefore “not fit” to be her parents.** The ruling was handed down by a court ... despite the judge in his initial verdict acknowledging that Lydia felt an “intense emotional attachment” to her adoptive parents and saying there was “zero chance” another adoptive family would be found for her, given Lydia’s health problems. This case currently remains ongoing and was last reported to be under appeal before the Iranian Supreme Court.<sup>28</sup>

Being denied access to one’s parent – or conversely, one’s child – represents more than simple retribution or immediate cruelty. **It is an ongoing trauma, a barrier to cultural and ideological identity, and a disruption of family and community.** This is a tactic that has been used for centuries in a breadth of contexts, as exemplified by the recently publicized experiences of indigenous children in Northern America in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, who were removed from their parents, re-named and re-educated.<sup>29</sup> Not only could their parents no longer see them, they could also no longer influence the factors that would shape their future identity. Elsewhere in the world, similar tactics endure today. While varying in scale, identity of perpetrators and degree of systemization, these tactics continue to cause irrevocable damage to individuals, families, and communities.

The layers of trauma experienced by children separated from their parents cannot be underestimated. **Psychologists note that for children, separation represents a loss of a lifeline, causes intense grief and depression, and threatens their sense of self and ability to form positive attachments.**<sup>30</sup>

The trauma of such experiences can shape their minds, emotions and even biology.<sup>31</sup>



Lydia with her adoptive parents, Sam and Maryam, who are Christian converts in Iran. © Article 18.

<sup>26</sup> [Jordanian law](#) stipulates that all prospective parents for legal guardianship must be Muslim, married for five or more years, and medically certified as infertile in order to obtain legal guardianship in Jordan. In select situations, and on a case-by-case basis, non-Muslims may be granted guardianship/custody of a non-Muslim child by a juvenile court order issued through the civil court. See USDS, Jordan Intercountry Adoption Information.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Christian converts’ adopted child to be removed from their care,’ [Article 18](#), 24 September 2020.

<sup>28</sup> ‘[Three Iranian Christians’ Imprisonment Sentencing Upheld](#),’ Persecution, 2 August 2021.

<sup>29</sup> ‘[What happened at residential schools for indigenous children in North America?](#)’ The Economist, 26 July 2021.

<sup>30</sup> ‘[Attachment and loss. Volume 1: attachment](#),’ Bowlby, John (1997), London. In International Forum of Psychoanalysts 28(3), 2019.

<sup>31</sup> ‘The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma,’ Van Der Kolk, Bessel, 2014.

## VALENTINA'S STORY

Valentina's situation is not the most extreme form of separation from a parent – as often this is final and long term. However, it provides invaluable insight into what that parents and children experience. Religious persecution provokes long-term inner turmoil and pain as both parent and child struggle to come to terms with this reality for the formative years of Valentina's life.

### Valentina

#### THE DAUGHTER

In Colombia, Valentina left her parents when she was 11 because it was too unsafe for her to stay. In the region where she lived, there are communities that perform witchcraft rituals and are hostile to those who profess a faith other than their own.

Her father and other Christian leaders were dissatisfied with the education their children received in the local village school due to rituals and practices that went against their faith. Their request to open a different school was denied.

Valentina's parents heard of a Children's Center for children of persecuted Christians, an Open Doors project, that allows for them to receive education and support. Despite it being a 15-hour journey, they decided to send Valentina there.

"I was sad at first, because I missed them but now I feel like I don't want to leave here. I felt like I was finally okay," Valentina said. "I also really miss my sister, I wish she could be here too."

Now 15 years old, Valentina has been at the center for four years and feels as though the radical change and separation from her parents saved her life in many ways. Not only was she safe from being recruited by guerillas, but she developed artistic skills she didn't know about, her faith was strengthened, and she received surgery for a heart condition.

Even though Valentina is happy at the center, she still worries for her family back home who receive threats for their faith, often telling her mother to not leave her younger sister alone in case anything happens to her.

When she finishes her education, she dreams of travelling and sharing her faith and experiences to help other people.

"I've always understood everything in life has a purpose – God has a purpose even though we don't see it immediately."

### Francisco

#### THE FATHER

For Francisco, separation from his daughter was necessary for her safety – but it didn't make it any easier for him and his wife.

The risk that she would be conscripted by guerillas meant that staying home wasn't safe. The fact that as a Christian she couldn't get an education in a safe environment confirmed the choice. "We were feeling sad to send our little daughter so far away we couldn't see her, but happy at the same time knowing she wasn't in danger anymore," Francisco shared.

Francisco is a leader in the area's Christian community, which meant that his family were targeted for their faith and denied access to healthcare, and his children denied the opportunity to have an education in a safe environment or in keeping with their faith. They heard of an opening at a Christian Center far away and, as desperate parents, made the tough decision to send her where she'd be safe.

"We knew that we couldn't give her education here, she wasn't accepted in school because she is a Christian, and private schools were too expensive for us. We explained that to Valentina and she began to understand," Francisco said. "At the beginning she cried a lot, a month almost, and she was so little that we were worried we sent her so far away."

Despite the miles between them Francisco believes it was worth the decision because his daughter is receiving not only an education, but it is in a safe environment and in keeping with her faith which will help prepare her both academically and spiritually.

"They are getting closer to God and that's great for them and for us. Even if we die, they remain to preach the word of God, they remain as new leaders. Their education is preparing them to share the Gospel and so it's worth everything."



Valentina and her father,  
Francisco, from Colombia.

# Regional analysis<sup>32</sup>

## ASIA

### TOP REGIONAL PRESSURE POINTS:

- 1 Discrimination/harassment via education
- 2 Violence – psychological
- 3 Denied access to a Christian Parent
- 3 Violence – verbal

Across the diverse Asian countries which feature on the 2022 World Watch List,<sup>33</sup> children have **little opportunity to form a legal or cultural identity as a Christian**, due to the dominance of majority religions or state controls. At birth, children of Christian heritage are denied the opportunity to be registered as a Christian in over a third of countries.<sup>34</sup> In China and across Central Asian countries, governments have banned under-18s from participation in religious activities.<sup>35</sup>

The Pressure Point **false charges** represents a particularly **harsh dynamic** that is unique to the Asia region.<sup>36</sup> “Children speaking out about their faith can lead to a charge of blasphemy,” a local expert in Pakistan explains, causing them to keep silent for fear of attacks against them or their families. In addition to being a **tool of self-censorship**, this Pressure Point has also been used to make Christian children **scapegoats of blame**. As highlighted in the 2022 Gender Report *[In]Visible*, a twelve-year-old Christian Pakistani boy was accused of raping an eight-year-old Christian girl, despite evidence clearly pointing to her teacher as the aggressor.<sup>37</sup> This accusation reflects a confluence of pressures; within the context of education, a sphere which ideally protects and develops children, a young Christian boy was falsely accused of a violent crime perpetrated against a young Christian girl.

In this highly collectivist region,<sup>38</sup> children and youth are isolated within the schoolyard, by their families, and within their local communities. The Pressure Point *denied access to social community/networks* was also more commonly reported in Asia than any other region. An expert in Nepal shares: **“Christian kids face difficulties or harassment by their friends. Other children do not allow them to play with them as they are directed by their parents not to mix with Christian children.”** Convert children can also be put under house arrest, as exemplified by the case of two sisters who came to faith in Central Asia. As a regional expert reported “[upon discovering their faith], their Muslim parents were not happy ... they forbade them to contact other believers and go to church. Now the girls are under house arrest, only allowed to visit school and college.”

**Attempts to foster community among Christian children and youth have also been hampered** by state monitoring and community resistance. In India, youth organizations have found it increasingly difficult to run camps and parents have reportedly been punished for sending their children to such camps. As a local expert shares, “Christians have faced imprisonment for taking the children to Christian children camps ... Fearing opposition by the government ... many are afraid to send their children to such camps or meetings.”



Raj, an 18 year old young man from India, lost his father when he was younger – making him the responsible male in his family. Since converting to Christianity, he and his mother faced a lot of opposition from relatives and friends.

<sup>32</sup> See regional bar chart in Appendix 3 for an overview of regional Pressure Points.

<sup>33</sup> See Appendix 4 for a full breakdown of countries under study for each region.

<sup>34</sup> *Denied legal identity as a Christian* was reported in: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, India, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar and Pakistan.

<sup>35</sup> See USDS International Religious Freedom reports: [China](#), [Tajikistan](#), [Uzbekistan](#). In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, laws allow involvement of children in religion only to registered churches and with parents' consent.

<sup>36</sup> *False Charges* was only recorded in three countries, all of which were in Asia: Pakistan, Nepal and India.

<sup>37</sup> *[In]Visible: The Gender Report 2022*. Open Doors International, March 2022, p.9.

<sup>38</sup> According to Hofstede, the 'individualism' element of culture has to do with "whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "We". In Individualist societies people are supposed to look after themselves and their direct family only. In Collectivist societies people belong to 'in groups' that take care of them in exchange for loyalty. [Accessed 31st August 2022].

## LATIN AMERICA

### TOP REGIONAL PRESSURE POINTS:

- 1 Discrimination/harassment via education
- 1 Violence – psychological
- 1 Violence – verbal

The day-to-day experiences of children and youth in Latin America<sup>39</sup> continue to be **heavily shaped by criminal activity and deeply rooted cycles of violence**. Within a context of high unemployment and criminal gangs that intentionally recruit members under-18, many young people view forced recruitment as an unavoidable destiny and roadblock to an alternative future pathway.<sup>40</sup> The Christian children and youth in this region face additional vulnerabilities because their faith is often seen as being in competition with the loyalties required of the criminal groups.

Additionally, the perceived docility of young Christians draws attention from gang members, who consider them easier to shape ideologically because of their obedience. **“If they oppose, they run the risk of even being killed,”** according to a regional expert who explained the greatest risk of their vulnerability. Threats, coercion and psychological harm against children were widely reported in the Latin American region.

The children of parents involved in church activities in gang territory are reportedly targeted for forced recruitment or sexual assault by gangs as **a means of punishing unwelcome Christian activity and hindering future church growth**. Both adolescent boys and girls struggle to escape the clutches of gangs, but there is a gender-specific element as to what conscription into gangs means for young people: **While boys are more likely to be forced into gang membership,**

**girls fear being sexually assaulted, trafficked or forced into marriages with gang members.**

The children of church leaders and vocal Christians can further be targeted by community and state officials, particularly those whose Christian convictions drive them to take a direct stand against the government. A local expert provides an example from Nicaragua, where the animosity between President Daniel Ortega’s and the Catholic church is well known.<sup>41</sup> When asked about how children have been discriminated against because of their parents’ faith, they shared: “If the actions and public manifestations of the parents are known [e.g. for their activities demanding the end of the Ortega presidency], children are likely to be especially monitored and threatened in schools... Usually, physical threats are addressed to children as a way to manipulate the “dissident” parents or punish them.”

In addition to gangs, young Christian teenagers – mostly boys – are **targeted to join militia, military or guerrilla groups**, especially along the Colombia border. Groups take advantage of the difficult economic and social situation, promising food and medicines in exchange for participation in crime.

In Colombia, militants are reportedly encouraging children and teenagers to embrace and exalt armed violence. Commenting on the experience of young Christians, an expert observes: **“The intention of these groups is to transform the mentality of childhood and youth and to root their criminal ideology in society,** making it more difficult to eradicate them in the future.”

Within the community sphere, **pressure is particularly high for Christian children and youth from an indigenous background**. Within these contexts, conversion is severely punished, and Christian families immediately become second-class citizens.



Indigenous children from the Nasa community in the Huila region whose parents have been displaced by the authorities because their faith.

<sup>39</sup> For Latin American countries under study, see Appendix 4.

<sup>40</sup> For more information, see ‘[Same Faith: Different Persecution](#),’ Open Doors International. March 1, 2021. pp. 10.

<sup>41</sup> ‘[Tension between Nicaragua and the Catholic Church](#),’ The Associated Press, August 14 2022. [Accessed 1 September 2022]

## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

### TOP REGIONAL PRESSURE POINTS:

- 1 Violence – sexual
- 2 Denied access to a Christian Parent
- 2 Discrimination/harassment via education
- 2 Forced marriage

Christian children and youth face **high levels of violence in family and community settings**,<sup>42</sup> and from **Islamic militant groups** in the Sub-Saharan Africa countries under study for this report.<sup>43</sup> This violence, along with the various forms of conflict and insecurity prevalent in the region, has resulted in the highest number of countries reporting children being forced to flee.<sup>44</sup>



Children in northern Mozambique reading a Children's Bible as part of emergency relief delivery to Christians affected by jihadist violence.

According to the observations of a regional expert: “**Young Christian girls have been at the threat of abduction and forced marriages in the north of Mozambique.** Some girls are as young as seven ... In addition, many displaced young women and girls said they left their communities and fled specifically because of the threat of abduction, detention, rape, and forced marriage to Al-Shabaab fighters.”

**The violence that these Christian children face is often gender-specific.** Extremist militant groups are often the perpetrators of gender-based violence against Christian girls, but family and community members also can exploit the cultural and legal norms to control and abuse young female Christians. **Sexual violence and forced (child) marriage targeting Christian girls is particularly prevalent**,<sup>45</sup> and has wide-ranging and long-lasting effects. As well as driving people to become IDPs and refugees,<sup>46</sup> fears stemming from exacerbated vulnerability to gender-based violence can result in parents keeping their daughters out of school, with girls often particularly at risk of abduction and sexual violence on their journeys to school.<sup>47</sup> While these fears may be well-founded, the denial of education can considerably restrict the future pathways of girls by decreasing their future opportunities for financial autonomy and resilience in the face of unstable circumstances.

**If perpetrators are successful in targeting Christian girls with sexual violence, life pathways** can again be shaped and – notably – **sharply restricted** due to the **resulting shame, isolation, and severely restricted opportunities to marry.** A regional expert comments that in many sub-Saharan African countries, “If a girl is raped the community will isolate her. She won’t have a chance to marry, learn and her family will also be ashamed ... in general her future will be destroyed by the news of this experience.” This observation highlights the crucial interplay between perpetrator action and expected community reaction. Communal expectations persist which associate the domination of a young woman’s sexuality with the group who can claim her allegiance. This and other community responses based upon societal definitions play a determining role in whether or not an incident in an adolescent girl’s life will define her future opportunities to remain a valued member of her faith community.

Extremist militant groups pose a particular threat to Christian boys: **Forced recruitment into their ranks as child soldiers.** A regional expert on Chad gives an example of Muslim extremist groups who “abduct Christian boys and convert them to Islam so that they will be a potential future soldier.” This can result in **extensive and exploitative forms of abuse**, including forced labor, forced participation in violence and combat, and the witnessing of and/or involvement in killings and torture.<sup>48</sup> Similarly to the repercussions faced by girls, this results in boys missing opportunities to pursue education, which likewise narrows pathways to their potential futures.

<sup>42</sup> Particularly these Pressure Points: *abduction, violence – physical, and violence – sexual.*

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix 4 for list of Sub-Saharan countries under study.

<sup>44</sup> ‘*The Church on the Run*,’ Open Doors International, June 2022.

<sup>45</sup> 92% and 88% of countries under study in Sub-Saharan Africa record *violence – sexual* and *forced marriage* respectively.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> ‘*Children and Youth Specific Religious Persecution*,’ Open Doors International, September 2021, p.9.

<sup>48</sup> ‘*Children recruited by armed forces or armed groups*,’ UNICEF; OCHCR 2000 ‘*Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Children on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*’.

## MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA)

### TOP REGIONAL PRESSURE POINTS:

- 1 Discrimination/harassment via education
- 2 Violence – verbal
- 3 Denied access to a Christian Parent

**State institutions play an important role in shaping the experiences of children and youth in the MENA countries of this study.**<sup>49</sup> In most of these countries, where legal registration with the state includes the identification of religious association, there is no legal recognition of an individual's personal choice.

This means that Christians are **denied a legal identity that recognizes their religious affiliation of choice**, and are instead deliberately identified with another, majority religion.

In countries where conversion from Islam is illegal, Christians registered as Muslim are unable to change their legal religious affiliation. If either one of or both parents are legally considered Muslim, their children will automatically be registered as such, despite their family's choice of faith. For example in Iraq, even children born from rape are registered as Muslim if one parent is a Muslim; this practice is particularly significant as sexual violence has been used repeatedly in the last decade against minorities across the country.

A regional expert summarizes the situation in Iran: "The constitution does not provide for the rights of Muslim citizens

to choose, change, or renounce their religious beliefs. The government considers a child born to a Muslim father to be a Muslim and deems conversion from Islam to be apostasy, which is punishable by death."

This **legal identity shapes the course of childhood and adulthood**. In most cases it leads to compulsory Islamic education and participation in prayers and rites, restricted opportunities to marry and start a family within Christian communities, and when they have children of their own, impossibility to register a new birth according to their choice of religion or belief. **Children and youth often have to lead a double life; a Christian one in private and a Muslim one in public, creating internal confusion around their identity.**

The state is not the only key actor in restricting young people pathway towards learning about the Christian faith. Families, meaning within the domestic sphere, can restrict and control young people's comings and goings without incurring communal or state scrutiny. **House arrest**, recorded in multiple countries across the region,<sup>50</sup> **particularly targets young people who have chosen to become Christians against the wishes of their family**. Frequently, this is **gender-specific**, with girls especially targeted. In Morocco, where young female believers in rural areas are particularly at risk, a regional expert explains that "house arrest is the punishment of parents towards girls who show their faith in public."

This reflects the **power of family members over children and youth**, and constitutes one of the most extreme forms of isolation, where contact with friends and fellow Christians is completely severed.



A young Iranian girl near Fatima Masumeh shrine in Qom, Iran.

<sup>49</sup> See Appendix 4 for list of MENA countries under study.

<sup>50</sup> *House arrest* is recorded in nine countries, out of the 20 overall countries focused on in the region.

# Recommendations directly from young adults in MENA

Young adults were interviewed across the Middle East and North Africa in early 2022 in a series of focus groups around themes of **hope, faith, resilience and church**.<sup>51</sup> Insights from this demographic – who are the closest to their years as children/adolescents – provide a deeper understanding of the full impact of closed-off *gateways* and restricted *pathways*. These young adults provide a snapshot of how young people in MENA are impacted by religious persecution, and what they are calling for in response.

Young adults acknowledged that **the situation for Christians in their region is at a critical point, due to the role and legacy of ISIS in the region, economic pressures (exacerbated by Covid-19), ongoing conflict and political turmoil**. Some spoke hopefully about their future, while others found it difficult to be positive. “There is no hope about hope!” one Syrian shared.

Although they spoke about the challenges, several respondents also recognized the positive role of the church in their home countries, and clearly had a desire to stay and contribute to their local community.<sup>52</sup> When asked why they thought Christians should stay in Iraq, a young believer shared: **“We are the salt of the earth ... We are here from a long time ago. Our presence in the country is very important. We exist here, but we are marginalized and forgotten. But how are things going to be if we didn’t exist?”**

In order to remain in their homelands, and move forward positively into adulthood, participants called for three things: Equality for Christians in society, psycho-social support, and for the local church role to be united and strengthened.

## EQUALITY IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Participants shared how the discrimination that they had experienced as students paralleled their current challenges as members of the workforce. For many, discrimination was a part of day-to-day life. While an issue affecting all young people across MENA, Christians reported facing additional barriers when it came to accessing education and employment. Participants commonly drew a link between joblessness and hopelessness. They **called for the church to take an**

**active role in job creation, noting that this would be a key factor in enticing them to stay** rather than seek opportunities abroad.

Economic pressures combined with trauma are cited as the key reasons that leave young Christians feeling as though they have little choice but to emigrate. Indeed, many flee the country as refugees due to ongoing pressures, as detailed in *The Church on the Run* report.<sup>53</sup>

## PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

Many young Christians have experienced loneliness, bullying and exclusion, which has negatively impacted their psychological well-being.

As noted in: *Denied access to a Christian parent*, trauma can accompany children and youth into adulthood, negatively impacting their ability to form positive attachments, exposing them to depression and anxiety, and causing them to question their faith.

The trauma can even come from simply witnessing the religious persecution of a family member. Upon remembering a situation where her parents were exploited financially as Christians, a young Egyptian woman shared, **“I felt that this is unfair; I felt like someone who wanted to talk, but didn’t have a voice.”** Such experiences remain with young people and continue to have a detrimental impact as they enter adulthood.

The need for psycho-social support was most commonly reported in countries that had experienced mass displacement and conflict, most notably Syria. “We lost hope,” shared one Christian, “It was so difficult and it caused us to doubt and to get away from our faith at that time.”

It is vital that the church offers spiritual and emotional support to victims of trauma. As one young Syrian reflected, **“There should be a kind of rehabilitation for many cases, especially among the children who were subject to these circumstances. The church has a very big role in this.** It is actually playing a big role in rehabilitating everybody, even the adults are suffering from the things they have seen.”

<sup>51</sup> Participants were between the ages of 16 and 30. For more information about the collection of this data, see Methodology (page 19).

<sup>52</sup> While the sense of belonging, commitment to place and desire to contribute to society in the Arab world is deeply rooted, the desire to stay and levels of hope varied across the countries studied. Due to the wider societal contexts, young Christians in Iraq and Syria seemed to be less hopeful about their futures in their countries, whereas in Egypt for example, the respondents’ desire to stay was notably high.

<sup>53</sup> *The Church on the Run*, Open Doors International, June 2022.



## A UNIFIED AND EFFECTIVE CHURCH RESPONSE

Young adults recognize the powerful role that the church can play in supporting young Christians. **They look to the church as a safe place within a surrounding hostile environment.** Undermining this support is the frustration of feeling marginalized even here. Participants named feeling unheard in their church, or expressed frustration that their leaders are not attentive to the needs they face.

A positive development referenced by Iraqi Christians was the establishment of **Centers of Hope**, which are regular meeting grounds for young Christians, open to all denominations and typically modern in style. Usually, wary of inter-denominational hostility, young adults welcomed this unity.<sup>54</sup> According to the researcher who conducted these focus groups, **“the youth are attracted to these centers as they find in them what they need,** in as far as solidification of faith, activities and education, away from the routine of the traditional churches and their rituals. This successful model should be franchised throughout the Arab world.”

In addition to seeking unity within their own country, **young Christians called for increased collaboration and unity between local churches and the global church,** as well as organizations who advocate against human

rights violations and persecution. Christians reported feeling forgotten by the world at large, while being isolated and alone in a hostile environment. In the Iraq focus group, the visit of the Pope in 2021 was cited as a source of encouragement: “It caused awareness and change in the people towards the Christian religion and the historical religious sites in Iraq, and the existence of Christians in Iraq through the centuries.”

## HOPE FOR CHANGE

Sometimes it might seem that religious prejudice is impossible to change. However, not all participants reported endemic difficulties, indicating that in many contexts tolerance between faith groups can grow. As one Palestinian respondent shared, “All the students in my class are Muslim and I am the only Christian among them ... At the beginning of the year, there were this kind of differentiation, you are a Muslim and I am a Christian, before we got to know each other. But actually, **we broke these barriers.**”

It is clear, however, that many young Christians are struggling to endure in spite of their day-to-day circumstances. While their faith helps them to find hope, further encouragement and action is required.



Ferial and 3 of her students at one of 160 Centers of Hope in Syria. These remarkable places provide holistic support including prayer, counselling, Bible teaching, income-generating projects, loans for starting businesses, medical support and humanitarian aid.

<sup>54</sup> Centers of Hope are supported by Open Doors ministry. For example, see: <<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/act/hope-for-the-middle-east/>> [last accessed 1 September 2022].

# Implications & Conclusions

## BREAKING ATTACHMENT

From targeted sexual grooming to the removal of children and youth from Christian parents, **religious persecution inhibits a young person's sense of belonging and attachment in a faith community.**

At a formative stage of life and faith development, children and youth face surprisingly harsh forms of persecution. The use of forced marriage, abduction and forced recruitment as child soldiers into militias or criminal gangs can **literally sever connection to family and community.** But they can also **manufacture shame and stigma that erodes the sense of community belonging** which plays an important role in the development and wellbeing of children and youth.<sup>55</sup>



Christmas celebrations in Bangladesh for believers from Muslim backgrounds.

Encountering persecution in foundational spheres of life, such as education and family, creates **confusion and dissonance.** The tension between holding a Christian heritage and/or belonging to a Christian community, and the powerful message of ostracization communicated through the removal of a parent or social exclusion at school, can fray or snap the attachment of children and youth to faith communities.

Breaking a sense of attachment or belonging can also result in a **damaging ripple effect across all generations.** Religious persecution puts relational cohesion between generations of faith communities at risk, particularly when children and youth are targeted as a means of punishing their parents. Occasionally, however, persecution can unintentionally have the opposite effect of bringing communities closer together because of the pressure they face.

## BUILDING BELONGING

There are steps that local faith actors can take to build and strengthen attachment and belonging. Church leaders and parents can **prioritize the meaningful participation of children and youth in their faith communities, listening to what they have to say and equipping all generations to communicate effectively and bridge divides.**

Churches have the potential to be the places which **recognize the worth and capacity of children and youth, to be places of encouragement and intergenerational community.** However, church

leaders may feel ill-equipped to understand the experiences of the young people in their congregations and meet their needs; more attention and resources need to be directed towards building the capacity of churches and church leaders to welcome and support the children and youth in their communities, and the families to which they belong.<sup>56</sup>

At the national and international level, **policymakers can recognize how vulnerabilities overlap and intertwine;** belonging to a marginalized belief community and to an emerging generation multiplies the vulnerability of children and youth. This report has frequently highlighted how gender inequalities further compound age vulnerabilities.

Those with influence in policy circles can **work for the protection of children and youth marginalized** for their belief identities (and the belief identities of their parents) by implementing the recommendations found in this report (page 24). Young adults from MENA highlighted the importance of equality in education, a key area where discrimination or harassment on the basis of religion or belief needs to be addressed. Legal responses are needed to better guard against targeted seduction and the removal of parents from their children.

By working intentionally to counter attempts to isolate and abuse children and youth at vulnerable stages of development, **local faith actors and lawmakers can use their influence to solidify a sense of young person's sense of belonging in their faith community and provide protections for them to grow safely into their choice of faith.**

<sup>55</sup> See for example 'Exploring the Impacts of School Belonging on Youth Wellbeing and Mental Health among Turkish Adolescents,' SpringerLink, February 2020.

<sup>56</sup> This was also highlighted by young adults in MENA, who similarly raised the importance of interdenominational community and psychosocial support.

# Methodology

During the reporting period (1 October 2020, to 30 September 2021), Open Doors World Watch Research monitored religious persecution dynamics in more than 100 countries. SRP analysts studied data from the top 76 countries where the persecution of Christians was recorded as being very high or extreme.<sup>57</sup> Findings from the top 50 countries were prioritized, with detail from countries ranked 51-76 used to develop analysis of regional dynamics and spotlights on Targeted seduction and Denied access to a Christian Parent.

Data is gathered from Open Doors' field staff and field contributors, external experts and WWR persecution analysts. As a part of the data collection process, regionally based experts collected qualitative data from trauma specialists, church leaders, focus groups and local persecution experts.

Children and youth-specific data was coded through a children and youth SRP Pressure Points framework,<sup>58</sup> which has been adapted over five years of SRP research and two years of research on children and youth. 'Pressure Point' is the term used to refer to both the pressure and violence faced in the course of religious persecution. This analysis revealed the frequency with which Pressure Points were experienced, enabling an understanding of emerging overall trends as well as retaining contextual descriptions.

For purposes of this study, "children and youth" should be understood to refer to individuals under the age of 18. While Open Doors recognizes that understandings of who is classed as "children and youth" varies according to context, the need for research consistency led to using the classification of under-18s, as used by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The specific experiences of children and youth may also vary according to their particular backgrounds, such as being born into a Christian family or a family of another belief. Another distinction can be made between the experiences of pre-adolescents and adolescents. However, background and age distinctions are not common enough in the data to draw consistent conclusions from across all the countries under study.

This research primarily relies on data provided by adults describing persecution of children and youth. Including and prioritizing the direct voice of children youth is an area of development for the SRP research team. However, SRP analysts also recognize the unique vulnerabilities and challenges of conducting research with children and youth.<sup>59</sup>

Additionally, this year's report has been supplemented by further research carried out by Open Doors partners in the Middle East with youth in seven countries in the region (See: Recommendations directly from young adults in MENA). The purpose of the research was to capture the experiences of young Christians across MENA and explore what 'Hope' meant to them. Focus groups were held with between six and fifteen participants in each group, with two held in Syria and one group in each of the other countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestinian Territories). At the time of interview (February – April 2022), the majority of interviewees were between the ages of eighteen and thirty (except two participants aged sixteen), but they shared about their past experiences in childhood and adolescence and the impact of these experiences on their faith/resilience/hope today.

While qualitative research can be limited by increased levels of subjectivity in respondents' answers, it does provide a depth of insight that complements the quantitative data used.

A more detailed version of the methodology with an outline of the children and youth SRP Pressure Points framework with definitions can be found at Open Doors Analytical.<sup>60</sup>



A young boy in the fields near Kaesong in North Korea.

<sup>57</sup> Complete WWL Methodology, Section 5.3 – latest update available at [Open Doors Analytical webpage](#) [password: freedom].

<sup>58</sup> Children and youth specific religious persecution "Pressure Points" include aspects of both pressure and violence, which are analyzed separately in Open Doors' World Watch List standard methodology and literature.

<sup>59</sup> See for example, 'Ethical Research Involving Children', UNICEF, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> [2022 Children and youth specific religious persecution methodology](#), Open Doors International, [password: freedom].

# Appendix

## APPENDIX 1: TOP 10 PRESSURE POINTS

The following table shows the top ten Pressure Points that were recorded most commonly in 2021<sup>61</sup> and 2022.

Variations between years do not necessarily reflect a deterioration or improvement of a situation. The percentages are influenced by the availability of information, the perceived importance of each Pressure Point in the minds of participants, and the events of the year. Over multiple years, a trend might be determined, but not based on two years data.

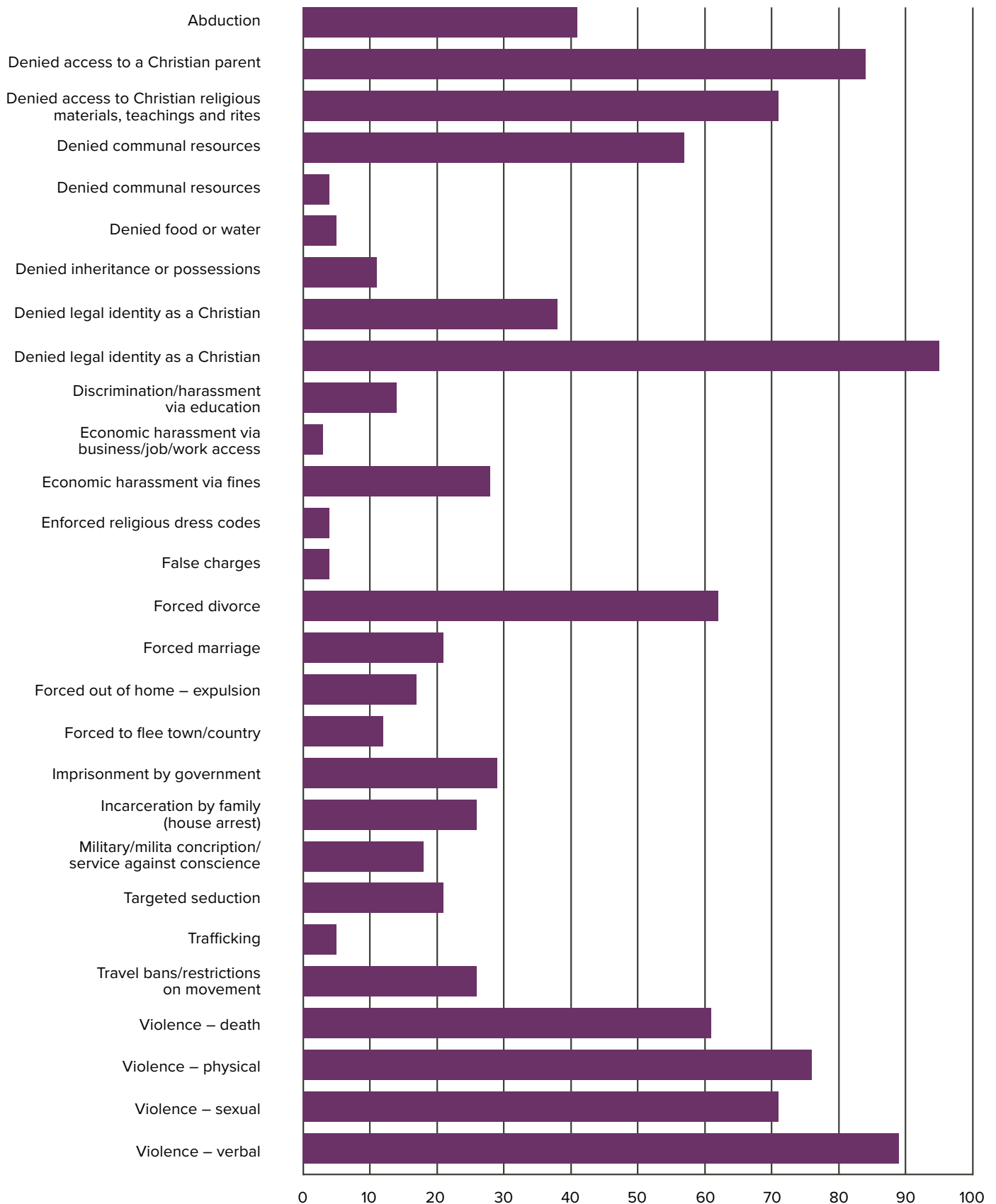
The percentage refers to the percentage of countries within the World Watch List 2022 Top 50 that record instances of each Pressure Point.

2022 Rank	Pressure Point	2022	2021
1	Discrimination/harassment via education	98%	98%
2	Denied access to a Christian parent	94%	84%
3	Violence – Verbal	90%	82%
4	Violence – psychological	78%	50%
5	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites	72%	94%
6	Violence – sexual	70%	58%
7	Violence – physical	68%	58%
8	Denied access to social community/networks	64%	44%
9	Forced marriage	62%	66%
10	Denied legal identity as a Christian	48%	58%
10	Abduction	48%	46%

<sup>61</sup> 2021 Children and Youth-specific Religious Persecution – Methodology, Open Doors International.

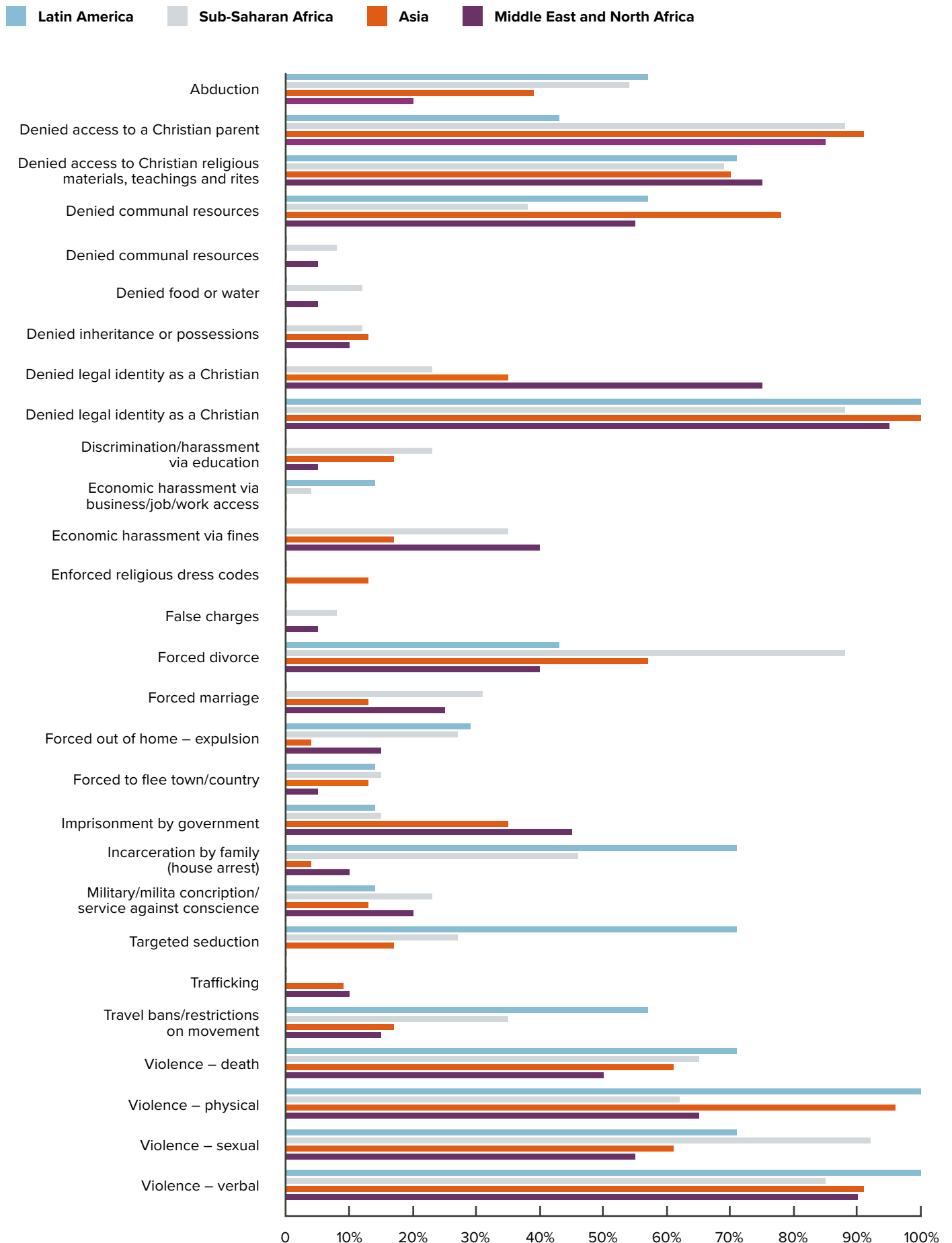
## APPENDIX 2: COMPLETE 2022 PRESSURE POINTS – GLOBAL OVERVIEW

The full list of 28 Pressure Points and a visual representation of the distribution of Pressure Points for children and youth is presented in the bar chart below. This chart illustrates the number of Pressure Points recorded across the 76 WWL 2022 countries.



### APPENDIX 3: COMPLETE 2022 PRESSURE POINTS – REGIONAL OVERVIEW

This chart shows the variation by region of how often each Pressure Point was recorded across the 76 WWL 2022 countries.



## APPENDIX 4: REGIONAL CATEGORIZATION OF WWL TOP 76 COUNTRIES

In 2022, there were 76 countries recorded by WWR as experiencing high, very high or extremely high levels of persecution.<sup>62</sup> The table below lists the how these 76 countries are categorized regionally within World Watch Research.

Asia	Latin America	Middle East and North Africa (MENA)	Sub-Saharan Africa
Afghanistan	Colombia	Algeria	Angola
Azerbaijan	Cuba	Bahrain	Burkina Faso
Bangladesh	El Salvador	Egypt	Burundi
Bhutan	Honduras	Iran	Cameroon
Brunei	Mexico	Iraq	Central African Republic
China	Nicaragua	Israel	Chad
India	Venezuela	Jordan	Comoros
Indonesia		Kuwait	Democratic Republic of the Congo
Kazakhstan		Libya	Djibouti
Kyrgyzstan		Mauritania	Eritrea
Laos		Morocco	Ethiopia
Malaysia		Oman	Gambia
Maldives		Palestinian Territories	Guinea
Myanmar		Qatar	Ivory Coast
Nepal		Saudi Arabia	Kenya
North Korea		Syria	Mali
Pakistan		Tunisia	Mozambique
Russian Federation		Turkey	Niger
Sri Lanka		United Arab Emirates	Nigeria
Tajikistan		Yemen	Rwanda
Turkmenistan			Somalia
Uzbekistan			South Sudan
Vietnam			Sudan
			Tanzania
			Togo
			Uganda

<sup>62</sup> For more information on this, see [WWL 2022: Compilation of all main documents](#). WWR, 2022.

# Recommendations

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

- 1 Integrate the principles of FoRB according to Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in all programs designed for protection and promotion of children's rights;
- 2 Ensure that parents have the right to educate their children according to their own religious beliefs and to introduce their children to religious practice. This benefits the growth of a child in a supportive environment aiding in the realization of his or her rights;
- 3 Exercise due diligence when dealing with concerns of children and youth vis-à-vis FoRB violations, ensuring non-discriminatory family laws and the settlement of family-related conflicts;
- 4 Support and fund evidence generation programs in relation to children being used as tools in the infliction of FoRB violations on particular religious groups to address the abduction, early marriage and forceful conversion of young girls on an urgent basis;
- 5 Train, support and involve local faith actors in the discussions with the religious community leaders for the elimination of harmful practices inflicted on children, including actively contributing towards the elimination of such practices whenever they occur;
- 6 Encourage states to remove all religiously biased referrals from their educational curricula and bring punitive action against any person found to be harassing the child due to his or her religious background.