

WWL 2022 Compilation of Pressure Points and Gender SRP profiles for countries ranking 1 - 76

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Introductory note

This compilation presents a per-country look at the Pressure Points and Gender Profiles for the top 76 countries on Open Doors World Watch List 2022.¹ Gender-specific research persecution (Gender SRP) analysts conducted analysis on these 76 countries, utilizing existing qualitative information to draw out gender-specific forms of persecution for each country. Gender SRP analysts use the term ‘Pressure Points’ to describe these pressures. Detailed information on the nature of this research, as well as definitions for these 30 Pressure Points, are available in the Gender SRP Methodology.²

The results of this research formed the basis of the *[In]Visible: The Gender Report 2022* which presents global trends and findings.³ To enhance country-specific understanding of Gender SRP, researchers further utilized the results to compose gender profiles for each of the 76 countries. These profiles are collated below, alongside the accompanying Pressure Points identified for each country, by gender.

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¹ WWL 2022 Compilation of All Main Documents, <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WWL-2022-Compilation-of-main-documents-February-revision.pdf>

² 2022 Gender SRP Methodology, <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2022-Gender-SRP-Methodology-Final.pdf>

³ [In]Visible: The Gender Report 2022, <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/The-Gender-Report-2022-DIGITAL-PDF.pdf>

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1) Afghanistan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

The swift take-over of Afghanistan by the Taliban has thrown the advancement of women’s rights into turmoil. Women have long had a lower social status and been viewed as second class citizens, but under Taliban rule face an increasingly uncertain future. Women from religious minorities, including Christians, are especially vulnerable. In an early announcement following their take-over, a Taliban statement declared: "Our women are Muslim. They will be happy to be living within our frameworks of Sharia" ([Al-Jazeera, 17 August 2021](#)). Reflecting the downward trend of women’s right, girls’ school attendance is restricted and women are currently barred from the workplace ([CNN, 19 September 2021](#)).

Female converts also face extreme pressures on a familial and societal level, facilitated in part by the limited role women play in Afghan society and their few rights to social protection. Although conversions usually happen together as a family unit in Afghanistan, when a woman decides to convert to Christianity on her own, she is likely to keep it a secret. If her faith is discovered, she is vulnerable to physical abuse and being put under house arrest. She may also be forcibly married to a Muslim or sold for sexual enslavement. According to a country expert, forced marriages are commonplace in Afghanistan and “all marriages face an element of forced marriage”. Forced marriages and rape are used as tools for forced (re-)conversion, particularly against women and girls from a Muslim background. A young female Christian convert can be forced to marry a non-Christian (often older) with relative ease. Due to Afghanistan’s honor-shame culture, women are unlikely to report instances of rape or sexual abuse due to both the stigma attached and the lack of legislative justice.

According to a country expert, Christian women and girls are being targeted and abducted in order to be forcibly married to Taliban fighters, with fathers being forced to give up their daughters at the point of a gun. “Christians have no value or worth,” explains another country expert, “therefore if or when they are discovered there is a high probability, they will be turned into sex slaves.”

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

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

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

As men are at the forefront of public life, male Christians are extremely vulnerable to community and family pressures if their faith is discovered. They will be harassed, socially isolated, beaten or killed. If married, they will likely have their wives and children taken away from them. Given that men have greater freedom of movement, they are additionally vulnerable to being kidnapped, or killed, in the streets. In light of these pressures, Christian men choose to keep as low a profile as possible, with some choosing low-level positions in the workplace so as not to gain unwanted attention. They are forced to live, work and identify as Muslims. Since men are the economic providers in their household, families rely on them financially. If male converts are killed, female family members are left vulnerable to exploitation and poverty.

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

2) North Korea

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

North Korean escapees, the majority of whom are women, suffer from the fear of forced repatriation and severe interrogations, including torture. Others may face repeated trafficking, and a continuous cycle of violence and harassment from the Chinese who purchased them. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, North Korean repatriations were temporarily brought to a halt but have since resumed again ([RFA, 19 July 2021](#)).

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

Sources indicate that rape has commonly been used during the questioning of female repatriated escapees. Due to the fall in repatriations caused by COVID-19 travel restrictions, such instances decreased, it must however be recognized that these assaults represent a mere fraction of the total rapes committed against Christian women in any given year. A country expert explains how sexual abuse is used as a tactic by the authorities to intimidate and humiliate Christian women: “They are well aware that Christian women and girls understand and accept the importance of sexual purity according to the Scriptures. Therefore, violating that purity is a very common way for Kim's authorities of showing contempt for Christian women and their beliefs, as well as to shame them into submission in the presence of others.” This sexual exploitation is enabled by a society which is culturally patriarchal; women are treated relatively poorly and are considered subservient to men.

The practice of forced abortions is also an ongoing issue for Christian women, particularly for repatriated North Korean refugee women made pregnant by a Chinese father (often the result of being a victim of

human trafficking); there are many documented instances of North Korean border guards being instructed to carry out forced abortions to prevent the North Korean bloodline from being ‘defiled’ ([OCHCR, 2014, para 424ff](#)).

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

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

Commenting on the differences between the persecution of male and female Christians, a country expert explained that the authorities actively seek to shame males: The “authorities emphasize how deficient men and boys are by putting their faith in Christ instead of offering wholehearted loyalty to the Kim regime and the Worker’s Party. Such a shaming tends to be more effective on male pride than females. In addition, because Korea has long been a culture in which shame, guilt and saving face have a very high social value, men and boys tend to be especially vulnerable to public shaming.”

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

3) Somalia

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Women in Somalia mostly lead prescribed lives with little leeway for personal belief or expression. A woman does not have a voice in her community and is dependent on men. Young female converts to Christianity remain one of the most vulnerable populations. Commonly, a woman suspected of Christianity will be humiliated in public, kept under strict house arrest, raped, abducted, forcibly married to a radical sheikh or killed. If already married, she will likely be divorced and have her children taken away to ensure that they are raised in an Islamic way.

Forced and early marriages are commonplace (and legally permissible) in Somalia. As such, forced marriage – often to much older men – is easily accessible as a means of coercion to restore converts back to Islam. Some are pressured by families, whilst others are abducted by radical Muslims for the purpose of forced conversion, marriage and sexual slavery. Insecurity in the country due to al-Shabaab and clan militias has seen a concerning [80% rise in sexual violence](#), primarily against girls. As one country expert explains, “due to Sharia law and teaching of strict forms of Islam, there is extra pressure on girls/women to stick to the rules, even dress code... Sexual violence, not only against women, but also girls, is widespread.”

[Education](#) is often brief for girls, with only 5% making it to high school enrolment (No Ceilings: The Full Participation Project, accessed 2 November 2021). In education, Christian girls can be pressured into attending Islamic *Duksi* classes and dressing in al-Shabaab compliant burkas. In combination with discriminatory inheritance practices, this can exacerbate women’s economic vulnerability, which is often exploited. Christian women also suffer when their husbands are imprisoned or killed; widows tend to be forced to marry Muslim men, property is confiscated and the widow is left at the mercy of the man’s family. Many are taken advantage of by male relatives and young daughters married off. The family often ends up impoverished.

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

Somalia is a patriarchal society with high social control. Somali men and boys merely suspected of conversion to Christianity face extreme violations of their fundamental rights. They are at risk of being verbally abused, physically assaulted, imprisoned, heavily threatened, tortured, abducted, or killed in abhorrent ways. These are no idle threats and fear is a constant companion for Somali Christian men and boys.

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

Additionally, boys are expected to own and operate weapons, and many are abducted and indoctrinated by al-Shabaab. Families forcefully send their young men, including converts, to Islamic rehabilitation centers to be trained as al-Shabaab militia, or to be “re-oriented back to radical Islam” as one expert shared. If exposed within this context as Christians, they face further dangers; as one country expert notes, “it is even impossible to trust your own family members when it comes to converts.”

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

4) Libya

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

Female Christians often face the same pressure of persecution as men. However, as Libyan women tend to live secluded from other people and under strict familial control, the severity of their experience is greater. In general, women have a lower position within Libyan family life than men; this is caused by tribal norms corresponding to Sharia. It is extremely challenging for female converts to access Christian religious materials or meet with other Christians. If suspected of being interested in Christianity, a woman can face house arrest, sexual assault, forced marriage or even a so-called ‘honor killing.’ It is difficult for female converts to escape such dangerous situations. There is almost no scope for them to live autonomously, due to explicit restrictions on a woman becoming head of the household or family.

In light of Libya’s honor-shame culture, women and girls from primarily Libyan backgrounds are expected to uphold high norms regarding their sexuality and dress modestly. It is widely understood that failing to do so brings shame upon the wider family. A country expert summarizes: “Most things are related to the honor for women, as prescribed by the local culture.”

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

Christian Sub-Saharan migrant women and men attempting to cross Libya to reach Europe continue to be a significant group of vulnerable Christians in Libya. Christian migrant women are highly vulnerable to trafficking, abduction and sexual enslavement, especially when they are separated from their male companions - such as in migrant detention centers.

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

In general, men face higher risks of physical violence in Libya, due to an ongoing "cycle of violence, atrocities and impunity" according to the previous International Criminal Court [prosecutor](#) (UN News, 6 November 2019). Christian men face loss of employment, physical and mental abuse and eviction from their family home. As the providers for their family, Christian men who lose their ability to provide as a result of persecution often feel that they have lost their role in the family, causing psychological distress. The risks for Libyan Christian men are so high that the formation of fellowship groups is nearly impossible unless whole families convert.

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

Libyan men and boys have been increasingly forced to fight in militias, causing more and more to flee their home towns to evade such a fate. Migrant Christians in detention camps, too, are forced to fight. As a country expert explains, "men and boys are increasingly forced to fight in the militias. ... [M]igrant Christians in detention camps have been forced to fight as combatants or provide support for the war efforts of the militias." Refusal to fight can be met with death.

5) Yemen

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

Yemen is a strongly patriarchal society in which women enjoy few rights; women are expected to obey their fathers, brothers, uncles, and husbands. Without the permission of their male guardian, they do not have equal rights in relation to divorce, inheritance or child custody (HRW 2020). Conversion from Islam to Christianity is forbidden both in Islam and in Yemeni law. Within this patriarchal, Islamic context, a female converting to Christianity is considered a shameful act for the whole family.

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

Converts from a Muslim background are most vulnerable. In a typical scenario, female converts will have their telephone and other means of communication taken away. Next, she might be isolated in the home, physically and mentally abused, and possibly given in marriage to a devout Muslim, raped or even killed to ‘restore the honor’ of the tribe or family. The family control of girls is the cultural norm in much of the country, although much less so in major countries such as Sana'a and Aden.

Christian women and girls are also at the risk of being sexually abused at the hands of militias due to the concept of 'anfal', which permits non-Muslims in some circumstances to be treated as slaves as part of the spoils of war ([Quran, Sura 8](#)). Although no specific instances have been recorded, this is a source of fear for Christian women. According to country experts these groups are running prostitution rings in the country; both Christian migrants in Yemen, as well as Yemeni female Muslim converts to Christianity risk being exploited. There is no clear data currently available to indicate what extent Christians may have been raped while in detention, although this is believed to occur, particularly in Houthi-controlled areas.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Life in general in Yemen is tremendously difficult in an ongoing war with no religious freedom. The most common pressure for Yemeni male converts comes from family and community. Pressure varies in intensity according to the family hierarchy; it is most keenly felt by women and girls, followed by younger men, followed by older men (reflecting cultural levels of status and freedom).

All males, including Christians, can be forced to join militias, if they are of military age. Boys as young as seven are also recruited into militias (Human Rights Council, 2020). When boys are dragged into the army and war, it affects their education and future - not just because of the amount of time it takes from their lives - but also because of the highly controlled Islamic environment in which training takes place.

Male converts to Christianity face a greater risk of losing their job, being beaten and being imprisoned by the local authorities. Whereas women are most likely to experience pressures in the private sphere, men are more likely to experience challenges in the public sphere and Yemen’s collectivist culture. Within detention facilities, Christian detainees have reportedly experienced physical and mental torture. Pastors and church leaders are also in danger of imprisonment.

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

6) Eritrea

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

Female Christians are caught in a pincer of pressure from the Eritrean government and social pressures. Not only are Evangelicals and converts alike subject to increasing government persecution, but they experience the usual social and domestic pressures of belonging to an unacceptable minority. Converts face abduction, incarceration in the home, forced marriage, forced divorce and loss of child custody, particularly in rural areas. If a female Christian is abducted by a Muslim and forcibly married, or lured into a romantic relationship by one, she will be forced to accept his religion as well. Forced marriage is a widely reported tool utilized against female converts in Eritrea.

While pressure is reportedly highest against converts from a Muslim background and for those leaving the EOC to join another denomination, families have also been known to look down on converts, isolating them within the home. While parents may appear to fulfill their parental responsibilities, such as providing school fees, clothing and housing, they may be ignoring them entirely, causing psychological distress. In some situations, converts could be expelled from home, shunned without any help.

Whereas in many countries women are exempt from military service, in Eritrea, women are also subjected to obligatory military training and national service at the infamous SAWA military training camps, a highly controlled environment in which every behavior and belief is scrutinized. [Female conscripts](#) are vulnerable to various forms of gender-based violence, including from prisoner guards and commanders (HRW 2021). Many choose to flee the country in order to evade such a fate.

Hundreds of women also experience gender-based violence in detention centers. This is within the context of Eritrea’s practice of indefinite detention for no reason other than being Christian. A country expert explains: “Women detainees are reportedly under the responsibility of male staff in the main, as the majority of guards at detention centers are men, which exposes them to multiple forms of abuse, including sexual violence, rape or threats of rape and sexual harassment.”

Women detained or forced to escape the country are not the only victims. The families and children of such detainees and escapees will also be victims in that they will be denied the chance to see their loved ones, in addition to other punitive acts, simply for being a family member. In a similar vein, when men flee the country, or are killed or imprisoned for their faith, women are responsible for taking on family responsibilities in their absence, with many families ending up impoverished due to the lack of financial provision.

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

As is the case for women, male Christians are subject to the system of obligatory military conscription, which places them in a highly controlled environment. As a result, many young Eritreans seek to escape the country. It was hoped that the peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia might change this compulsory situation, but three years on and Eritrea finds itself fighting alongside Ethiopian federal soldiers against the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). While initially this was primarily limited to Tigray, the conflict has expanded to Afar and Amhara regions ([International Crisis Group, 2 April 2021](#)).

Everyday life is under scrutiny; phone calls are monitored, bandwidth is kept slow and a network of citizens (usually women) are tasked with spying on their neighbors. Indeed, the level of monitoring has caused Eritrea to hold the infamous title of [“Africa’s North Korea”](#) and to top the list of the [most censored countries](#) (The Economist, 14 Aug 2018; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2019).

Those suffering the most are Christians who are not recognized by the state. In Eritrea, there seems to be little difference in the treatment of genders as all who are found in secret cell group meetings suffer the same fate of arbitrary arrests and indefinite detention. However, pastors, who tend to be men, can be especially targeted by imprisonment. Any arrests among them causes a leadership vacuum. In cases where an arrested man is the breadwinner, his arrest causes economic distress to his family, an unstable childhood for his children and consistent fear. His children find they are often taunted by fellow children and branded as a ‘Pente’, a label which is deemed to be shameful across Eritrea.

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

7) Nigeria

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

In the North of Nigeria, and increasingly in the South, the situation of Christian women and girls continues to be dire. Raids by Boko Haram and the splinter group ISWAP, Fulani militants and armed ‘bandits’ have terrorized Christian communities. Women and girls have been raped, forced into sexual slavery, kidnapped for ransom and killed. There is a general practice of treating women as inferior to men, in rural regions especially, which makes their maltreatment easier. Women and girls are especially vulnerable to sexual violence in IDP camps. A Nigerian analyst comments: “The banditry, Fulani militia activity and herdsmen attacks have subjected a lot of Christian young women and girls to rape. In our interviews during our numerous visits to internally displaced persons camps, as high as fifty to sixty percent of the women and girls in camp have been either raped by bandits or kidnappers. About 80% percent of kidnapped victims that are women have been raped by their captors.”

Abduction is used regularly to depopulate Christian-dominated territory. Most commonly, Christian girls are abducted for the purpose of forced marriage and forced conversion – even women who are already married. A country expert comments: “Usually, the moment a Christian girl is abducted, her abductors ensure that they marry her off within one or two weeks. Even before marriage, she will be sexually abused to try to make her parents give up on her when she becomes pregnant” (in the case that she is rescued and returned to her parents). The label of “marriage” is used to mask and defend the actual slavery occurring. When parents try to rescue their child, they commonly face resistance from the community, police and judiciary, who argue the marriage is legitimate under Islamic law and the girl has accepted Islam. In addition to being ‘married’, girls abducted by militants have reportedly been used as suicide bombers or as fighters.

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

When women are raped, their husbands can sometimes struggle to move past the trauma – they may even view their wife as dirty or impure, particularly if pregnant. Many homes have broken up because of this. When girls are abducted, a deep sadness falls upon the family. Men often see it as their fault for not protecting their children adequately. The victims themselves, too, carry scars and trauma for a very long time, and can be stigmatized by communities. Christian communities therefore end up deeply fractured and there have been [calls for a greater response](#) to the gender-based violence (Amnesty International, 24 March 2021). The high rate of killings of Christian men also causes many dependent wives and children to fall into poverty or flee for safety.

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

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

In the North of Nigeria, and increasingly in the South, Christian men and boys are often specifically targeted and killed by actors including Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani militants and armed 'bandits'. Much of this violence happens through attacks on Christian communities in rural areas and at roadblocks. These

killings not only serve to eliminate the current generation of men and boys, but also guarantees a considerable fall in the birthrate of Christian families. A country expert comments: "A lot of [men and boys] are paying the supreme price for their faith on a daily basis."

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

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

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

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

8) Pakistan

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

While all women are vulnerable to gender-based violence in Pakistan, women from religious minorities face overt and violent forms of gender-specific religious persecution. In December 2019, the trafficking of women from Pakistan sold as ‘brides’ in China made headlines ([AP News, 7 December 2019](#)). These dangers, alongside more insidious forms of human trafficking that center around forced conversion, remain live risks for women from religious minorities ([CREID, 30 July 2021](#)).

Reports of the abduction of Christian women and girls have increased throughout the WWL 2022 reporting period, particularly in Punjab. Christian girls as young as 12 - primarily from poor families - are kidnapped, forcibly married, sexually assaulted and forced to convert to Islam on pain of death ([CLAAS, 18 August 2021](#); [CREID, November 2020](#)). A country expert explains the religiously-motivated ideology behind this trend: “By forcibly converting and marrying a 'former' Christian you receive a reward in heaven. This ideology goes hand in glove with the idea of conquering another faith group ... To ensure your victory the conqueror must take the women so that they cannot live as Christian or breed more Christians. These are socially sanctioned acts of violence.” In addition to abduction, reports indicate that Christian girls have been seduced as a means of converting them to Islam.

Many families never see their girls again, in part as the authorities rarely take meaningful action to bring perpetrators to justice. Should the case come to court, girls may be forced to testify that they converted voluntarily. The challenges involved represent a huge emotional strain for the families who constantly fear retribution from the perpetrators and their supporters. For victims who are recovered, the shame of abduction and rape places a huge shadow over their lives within Pakistan’s honor-based culture.

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

Christian women and girls are also trapped in cycles of debt and bonded labor, such as in brick-kiln factories. This affects Christians of both genders, although is a context in which female Christians may be additionally exposed to sexual violence. As a country expert explains, “the circular debt ensures enslavement of generations. The landlords enjoy charging extortionate rents to Christian families and violate Christian women at will (because Christians have no honor). Christians don't pay religious taxes but they are forced to pay in other ways.”

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

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

Blasphemy laws continue to provide the structure for much of the rights violations of Christian men in Pakistan. “Men and boys are especially likely to be accused of blasphemy as they form the majority of employed Christians,” a country expert explains, “this then means they are more likely to encounter intolerant Muslims who have a tendency to react in a highly defensive and accusatory way in response to perceived disrespect to Islam and the Prophet of Islam.” Christian men live in constant fear of blasphemy allegations, false charges, destruction of their property, arrest, imprisonment, beatings, torture and execution. Exemplifying the dangers, in late 2020 a Christian man was sentenced to death for having sent ‘blasphemous’ text messages to his former supervisor, having been in custody since 2013 ([Al-Jazeera, 8 September 2020](#)). As a country expert observed: “Men pay the price simply for being Christian in an Islamic world.”

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

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

9) Iran

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

Iranian women have little individual legal protection, making the situation particularly precarious for Christian women detained for their faith. According to some estimates, the majority of house-church members in Iran are women, as the domestic setting provides more opportunities for them to participate in ministry and leadership. While this has allowed many women to fulfil their spiritual calling, it has also made them more vulnerable. They risk being arrested and sexually harassed by the authorities during interrogation and imprisonment. Shaming women in this way is an effective way to stain their reputation and harm their social status, and can damage their chances of finding work.

With many churches forced to shut down and Christians increasingly isolated, some Christian women, particularly Muslim background converts, are forced to marry Muslims. This pressure from family and local community affects both women and girls; it is possible for girls as young as nine to [legally be married](#) (US State Department Human Rights Report for 2020, October 2021). If a female convert is an already-married mother, it is highly likely that the custody of the children will be taken from her in order to ensure the children are raised in an Islamic way. A country expert shares: “Forced separation of children from Christian mothers is one of the most terrifying acts for believer women.” Converts may also be placed under house-arrest and denied access to Christian community.

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

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

At a most basic level, Iranian law provides that [a woman who appears in public](#) without appropriate Islamic attire may be sentenced to flogging and being fined (Amnesty International, 28 May 2019). [Female activists](#) against the compulsory hijab have been imprisoned, fined, and flogged (International Christian Concern, 22 March 2021).

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

Despite the majority of house-church members now being women, more men are arrested, prosecuted, sentenced by the government, and often imprisoned for many years experiencing physical and mental abuse while detained. Men are more often arrested in urban areas, whereas in rural regions they are forced to flee the area and can be forced out of their homes. Lengthy imprisonments can cost families dearly; sometimes the strain and emotional pain caused by separation leads to divorce and child trauma.

Men are usually the primary providers for their families, especially if they have young children. When converting to Christianity, men risk losing their jobs, particularly if they have been arrested. If they apply for a business registration or trade permit and the officer discovers their Christian faith, the application is likely to be turned down. This puts extra financial and psychological pressure on the families. Younger converts may be banned from continuing with their education upon discovery of their faith.

When single Christian men are under acute stress through monitoring, threats (including the threat of apostasy) and harassment, they are likely to flee the country, which naturally impacts the family emotionally and financially. In contrast to women, men are not seen as 'misguided', but as willfully making wrong choices. Thus, their punishment is harsher, and they are more likely to suffer physical abuse, torture and longer prison sentences. When Christian men are forced to flee, it weakens the Church, depriving it of potentially experienced and mature male leaders.

10) India

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Denied food or water; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

India is a religiously diverse and democratic society whose national Constitution provides legal equality for all citizens irrespective of their religion, sex, race or caste, and prohibits religion-based discrimination. However, the reality is far different; other simultaneously existing laws uphold ancient traditions, which are by nature patriarchal and exploitative of weaker classes of society. As a country expert explained: ‘Women have fewer rights than men and are considered merely tools for community subjugation - gender violence on women is an expression of power over the other’.

Shame is a very powerful force in Indian society. Sexual attacks serve to shame the family, as a woman's sexual purity connotes the honor and prestige of her family. Daughters, sisters and wives of pastors are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, and verbal slurs. Young Christian women and girls are particularly vulnerable in tribal areas to sexual predation. Physical attacks on Christian women have historically included acid attacks, brutal beatings and killings. While both male and female converts face pressure if their faith is discovered, female converts are more vulnerable to physical, domestic violence. They further risk incarceration by their family and local community, forced marriage, forced divorce and being abandoned or expelled from their home or village. Social discrimination is widely utilized as a means of isolating and pressuring converts; they are banned from social life as well as communal resources, such as drinking water.

Women from the lower strata have always been exploited by high caste Hindus who mostly adhere to Hindutva’s ideology today. Many women from this lower caste community have turned to Christianity; this makes them a double target - for being Dalit and now Christian. As a country expert stated: “India's patriarchal society is possibly a worse enemy of women than religious bigotry. Together, the two make a fatal cocktail.”

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied communal resources; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Despite legal protection, Christian men who are discovered talking about Christianity or choosing to adhere to the Christian faith are likely to be subjected to violence in many forms. Men and boys are seen as physically strong, and so the persecution of Christian men targets their physical strength as well as their position as decision-maker in the family and head of the household (if older), or head of the church. Violations against men include brutal beatings, killings and 'emotional torture' such as being forced to watch family members being assaulted. Church leaders are particularly vulnerable; being a pastor continues to be one of the riskiest vocations in the country today. Hindu radicals target them and their families in order to set an example to the wider Christian community. Fear grows with each attack.

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

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

11) Saudi Arabia

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Forced divorce; Forced marriage; Travel bans/restrictions on movement
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied/restricted healthcare; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Women and girls have an extremely limited voice in Saudi Arabia’s Islamic, patriarchal society, and are under constant monitoring by their family and local community. As a country expert explains, for Saudi Christian women this situation becomes “amplified during persecution. They are seen as even less valuable and not worth hearing.”

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

Outside the context of marriages, sources report that instances of rape and sexual assault are commonplace across Saudi Arabia for the thousands of non-Saudi (especially Asian and African) housemaids across the country who are Christian (or non-Islamic), a position in which they are commonly abused and virtually treated as slaves. This reflects the subordinate position of women in Saudi society and their unprotected status when on their own (e.g. when working outside their home) which is strengthened by their nationality and religion (i.e. non-Saudi and non-Muslim).

Given such pressure - and the ultimate threat of honor killing - it comes as no surprise that many Saudi women choose to become secret believers. Fleeing is rarely an option, as despite [2019 legislation](#) allowing women to travel without a chaperone (HRW, 22 August 2019), the movement of women remains heavily controlled by male guardians who can easily withhold her passport, money and possessions (HRW 2021).

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

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

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

In a shame and honor culture, to bring shame on the family is the worst thing a son or father could do. Whereas female converts are often punished secretly or behind closed doors, male converts are punished publicly or openly within the family. They risk being publicly shamed, beaten, imprisoned, thrown out of their home, emotionally abused and threatened. They may be denied financial support, then offered material incentives to return to Islam and revoke the shame brought upon the family. Alternatively they might be taken to a Sheikh who will pressure them to recant.

Compounding the psychological trauma, families commonly cover up why they are maltreating their male family member. A country expert explained that one Christian “was disowned by his family who then lied to others about why [he was disowned] which further shamed him. They even posted lies about him on social media.”

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

12) Myanmar

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

The military coup of February 2021 implicates fresh concerns for women in Myanmar. Over the last decade some progress has been made on women’s rights in the country which are at risk of reversal, and the army, which has expanded its already considerable power base, is a [known perpetrator](#) of gender-based violence (Foreign Policy, 23 March 2021). Women have been heavily involved in [the protests](#) for these very reasons (Al-Jazeera, 25 April 2021). Rape and physical assault by the armed forces is a significant threat to Christian women, particularly those belonging to ethnic minorities.

Christians feel they are viewed as second-class citizens across Myanmar, without the same legal protection and rights as the Buddhist majority. Thousands have become IDPs and refugees due to the coup. Women in Myanmar are also subordinate; reflecting this, a traditional Burmese proverb says: “Husband is god, son is master” (Burma Library, “Social Roles and Gender Stereotypes”).

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

Among the Muslim Rohingya minority, non-family members also utilize marriage as a means of cultivating Islam among Christian girls. Rohingya extremist groups reportedly abduct Rohingya Christian women, forcibly marry them to Muslim men and attempt to convert them to Islam. Additionally, there are instances when men have pretended to be a Christian – going so far as to be baptized – in order to find a Christian girl. After getting married, they then apply pressure on their wife to convert to Islam.

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

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

In Myanmar, men are culturally encouraged to find work as the [primary breadwinners](#) within the family unit; if they lose their job or are driven from their village or town because they are Christians, the whole family suffers and it causes emotional distress (Care International, “Rapid Gender Analysis, Myanmar – Rakhine State”). Such persecution is real and tangible for male converts, who have fewer job opportunities available to them. Others find themselves in cycles of forced labor. Converts also face threats, ridicule and physical beatings.

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

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

13) Sudan

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

Women have encountered rapid change in Sudan in the past few years. Under the transitional government in 2020, there were positive changes impacting women’s rights and safety, including the elimination of the apostasy law, the removal of permits from male relatives for women to travel, and the banning of FGM ([Human Rights Watch, 16th July 2020](#)). It was also [announced](#) that Sudan’s transitional government had agreed to separate religion from the state, ending 30 years of Islamic rule (Bloomberg, 4 September 2020).

However, in 2021, COVID-19 and the deteriorating economic conditions led to increases in domestic violence, including physical and sexual violence, and an increase in forced marriage ([UN News, 19 July 2021](#)). The recent military coup on 25 October 2021 threatens the progress on women’s rights, with women also facing targeted violence amid the unrest ([UN News, 5th November 2021](#)). Female Christians continue to face tremendous challenges and are at a disadvantage in society simply because of their gender. Continuing gaps in protective legislation remain avenues for religious persecution.

Christian women and girls, particularly converts, are vulnerable to rape, forced marriage and domestic violence. On a broader level, radical Islamic groups have reportedly been kidnapping Sudanese girls for marriage and/or sexual slavery. Converts may also be isolated within the home to reduce the embarrassment and shame of the conversion on the family, as well as to ensure they cannot meet with other Christians. Converts will also be denied inheritance and if already married, divorced from their husbands. A country expert explains: “The laws on marriage and divorce particularly place women and girls in vulnerable positions since they have fewer rights under custom and sharia law, both of which require them to be submissive to their husbands.”

It is challenging for women and girls to report sexual crimes and domestic violence to the authorities. The testimony of women is not considered equivalent to that of men, and there is significant social stigma attached to rape that deters from coming forward. Additionally, it has been reported that policemen themselves have raped Christian girls, which feeds into a landscape of impunity for perpetrators. Women

play a major role in raising their children, representing the family at societal events and helping their husbands with agricultural tasks. The persecution of women and girls therefore has a rippling negative impact on the wider family and community.

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

Violent Islamic militancy continues to plague many African nations and has led to an increase in the persecution of Christians. The government of Sudan targets male Christians with a variety of serious false charges, including “terrorism”. Church leaders, who are predominately male, are the most frequent targets and government security forces monitor their activities daily. A country expert summarizes: “In most cases the persecution [by governmental and non-governmental forces] takes place in the form of criminal charges against pastors for things they did not commit.”

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

Men are usually the head of households and providers of the family. If they are unable to provide for their families due to persecution, the family will experience trouble financially. Preceding, but especially during the recent unrest, men are particularly important for security; in remote parts of the country, absence can lead to family property being looted and wife and daughters being sexually attacked.

14) Iraq

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

After years of violence, peace remains uncertain in Iraq. During the war against IS, IS was known for its atrocious treatment of women, especially using those from religious minorities for forced conversion and sexual enslavement. For survivors who returned to their families, it has been difficult to process the trauma they experienced due to the high levels of shame associated with sexual violence.

Women remain unprotected from gender-based violence and due to social stigma, victims of sexual crimes choose to remain silent. Rape victims – who can be forced to marry their rapist under Iraqi law – often choose not to report incidents of assault to avoid such a fate. In some areas, Christian women and girls choose to wear veils (as Islamic women do) for their own safety. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, there were no reported incidents of rape; however, as a country expert explains: “Christian girls in Iraq, especially teenagers, are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment by their Muslim neighbors.” They are also reportedly vulnerable to sexual harassment from Shiite militias, and even at the hands of the police force ([USDS, May 2021](#)).

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

A female convert might also be divorced by her husband and lose custody of her children; while both male and female converts risk being divorced by their non-believing spouse, Iraqi divorce laws make women more vulnerable as they have fewer legal rights. If single, a female convert may be forcibly married to a conservative Muslim. The attitude of the spouse’s family is crucial in this issue. Further adding challenges, female converts from Islam cannot officially marry male Christians, as the Iraqi state still considers them to be Muslims; Muslim women are not allowed to marry non-Muslims.

Single Christian girls without a convert background have also been reportedly ‘lured’ by Muslim men, who then harass them and force them into marriage. As a country expert explained, “the target girl is often beautiful and educated, and the parents cannot retrieve her despite the complaints, because she has lost her purity and is afraid to be a blemish to the Christian community.” Within the wider community, Christian women are viewed as being women and girls who are loose and free. Women have reported that they have suffered sexual harassment and vulgar threats because of this perception, including in the workplace.

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

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

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

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

These factors greatly increase the already strong motivation for emigration; the loss of Christian men not only affects their direct families, but also the local churches which consequently find themselves confronted with a lack of potential leadership. Further weakening the church, priests and Christian leaders (the majority of whom are men) remain vulnerable to kidnappings and killings, particularly in the Nineveh plains region. As a country expert explained, “targeting Christian leaders has always had a massive

psychological impact on the rest of their flock and led to an increased Christian exodus. Pastors and the families of the priests and their children and relatives were also socially and politically persecuted, which is a strategic move. As long as they remain in the area, their congregations will also.” While there were no known instances of abductions or killings of church leaders in the WWL 2022 reporting period, it remains a possibility, particularly if they are considered to be speaking out against political leaders or militias.

15) Syria

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

After years of ongoing violence, peace remains uncertain in Syria. More than a million people have been displaced through the conflict ([Global Conflict Tracker](#), last accessed 22 December 2021) and sexual violence remains an ongoing issue of concern (HRW 2021). In a context of instability and restrictions on religious freedom, women and girls from religious minority groups - including Christians - risk abduction, sexual harassment and rape. Whilst the rate of instances has dropped dramatically since IS dominated areas of Syria, this remains a risk in government-controlled areas and in rebel-held territory - though the threat is higher in the latter. Although there were also some reports of sexual violence against men and boys, women remain more vulnerable to such violent acts.

Not only Islamic militant groups constitute a threat for Christian women and girls. Christian women and girls regularly experience harassment and acts of discrimination in the public sphere. For example, if a Muslim supermarket owner sees a woman in a Hijab and another who is wearing a cross, she could keep the Christian waiting and potentially even raise the price for her. Women have also reported being spat at in the street and discriminated against in the workplace, or while accessing medical services. Christian women are most vulnerable to persecution in Islamist-held areas. In northeast Syria, where Islamic State’s religious police has made a comeback, they must completely cover themselves in public space for fear of violence ([Al-Monitor, June 2021](#)).

For female converts, violence can come from their own families and communities, particularly those from a Muslim background. Such pressure affects women and girl converts most, then younger men and lastly older men, reflecting the levels of status and freedom generally within Islamic culture. Leaving Islam is a great taboo and seriously violates family honor. Women are, as a country expert described, a “soft target.” They may face domestic violence, forced marriage to a Muslim, or even be killed to restore the honor of the family.

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

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

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

Within a context of [ongoing violence and proxy conflicts](#), a common fear among indigenous Christians – and among many other Syrian communities - is that young men will be forcibly conscripted into the Syrian Army or to other military factions, such as the armed wing of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party referred to as People's Protection Units or YPG (Global Conflict Tracker, last accessed 22 December 2021). In Syria there is enforced military service for all men at the age of 18; those wishing to be exempt must pay a hefty fine, prompting many men to consider emigration. Service within the military can prevent men from working, or even starting a family. Within the military, Christian men face further discrimination. As an expert explains, “A Christian in the military can only go up with promotion to a certain point, they will never make a Christian highest on the ranking. This forces Christians in the army or government to apply for early retirement.”

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

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

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

16) Maldives

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

Given the extremely strict interpretation of Islam in the Maldives, Christian men and women must be secret believers. If a Christian woman or girl is discovered to be a Christian, she will be pressured into marriage and be exposed to domestic violence in an attempt to force her to reject her new-found faith. NGOs have reported ongoing community pressure on women to wear Islamic clothing and harassment of women who choose not to do so (US Department of State IRFR 2020). A country expert

explained: “Nationals suspected of being Christian are likely to experience shaming and threats from the community.” As such they have little choice but to conform.

Despite the closely-knit social control on the islands, abuse, rape and sexual harassment are surprisingly common in a culture that generally excuses gender-based violence within the home. According to a country expert, “sexual abuse and child abuse is rising as well as domestic violence”. This observation is supported by reports which further note that the COVID-19 lockdown has been a contributing factor to a spike in violence (HRW 2021). The threat of sexual and physical abuse is used as a tool of religious persecution against Christian women.

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

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

17) China

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Trafficking; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

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

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

China’s (now abandoned) one-child policy is notorious for having created a gender imbalance. The consequences of this policy are interacting with the vulnerability of Christian communities in neighboring countries. Female Christians from neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Myanmar caught in China’s network of trafficking may be sold as brides ([USDS Trafficking in Persons Report 2021, pp.179-180](#)).

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Similar to the situation facing Christian women, male Christian leaders are generally the main target for government surveillance. Catholic priests and high-profile house church leaders have been abducted. “In most of the cases,” a country expert explains, “it's rather common for house church pastors or leaders to be asked to attend a meeting (where they are investigated by the authorities) they are closely monitored and restricted from leaving the country. Their family members could also face interrogation or threats.” Due to such pressure, some church leaders choose to emigrate.

Although they face similar pressure to women, men and boys are at greater risk of being physically abused, such as being beaten by police officers. Furthermore, men are often still the financial providers of the family. Consequently, if they are taken away - e.g. through arrest or even if they are just threatened with losing their jobs, especially when they are civil servants, teachers or medical staff – this puts the whole family under financial strain. In many cases, being held in custody for weeks or months and being treated harshly there leaves physical trauma, so that in some cases it is impossible for them to go back to work.

18) Qatar

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

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

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

arrest. It is much easier to apply pressure like this on women and girls. Converts also risk facing sexual violence, or in the most extreme cases, honor-killings. Thus, those who convert tend to remain silent about their conversion.

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

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

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

Besides the official restrictions on non-Islamic religious expression in Qatari society, Christians try to keep a low profile by self-censoring. When a Christian comes under public scrutiny, it is usually a male Christian; since men are most visible in the public sphere, they are at the forefront of interaction with the authorities. Those in Christian leadership, who are typically male, are required to report details of church activities, further subjecting them to scrutiny.

Male converts are not immune to domestic pressure. A country expert summarizes: “Among the small number of local believers, most pressure is from family and community – and this would typically be felt most keenly by women and girls, followed by younger men, followed by older men (reflecting levels of status and freedom generally within their culture).” When their conversion becomes known, the larger family can threaten that their wives and children will be taken away and placed with another family. In the ‘best’ circumstances, the wives could agree to live with their husband on the condition that the children will not be informed of the faith of the husband. Such converts might be able to privately carry

out acts of Christian worship, but they cannot then share their faith with their children. These combined restrictions mean that Qatari men are effectively isolated and find it very difficult to meet with other Christians or be taught and grow in their Christian faith. In more extreme cases, men can face physical trauma or even death for their faith.

Furthermore, Christian men are also under pressure in the area of employment, since the loss of a man’s status and job will affect the whole family through loss of income, future prospects and social isolation. They may also be victims of unjust court cases and false imprisonment, although instances of this are relatively rare. As men are the primary providers, if he is imprisoned or persecuted at work, the loss of income can affect his whole family and threaten his sense of purpose.

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

19) Vietnam

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Forced divorce
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Gender equality has been a topic given much attention in Vietnam. Unlike so many countries where women are at a significant economic disadvantage, Vietnam has one of the highest participation rates of women in the workplace. 79% of women are in the workforce, compared to 86% of men (The Economist, 8 June 2019). Nevertheless, women bear an unequal share of domestic work in the home. As in much of Communist Asia, women are traditionally expected to care for their parents, which requires a significant investment of time and energy. Despite socialist ideals of equality, Confucian values remain, embodied in sayings such as “1 boy is something, 10 girls is nothing” (Inside Asia, accessed 24 November 2021). This is also reflected in Vietnam’s son-bias and the ongoing practice of sex-selective abortions, with the sex ratio at birth one of the most unequal globally (VN Express, 19 July 2020).

Within this context, female Christians face pressure both for their faith and their gender. Some Christian women, particularly converts and those in tribal cultures, may be under pressure in the home from family members. A country expert explains: “Mostly when the wife or the child in a family converts to Christ, she

would be kicked out of the house, have her inheritance taken back, [and be] mocked by relatives.” For example, within marriages, women face oppression, violence and threats of divorce from their husbands. This reinforces the feeling that they are unequal, creating fear and despondency.

Christian women and girls continue to be victims of sexual assault for their faith, in ongoing situations resulting from forced marriage and the trafficking of brides to China among Hmong women (in northern provinces). Reports also indicate the targeting of ethnic and religious minorities (Global Human Rights Defence, 6 October 2021).

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

Although men generally have [higher positions than women](#) in the workplace (International Labor Organization), Christian men also face discrimination and harassment at work, with some losing their jobs altogether because of their faith. Government officials have monitored and interfered with the work of known Christians. As men are the primary providers in Vietnam, this paralyses the whole family economically and weakens their place within society. If they are church leaders, their congregations are weakened and may even face closure.

Christian men in Vietnam are targets for arrest (on faith-related grounds) and abduction, causing many to flee their villages. According to a [2019 Amnesty International report](#), 128 prisoners of conscience were in prison at the time of publication, including several Catholic activists who were speaking out for religious freedom. Generally, once in custody, Christian detainees suffer harsh treatment, physical beatings and are put under pressure to renounce their Christian faith. A country expert recounts: “A brother was beaten by authorities after he and other believers were caught doing Bible study in his home and they were arrested where they spent a day and a night in the prison.” Male Christians can also expect physical violence from villagers or the authorities, even risking death for their faith.

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

20) Egypt

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

There have been [reports](#) that Christian women are targeted for marriage by grooming, rape and forced conversion by Islamist networks, mainly in rural areas, villages and southern towns (World Watch Monitor, 14 September 2017). Police response has been often complicit or apathetic and many women remain missing. The psychological toll is high, and many women live in fear, especially in rural areas. They feel as though they cannot leave the house by themselves and at times they will ask for male company for protection. There are also reports that Christian girls are lured into marriage; these girls are often under-age and come from vulnerable families, often from situations of domestic abuse. Traditional practices do not help in this regard: Early marriage is part of the [norm](#) in more rural and traditional areas (Girls Not Brides: Egypt). Girls can also struggle to access education ([International Christian Concern, 1 August 2021](#)). Older married Christian women whose husbands regularly work away have also been targeted. This can also devastate their husbands.

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

Egypt has had a reputation for having relatively high rates of sexual harassment and violence within the Middle East. Due to international pressure and internal activists, there have been some [improvements](#) in protection for those reporting sexual abuse (Reuters, 16 August 2020). Official statistics for past years are lacking, in part because women and girls refrain from reporting incidents [out of fear](#) of retaliation and the stigma attached to sexual abuse (New Lines, 4 October 2020). Giving some indication of a baseline from which these improvements have come, a 2013 survey (UN Women, “Study on Ways and Methods to Eliminate Sexual Harassment in Egypt,” p.6), reported that over 99% of women in Egypt have experienced sexual harassment, regardless of what they wear or what their religion is. A country expert comments:

“Within the Middle East, even before Saudi Arabia or Iran, Egypt holds the infamous title of the country with the highest rates of sexual harassment and violence. In such an environment and without societal protection of women, Christian women are particularly vulnerable.” This is reinforced by a study that shows Cairo as the most dangerous megacity for women in the world ([Thomas Reuters, 16 October 2017](#)).

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

Christians in Egypt often feel they are being treated as second class citizens in a Muslim-majority country. Exemplifying this, the number of Christian in senior military or government positions is minimal. Unemployment is a great pressure on men throughout the country, but especially in Upper Egypt. Particularly in rural areas, it is hard for Christian young men to find a job. Further exemplifying economic discrimination, there have been instances of Christian men experiencing discrimination simply due to their Christian names. According to [Daraj](#) (14 March 2021), only 12 Christian players have been part of Egypt’s Premier League over 30 years. As the main financial provider, this hinders a Christian man’s ability to provide and impacts his self-confidence, which in turn affects his family. The strain of these dynamics has reportedly caused higher rates of domestic violence and divorce. Perpetrators have also used these financial difficulties to convert younger men to Islam, luring them with financial incentives.

Church leaders - most of whom are male - are particularly vulnerable to rights violations, in part as they are easily identifiable as Christians. The harassment and killing of clergy has evoked some feelings of fear and helplessness in the Christian community and has been a factor in emigration spikes. Those who speak out against injustices are also targeted. As already mentioned above, in November 2019, Ramy Kamel, a Christian journalist and activist was arrested for his continued reporting on violence and discrimination against Christians in Egypt and has since been charged for “joining a terrorist organization” and “spreading false news”.

Social media can also trigger physical violence and arrest. In August of 2020 a 65-year-old Christian was arrested and jailed for a ‘blasphemous’ post on Facebook. Coptic activists and researchers have also been arrested for "undermining social order". Converts can be particularly targeted and some male converts are eventually forced to flee the country.

21) Uzbekistan

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

While laws in Uzbekistan give equal rights to men and women, traditional Islamic culture places women lower than men and subservient to them within the family context. Total submission is expected from women to their parents, or if married, to their husbands. Perpetrators of violence against women commonly go unpunished, in part due to the lack of legislation addressing domestic violence (HRW 2021).

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

Female converts, particularly those in conservative regions, run the risk of being kidnapped by their own communities and married off to a Muslim. While no cases have been reported in the WWL 2022 reporting period, this remains an ongoing risk. Families, too, arrange such marriages in the hope that the convert will return to Islam. Sexual violence within those marriages is an often unacknowledged component that becomes normalized under the legitimization that marriage gives. If already married at the point of conversion, Muslim husbands commonly divorce their wives and deny them their possessions. Pressure to divorce often comes from the wider family network. As a country expert explains, “the family most definitely would seek to remove their family member from the influence of a convert out of fear of evangelizing.”

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

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

Church leaders, most of whom are men, are common targets for violations of rights. Typically, they will be fined, detained, denied exit visas to leave the country, or put under house arrest. They can be fined for such offences as meeting illegally, possession of religious literature, or having Christian songs on their smartphones. The persecution of church leaders is a deliberate tactic, as targeting them causes a ripple effect, spreading fear and anxiety throughout their congregations. Pastors and lay leaders of unregistered churches in particular have been insulted, beaten and humiliated.

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

Converts to Christianity also suffer from verbal, physical and psychological abuse, regularly being mocked in their places of work and study and coming under greater pressure from police officials. In addition, the obligation to fulfil military service also exposes Christian men to hostile situations and harassment.

22) Algeria

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

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

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

In the light of this pressure and violence, many female converts opt to hide their faith and live as secret believers. Should their family discover their Christian faith, it is likely that unmarried converts would be threatened with forced marriage to a non-Christian as a corrective measure, and to restore them to the Islamic faith. This can also be used as an effective threat against Christian women. If already married at the point of becoming a Christian, her husband can divorce her, use her faith to exploit her, or restrict her access to Christian religious materials. A country expert comments: “the threat of divorce seems to be used often and it is likely that some MBBs [Muslim background believers] do not (publicly) convert to avoid the shame related to it, which especially applies to women.”

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

Christian men in Algeria regularly experience community and economic pressure, facing harassment in workplaces and communal spaces. As men are the main providers in Algerian families, the loss of work can have a crippling effect on the whole family, creating fear and a sense of helplessness. While not common, men are also more likely to be detained, which also affects their ability to work. If imprisoned, they can leave behind children and families who may struggle without a financial provider.

Families are often the source of additional violations, such as physical beatings, being forced out of the home, verbal insults and threats. In comparison to other Christian men, male converts face the most severe violations of religious freedom. They suffer ostracism and rejection not just from their families, but from the wider community too. Upon discovery of their faith, they may also be beaten and taken to the local mosque by force. Under such pressure, converts are forced to live out their faith in secret. A country expert explains that for men, it "starts with pressure, intimidation and beatings first and when that doesn't work, the person is asked to choose between their Christian faith and their family".

23) Mauritania

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

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

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

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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government

Group	Male Pressure Points
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

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

Christian men have also been imprisoned for anti-terrorism and cybercrime offenses, charged for “undermining national security by insulting Islam and threatening Mauritania’s sacred principles”, as a country expert explained. Guilty verdicts can result in long prison sentences and high fines.

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

24) Mali

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

There has been a resurgence of attacks by Islamic militants since late 2019, in a broader context of instability. Militant groups kidnap girls, forcibly marry them to some of their members, and keep girls in sexual slavery. Whilst this does not affect Christian girls alone, it is considered a common tactic used by Islamic militants to spread Islam, and is a widely feared threat for female Christians. A country expert

comments: “Abducting Christian girls and forced marriage is considered as one means of spreading Islam by the extremist groups.”

Christian women live in an ambiance of Islamic culture with its imposed dress code. They experience social rejection and when facing persecution, the children suffer repercussions of whatever befalls their parents. When parents are separated, or fathers are killed or some other loss of subsistence income occurs, some Christian girls feel they have no option to survive but prostitution. Widows are also particularly vulnerable to this.

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

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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

As violent militant attacks continue across Mali, Christian men and boys are particularly subject to death-threats and violent, physical attacks because of their faith. Targeted attacks on Christian homes and businesses are effectively being used to impoverish families. This dire situation for Christians can be exacerbated by the targeted social rejection or the blocking of access to positions of responsibility and scholarships. Converts face the greatest level of persecution in this regard. Married males may additionally be forcibly divorced by their wives.

Within the context of widespread poverty and [ongoing violence](#) in one of Africa’s poorest nations, men and boys are exposed to recruitment by jihadist groups where they will be forcibly converted to Islam (Human Rights Watch, 22 October 2020). They may also be abducted by such groups and killed. Those living in rural and remote areas in northern parts of the country are especially vulnerable to forced recruitment into violent groups. This has a devastating effect on their families and fellow Christians who are traumatized by such persecution. In an attempt to protect Christian boys, they may be separated from their parents and moved to safer areas, but this creates other challenges.

The loss of Christian men and boys financially weakens families, as males are the primary providers in Mali. Furthermore, loss of men and boys mean less protection for the family and weakens the Church in Mali.

25) Turkmenistan

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

Within Turkmenistan’s patriarchal and Islamic culture, domestic violence is the greatest threat for Christian women who live with non-Christians. Total submission is expected, both to their husbands as well as to their parents. Female converts therefore, who by turning away from Islam challenge the existing accepted social order, are particularly vulnerable to persecution. They face harsh physical beatings, house arrest, verbal abuse, threats and rejection. They may even be sexually assaulted as a form of punishment, although such instances are rarely reported due to the attached stigma and shame, and the impunity granted to perpetrators.

In one recent case, upon converting to Christianity, a woman was beaten every day by her husband in front of her children, up until the point that he became a Christian. “I expect many female converts experience the same beatings and other abuse,” a country expert explained, “as it is part of the culture to treat women in such a way if they show disobedience to their Muslim husbands or other family, if unmarried.”

Female converts in conservative regions run the risk of being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim, as a corrective measure. Converts may also be forced into marriages not due to kidnappings, but due to the

obligation to follow pre-marital arrangements made by her parents prior to conversion. Considering such pressure, many women choose to live as secret believers upon their conversion out of fear.

More broadly, abusing women can be used as an instrument to intimidate and cause distress for Christian husbands and family members, thereby pressuring the wider Christian community and fostering fear and feelings of helplessness across the Turkmen Church. As a country expert describes, the persecution of women causes “anger, fear and anxiety in other family members.”

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

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

Church leaders in Turkmenistan are especially targeted for persecution. Muslims consider them primarily responsible for leading people away from Islam and attack those they deem to be most active evangelistically. The state authorities regard them as primary targets to control Christian activities; they expect a certain level of cooperation from those in leadership to inform them of anybody with radical or 'extremist' views. With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that the authorities also influence the choice of who assumes leadership positions. Church leaders also face challenges in obtaining religious training; many have been denied exit visas when going to Christian conferences and seminars. Tight restrictions exist over religious education and institutions in Turkmenistan; training can only be conducted in special, state-licensed religious institutions. There are, however, no such institutions in Turkmenistan.

Christian men also face discrimination, intolerance and bullying within the context of the armed forces; military service remains mandatory in Turkmenistan, and objection on grounds of conscience is not permitted. Those who refuse, risk imprisonment. Additionally, male converts face harassment and

interrogation by their families and local communities. They may also experience threats, disinheritance, shaming and beatings.

26) Laos

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

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

In Lao culture, value is placed on marital status. As a country expert explains: “If you are not married by a certain age, it means you are not a good person.” Christian women are undesirable marriage prospects, and so single Christian women attract additional insults and threats, as are deemed to be of lesser worth.

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

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

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

Church leadership in Laos tends to be dominated by men, a role that has become frequently targeted. Pastors are vulnerable to attacks on churches and to incarceration by the authorities. According to country experts, the detention of Christian leaders has increased over the past months, with at least 12 elders and pastors detained. One pastor was held for more than a year and was only released upon paying a large fine. The economic pressure of fines such as these, as well as the time when the church leader is absent, weakens church congregations and evokes fear. Families are similarly affected by these detentions, as Christian men remain the primary providers in Laos.

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

A major problem across Laos that affects boys and young adults is drugs, which are inexpensive and widely accessible. A country expert explained: “Non-Christian boys will try to influence Christian boys by letting them try cigarettes, alcohol, and other types of drugs for free at first until they become addicted. Then, they would convince them to abandon their Christian faith because they cannot be a Christian and do these things.” Given the limited educational and professional opportunities afforded to Christians, many men and boys are drawn into addiction.

27) Morocco

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

According to reports, most people in Morocco who declare their Christian faith are men, because they are less vulnerable to pressure than women. Although women's rights in Morocco have developed over the last sixteen years, which has given women more legal equality, women in Morocco remain in a generally less advantageous position than men (HRW 2021). For example, they have few economic opportunities, as highlighted in Georgetown's "[Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20](#)" (p.15), making them dependent on men. Cultural expectations bind women to the home and domestic duties, especially in rural areas.

Converts from an Islamic background are most vulnerable to religious persecution. While all Christians from an Islamic background can, in practice, be denied their rights to inheritance or family affiliation, this is a particular risk for women. They are also more vulnerable to arbitrary divorce and the denial of access to their children. A country expert comments: "Often women do not reveal their faith due to the seriousness of the type of persecution they may be subjected to. If she is married to a Muslim, she can be divorced, beaten, expelled, or denied custody to her kids." Personal status law follows the country's Maliki-Ashari Sunni interpretation of Sharia which enables such persecution.

Christian converts also at risk of domestic confinement, forced marriage to a non-Christian and being expelled from the home. In some instances, the pressure is simply so intense that the girl relents and agrees to a marriage to someone who does not share her faith in order to escape the pressure of her family. As these pressures demonstrate, religious persecution against women characteristically takes place within the private sphere, in the family home. Family members fear the scandal of their daughter's conversion, particularly if she is bold enough to demonstrate it in public. Considering these pressures, it is extremely difficult for converts to grow in their faith. Gaining access to Christian religious materials is extremely difficult. If found with a Bible, she will be severely beaten. Christian women using

the Internet as a way to counter isolation, risk experiencing cyber harassment for their faith and self-expression.

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

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

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

In general, converts to Christianity are among the most vulnerable in Moroccan society, although typically face fewer pressures than female converts. As a country expert comments: “Most converts are from an Islamic background to Christianity, and most of them are men, because the margin of freedom for men is wider, and because our society is patriarchal, men are less persecuted.” Nonetheless, by leaving Islam, they are perceived to bring shame upon their families and will face a wide variety of pressure.

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

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

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

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

28) Indonesia

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Gender inequality in Indonesia is an ongoing issue acknowledged by the government. Despite the attention, patriarchal gender norms, child marriage and education disparities remain [ongoing issues](#) (World Bank Blogs, 14 December 2020), and it is reported that 60% of Indonesian women have faced [verbal sexual harassment](#) (The Guardian, 18 July 2019). Recent media reports have highlighted a lack of effective implementation of legislation, noting that it is often challenging for victims to report incidents and [access justice](#), particularly in the context of COVID-19 which has caused a rise in gender-based and domestic violence (Jakarta Post, 10 March 2021).

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

Women who convert to Christianity face violence, psychological abuse, and death threats if their faith is discovered by their families. Many women within marriages may choose to keep it a secret for this reason,

also risking separation from their children if their husbands find out about their faith. A country expert also raises the issue of verbal violence: “Christian women [are targeted] through harsh insults, threats to be killed and so on.”

In addition, Christian women are marginalized through enforced religious dress codes. In provinces like Aceh, women are required to wear a hijab, especially within the government office. Women who are caught not wearing the hijab may face bullying, interrogation and labelling as immoral women. However, there has been some progress in 2021, with the government [banning](#) compulsory religious clothing in schools, although this progress has been reversed by the courts (BBC News, 5 February 2021).

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

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

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

29) Bangladesh

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

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

In this context, women and girls – particularly converts – are most vulnerable to rights violations from their nuclear family, extended family, friends, neighbors and local community. Conversion is viewed as a betrayal of their culture and religion and as such, Christian women and girls can face harassment from their community, especially if they do not conform to expected modes of dress. Because women and girls are mostly dependent on males, sexual assault, rape, forced divorce and forced marriage are common forms of religious persecution. They are not only abused physically, but also mentally, and can be targeted through house arrest, isolating them from churches and communities. According to [reports](#), violence against women and girls in Bangladesh increased during the COVID-19 crisis and female Christians have been vulnerable to these forms of persecution (UN Women and others, March 2021). A country expert explained some of the family and community dynamics in this way: “Oftentimes the fundamentalists rape minority women including underage girls in front of their families as a consequence of continuing to live in a Muslim country, as they claim it.”

Abduction and forced marriage remain a significant threat facing Christian women and girls, including in [refugee camps](#) (Human Rights Watch, 13 February 2020). Many kidnapped girls remain missing and law enforcement has been inadequate. A country expert commented: “In spite of innumerable instances of kidnap and rape, law enforcement has turned a blind eye to the issue and utterly fails to do anything to discourage the practice.” Victims of sexual abuse struggle to move on from the trauma, particularly if they become pregnant by their abuser.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

One result of the patriarchal cultural norms in Bangladesh is that males generally become Christians first, followed by their families later. As leaders within their families, men and boys often face persecution first. They are commonly beaten for ‘betraying their culture and religion’ and threatened. Pressure from community members and local Muslim leaders has also caused men to flee from their homes.

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

As men are the main providers, if they lose their job because of their faith – or are imprisoned – it will affect their whole family. The additional economic hardships of the COVID-19 crisis has pushed many families to breaking point. A country expert commented: “As a male-dominated country, according to the family structure of Bangladesh, males are in the position of leading the family and other family members depend on them. If persecution comes among men, it’s obvious that this will severely affect other members of Christian families and communities.”

30) Colombia

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

Despite the cessation of formal hostilities in Colombia in 2016, violence remains rife; cases of sexual violence against women [continue](#) in rural areas where armed groups use this as a weapon of war to generate fear (HRW 2021). Women belonging to indigenous and Afro-Colombia ethnic groups are disproportionately [affected](#) by conflict-related violence (ONU Mujeres, Colombia). For instance, within indigenous communities, the authorities oppose Christians who refuse to accept the indigenous rites and customs. Christian women may be promised in marriage to non-Christian men in order to eradicate their faith, or be abandoned by their husbands, separated from their children, threatened and ostracized by the community. This exposes them to forced displacement where they are vulnerable to criminal groups, trafficking and sexual exploitation.

In areas under criminal control, the guerrilla indoctrination of children also affects Christian girls, since they not only have to accept the violent ideologies imposed despite their faith, but their vulnerability exposes them to becoming victims of abduction, rape, sexual harassment and trafficking. Such criminal activity worsened during the pandemic, and spiked rates of forced recruitment and forced prostitution were observed.

In gang-controlled territories, some girls are ‘bought’ from their parents on pain of death. This phenomenon also affects Christian families who are forced to give up their daughters, targeted for their perceived purity and obedience, to cartel leaders for sexual purposes – or even marriage. In other instances, the girl may be targeted for seduction. This serves to both satisfy the sexual desires of the criminal commanders, as well as to silence the work of churches. “Strategically, they seduce them with gifts and by talking to them about how good it is to have money and independence from their parents, that is, to do what they want,” a country expert explained. “When the girls refuse, but the criminals have focused on them, they appeal to death threats against their families, so the girls end up giving in.”

Girls have also been put under strong pressure to use contraceptives and undertake abortions. This pressure is carried out more aggressively in schools in rural areas, where pupils are pressured into the use

of contraceptives despite their parents' disagreement. Many Christians feel this interferes with the parents' right to educate their children according to their principles and beliefs.

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

Christian men have always faced a higher level of threats and violence in regions of armed conflict, partly because they represent the head of the family (or of the church, if they are pastors or priests). As the providers for the family, men face being extorted to provide finances for armed groups; non-church leaders face the risk of being killed; pastors or priests may be physically assaulted, extorted for financial gain, forced to leave their regions, or even killed. Exemplifying these dangers, in October 2020, Catholic priest Casildo Rodríguez fled to a safe place after receiving death threats from an armed group in Medellín ([Canal1, 6 October 2020](#)). This is one of many such cases.

Christian men were also impacted by the national strikes which took place in March 2021. They were reportedly forced by criminal and guerilla groups to participate and protest against new government policies. This happened in several regions.

Within some indigenous communities, converts face extreme pressure when they abandon the traditional community rites. They may be beaten, harassed, threatened or sent away to do forced labor in a different territory. "This aims to discourage new conversions or continuing with the Christian faith," a country expert explains.

Christian men and boys are also exposed to abduction, forced recruitment and violence at the hands of criminal armed groups. They are subject to indoctrination and mandatory participation in the activities of these groups which may include abductions, surveillance activities, sexual abuse, killings and trafficking. As a country expert explains, "the phenomenon of forced recruitment is a frequent and unfortunate reality in the country, especially in rural areas where Christian children and youth are vulnerable because they are considered more docile." According to [COALICO](#), there was a dramatic

increase in the recruitment of children into armed groups in 2020, in part due to an exploitation of the COVID-19 crisis by criminals, who reinforced their territorial control while state resources were diverted to tackle the pandemic (June 2020).

In light of threats and reprisals, many see forced recruitment as an “inescapable destiny,” one country expert explained. Even if the children are able to escape the clutches of these gangs, they will face life-long threats from former gang-members and risk abduction in the future. The forced recruitment of Christian men and boys also impacts women and the strength of the family unit, as she must raise children alone and survive economically. As a country expert shared: “This also affects the community, as collective fear increases and with the recruitment of the family heads, the capacity to resist a possible criminal attack is lower.”

There is a noticeable lack of trauma management and resocialization programs for men. Gender-based policies promoted by the government do not give men the same opportunities to educate themselves or to participate in programs for managing and overcoming vulnerability. This is because, as men, they are expected to be stronger.

31) Central African Republic

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

The many years of violence and instability in CAR has left Christian women and girls particularly vulnerable to rape, displacement, abduction and forced marriage as forms of religious persecution. Some girls who are abducted are subjected to sexual slavery; sexual abuse is a source of shame for women and girls, and they can struggle to move on from the trauma, particularly if they become pregnant. A country expert points out a particularly concerning dynamic: “Christian women and girls are suffering at the hands of UN peacekeeping troops. Most of the time such acts of persecution involve acts of sexual violence, mainly rape, by troops who are assigned to protect the victims they are abusing.”

Within the context of high poverty rates, parents are sometimes enticed into giving their Christian girls in marriage in exchange for significant gifts. In other cases, Christian girls who thought they would be free to practice their faith once married to a Muslim discover that they are instead forced to convert. Female

students in particular face the risk of abduction and sexual violence while on the way to and from school. This has discouraged parents living in high-risk areas from sending their daughters to school. Girls who are abused and become pregnant are likely to drop out of school.

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

Christian women are pressured into following Islamic dress code. Some women have been harassed and intimidated for not covering their heads.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

When Christian families are targeted by radical militias, Christian women in CAR are usually sexually assaulted and left alive, while men are killed for their faith or detained by the militia. Pastors are especially targeted and sometimes false accusations revolving around resources are used as a pretext. Pastors have even been attacked during church services. A country expert explains: “Men face more hostile treatment because they are perceived as leaders who ought to represent the Islamic faith; they are expected to lead their family in religious matters and can consequently be blamed if a family member converts.”

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

32) Burkina Faso

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

Burkina Faso is located in a region where Islamist groups have a huge influence, and the central government is very weak, particular in the eastern regions of the country where Islamic law is applied. Jihadists have exploited this weakness during the COVID-19 crisis to gain increased control of the country's infrastructure. Within this context, there is a high potential for women and girls to be abducted by militants during raids. The militants may force them to marry one of their members or use them as labor. Christian girls will also be put under intense pressure to convert to Islam.

Rape of Christian women and girls is a common method of attacking Christian communities. In many areas, there is very little understanding of women's rights, so many people consider it 'normal' to sexually assault a woman. However, girls and women who are abused, very often have a feeling of worthlessness and think they have brought shame and stigma to the family. In particular, the daughters of Christian leaders are often targeted through sexual violence.

Converts from an Islamic or ATR background face additional pressures. Families beat them, give them in forced marriage, withdraw them from school and in some instances, chase them out of the family. Some young women are also threatened with death. Although Burkina Faso is a CEDAW signatory and has committed to ending [child, early and forced marriage](#) by 2030, 52% of girls are married before their 18th birthday (Girls Not Brides). A country expert summarizes: "Female converts are especially vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage. Forced marriages have been used as a weapon to force female converts to return to Islam." Another common form of pressuring converts is to keep them under house arrest.

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

Islamic militant groups operating in the Sahel region often recruit their members from countries like Niger and Burkina Faso. Christian men and boys are targeted for recruitment, physical attacks and for ransom. The abduction and killing of Christian men causes fear and trauma in Christian communities, as well as economic fragility as the men are normally the family providers. Further fracturing the stability of the Church, many men and boys flee the country due to the pressure they face. A country expert comments: “Christian men and boys are targeted and recruited by militant groups. In conflict areas, they are often victims of physical attacks by violent Islamic militants. When Christian men and boys are forcibly displaced from their homes and towns because of their faith, the families are seriously affected by the persecution as well.”

Converts from a Muslim background face further challenges. As conversion to another religion is considered a betrayal by some families, they may be rejected and denied their inheritance.

33) Niger

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

Niger’s society is heavily patriarchal. It has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with [76% of girls](#) being married by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides). This is in part due to [wide-scale poverty and escalating violence](#) (Humanium, 1 December 2020).

Like many other countries in the Sahel, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to abduction, rape and sexual abuse by extremist groups. A country expert comments: “Forced marriages are commonplace in Niger with very little being done to end it. Abducting and marrying girls to militants is part of an organized program by Islamist militants to breed its next generation of fighters.” Beyond jihadist groups, female Christians face the possibility of rape and targeted seduction for the purposes of forced conversion. Families do not report instances of rape as it will impact the marriage prospects of the victim and is viewed as a source of shame. More broadly, many Christian girls also face sexual harassment and discriminatory remarks for failing to wear the hijab.

Additionally, Christian women in Niger are affected by living under Sharia. For example, according to Sharia, a Christian woman has no right to claim custody of her children in divorce cases, even though Niger is officially a secular country. Converts to Christianity can face extreme hostility from their families and local communities. They can be denied custody of their children, forced out of the home, forced into marriage with a Muslim man and raped. “Young female converts, if discovered, may be forcibly married to a radical cleric as a corrective measure”, a country expert states. Christian parents can by law apply for custody of the children, but in practice, Christian parents fail to succeed. Many have also been denied their inheritance rights because of their conversion to Christianity. Christians are often unaware of their [legal options](#) to defend their rights (OECD, 2019, “[Social Institutions and Gender Index: Niger](#)”) but when the case is taken to court, the problem is often settled satisfactorily.

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

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

There is another phenomenon in Niger - although not specifically a form of targeted religious persecution - which affects all communities and has a strong negative impact on Christian families: Boys in Niger are subject to recruitment as child soldiers. There is high potential for boys to be abducted and forced to join the ranks of militant groups, or physically harmed during raids. They can also be abducted for forced labor, and/or trafficked between militant groups. Christian men and boys have also been targeted for killings by extremist groups. In 2021, [attacks by armed Islamist groups](#) have increased (Human Rights Watch, 11 August 2021). Since African communities are community-centered, this situation can harm all families in a community.

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

34) Bhutan

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

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

Christian women who convert from Hinduism or Buddhism to Christianity are at the greatest risk of persecution, typically through being emotionally abused by their families or divorced by their husbands. A divorce is relatively [easy to procure](#) in Bhutan, increasing the fear among female converts that their husbands might decide to leave them (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index: Bhutan”). While there were no reported instances of forced divorce in the WWL 2022 reporting period, this remains an ongoing risk for converts. Christian women married to non-Christians are also socially under pressure to stay with their husbands despite domestic abuse.

Furthermore, whenever Christian women are married to a non-Christian and do not want to convert (e.g. to Buddhism), they can in some instances face intense pressure from their husband and/or husband's family to convert in order to avoid the shame of a divorce. "There is a common belief that when a woman marries a man, she has to follow the man's religion," explains an expert. For single converts, the possibility of being pressured into marriage is a tangible threat, although no such instances have been reported in the WWL 2022 reporting period.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

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

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

35) Tunisia

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

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

As conversion from Islam is forbidden, converts from Islam face the greatest breadth of persecution if their faith is discovered. Women are more at risk in the traditional family context (since men have more freedom to express their own opinion). They may be physically beaten, expelled from their home, put under house arrest, threatened with death and raped. If already married, she will likely be divorced, have her children taken away and have her financial support withdrawn. Some Christian women have been separated from their children for prolonged periods due to disputes related to their new Christian faith. Single female converts on the other hand may be forced into a marriage with a Muslim man. A country expert comments: “Girls can be locked up in the house, stopped from going to school, stopped from pursuing a career, forced to marry a cousin or family member or make her marry any Muslim to protect her identity.” This is particularly common in rural areas.

The main source of persecution for women in Tunisia comes from the dominating male in the family: For a single female that would be the father, the brother or any other family member who follows in rank after that (uncle etc.); for a married woman that would be her husband or even fiancé. A country expert summarizes as follows: “Women cannot be independent; they have to stay with their family and be

subjected to all the abuse the family will give them.” Female converts, especially in rural areas, have little chance of accessing either Christian community or Christian materials.

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

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

Male converts also face loss of jobs and promotion and physical violence. When a man is persecuted, his family becomes vulnerable and lacks protection. The church, too, suffers. A country expert comments: “A man’s responsibility is to hold the family together. There is a lot of pressure as the man is the one [also] providing for the family.”

36) Oman

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

37) Cuba

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied/restricted healthcare; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Domestic violence remains one of the impactful forms of pressure on Christian women and girls. This pressure is, in part, facilitated by legislative gaps concerning domestic and intrafamily violence ([Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Feb 2020, “Human rights situation in Cuba”, p.123](#)).

In addition, women involved in activism are typically fired from their job, threatened and monitored. For example, police [continue to mistreat](#) and beat the ‘Ladies in White’ – a group of women founded by the relatives of political prisoners – on their way to and from Sunday church services (HRW 2021). In addition to beatings, members have also been arrested and detained for short periods of time.

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

While a greater issue for men, women were also affected by the mass detentions following the 11 July 2021 protests.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government

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

Christian men are generally more likely to be arrested or harassed since they are more likely to hold leadership positions from which they criticize government behavior based on their Christian beliefs. They additionally face fines, confiscation of Christian literature, destruction of property and death threats. A country expert comments: “As they are heads of families and churches, when they are victims, this has an intimidating message against their families and communities”. Members of the Christian Liberation Movement are also continuously besieged and threatened.

The number of detentions rose significantly in the WWL 2022 reporting period, following on from the 11th July protests, where many Christians – particularly young men – were arbitrarily arrested ([Cope, July 2021](#)). Several demonstrators remained missing months later ([Aleteia, September 2021](#)). Within prison, Christian detainees have also reported physical and mental abuse ([Amazonaws, 28 July 2021](#)).

National service is compulsory for men. If it is discovered that they are active Christians or have Christian parents, the level of discrimination and persecution depends on the attitude of the commanding officer. Although alternative forms of social service are theoretically possible, in practice permission is rarely granted. Also, given the economic difficulties resulting from state policies and US sanctions, many men must work abroad in order to meet family needs.

38) Ethiopia

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

Despite the long history of Christianity in Ethiopia, many Christian women remain vulnerable to religious persecution. Violations of basic rights against Christian women in Ethiopia often occur in the form of abduction and forced marriage to a non-Christian. This is facilitated by a general situation in which abduction and forced marriage [remain present](#) at a national level despite having been illegal for years (Plan International, accessed 6 December 2021). [40% of girls](#) are married under the ages of 18 and sources reveal that early and forced marriage particularly occurs in rural parts of the country (Girls not Brides). Experts have explained that the rising violence in the country has increased the prevalence of abduction and forced marriage. Female Christian teens (and converts in particular) can be forced to marry a follower of a different religion after abduction or family arranged marriage. Following her 'marriage', the Christian wife is expected to take on the religion of her new husband.

Rape is also an effective means of punishing a Christian woman or girl due to the severe consequences. A country expert explains: “If a girl is raped, the community isolates her; she will not be able to marry or learn; her family will be embarrassed, and, if a woman is raped, her future will be ruined by the word of the event. The violated girl's marriage would be frowned upon by the community.”

Female converts from Islam face the most severe violations, particularly at the hands of family members. They may be deliberately isolated from other family members and from their church community, put under house arrest in order to protect the family’s honor, physically abused and forcibly married to a Muslim.

When a Muslim wife converts to Christianity, divorce is the most likely outcome. Even if her spouse does not seek a divorce, his family will pressure the spouse to divorce and claim custody of the children, to protect the family name and ensure their grandchildren are given an Islamic upbringing. In areas where Christianity is a minority religion, a (de facto) divorce is most likely to take place outside

courtrooms; the elders presiding over a tribal court see Christian faith as a dangerous deviation and will likely grant custody to the other spouse in order to prevent the spread of Christianity in the community.

Christians often face difficulties in procuring their inheritance after their decision to convert; it is reported that this affects mainly women. Since [78% of the population](#) live in rural areas, inheritance is viewed as one of the main means to survive (World Bank data). Inheritance rights are in principle handled through official state institutions where religious discrimination is minimal. However, in areas where traditional systems are still dominant, or in the many cases that do not go through the official state process, part of the exclusion for new converts includes disinheritance.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Christian men in Ethiopia are generally more likely to suffer physical attack and displacement than women and girls, although rising violence in the country has challenged this trend by exacerbating attacks and displacement for all. They may also be robbed of their possessions, or even killed. It is deemed more strategic to attack men and boys, as they are usually the providers for their families. A country expert comments: “Persecutors are mostly targeting males to weaken the churches. This year many males have left villages and are displaced in other areas.” Attacking them weakens their whole family. Converts have reportedly been forced to flee their towns and settle elsewhere to avoid attacks and harassment.

The government also plays a role in violating men's religious freedom through imprisonment. Men are particularly at risk of this in Muslim-dominated areas.

In addition, there are numerous instances and allegations of government interference in church elections and appointments. Since the majority of church leaders are men, these violations mainly affect Christian men. The allegations target almost all leaders of major churches in the country, accusing them of being pro-government and of receiving appointments through government influence. New reforms continue to be discussed, however, and there is some hope that in future years this will become less common.

39) Jordan

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

Of all the categories of Christian community in Jordan, it is above all female converts from Islam who are particularly vulnerable to persecution for their faith. Pressure comes most often from family members. If she still lives with her family, she risks house arrest, isolation, beatings and sexual harassment. Female converts can also be prevented from meeting with other like-minded Christians as a punishment for conversion and to prevent the individual from bringing more shame upon the family. Although arranged marriages are not uncommon in Jordan, female converts are under additional threat to be married off involuntarily in a further effort to retain family honor and bring the daughter back on 'the right path'. This can extend to honor killings, which are a risk for converts in rural areas. While no such instances have been reported in the WWL 2022 reporting period, it remains a risk.

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

Female converts are also vulnerable under Islamic Family Law (which is used for personal status matters in Jordan among Muslims) and are likely to be forced to divorce, lose the guardianship of their children, and lose claims to inheritance.

The attitude of the non-Christian spouse's family is crucial in this issue. The recognized churches in Jordan have been working on the [revision of personal status laws](#), to improve the position of women regarding divorce and inheritance rights (Zenith, 25 October 2019) but to date no major improvements have been achieved. In particular, apostasy laws continue to pose challenges to Christian women ([St Charles Institute](#), last accessed 28 December 2021).

On a wider level, all Christian women face pressure to follow a specified dress code, and are at risk of sexual harassment within the public sphere. One local Christian shared: "We get harassed or bullied - there is name calling also for example during Islamic holidays, at the university or in the street." Christian women have also been reportedly enticed into marriage with a Muslim; this seems to be a strategic means to prevent the establishment of Christian families.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Within Jordan’s heavily Islamic context, Christian men – particularly converts – face a wide range of pressure for their faith. While some Christian men do occupy senior positions in the workplace, government and military, job discrimination continues to affect all Christians, especially those from a Muslim background. General unemployment rates for all men in Jordan have risen in recent years and have been made even worse by the COVID-19 crisis, with a reported [25% of people](#) out of work and a 48% youth unemployment rate (World Bank). This has increased the pressure on any men who have lost their jobs because of their Christian faith. If their faith becomes known, Christian men with a Muslim background can be denied security clearances and jobs. In the mostly traditional and tribal Jordanian society where men are regarded as the financial providers for their families, this can cause economic troubles for the wider family, as well as feelings of worthlessness for men.

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

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

days. “One brother was made to confess his faith to his family,” a country expert explained, “he was beaten with a metal chair, ribs broken etc, skull hit with stones. His liver is still damaged.”

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

40) Democratic Republic of Congo

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

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a complicated country, politically, socially and economically. Women across several areas of DRC, particularly those dominated by Islam, are commonly treated as inferior. This has an impact on their experience of much of life for girls. For married women, this can play out in Christians being denied access to their children, or commonly – if widowed – being denied access to their inheritance.

In addition to this discrimination, Congolese Christian women are vulnerable to abduction, rape, trafficking, and sexual slavery, especially by Islamist group ADF. A country expert summarizes the situation as follows: “Christians living in areas where Islamic militia operate are under a threat of abduction. The ADF for example kidnaps women, rapes them, and forces them to marry soldiers within their ranks.” Many Christian women who face this are reportedly kept as a kind of 'trophy'. Christian women – particularly converts – may be forcibly married, forcibly impregnated or forcibly divorced. These forced marriages are often early marriages, as sources report that elderly Muslim men often prefer young Christian girls. Child marriage rates are high in the DRC, with some [37% of girls](#) marrying before they turn 18 (Girls Not Brides).

Kidnappings and instances of rape most commonly occur at the hands of armed groups in the north-eastern regions, causing extreme psychological distress and trauma for the victims. According to country experts, women are sometimes raped next to male hostages, who are bound. Certain terrorist groups seek Islamization through violent means, forcibly marrying abducted women to militia leaders and

subjecting others to a life of sexual slavery. Reports indicate that the number of [sexual violence](#) cases has risen in 2021 (HumAngle, 4 May 2021).

Due to the shame of sexual violence, Christian women and girls may face isolation and rejection from their families and communities following an attack. Rape can '[socially destroy](#)' communities and victims, due to stigma and the fear of disease linked to rape (van Wieringen, K., 2020). In more extreme cases, an attack may cost a girl her life.

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

In DRC, political, social and economic tensions make life difficult for much of the population. In a context of ambient violence and impunity, Congolese Christian men face violent and extreme forms of persecution, including maiming, abduction, forced recruitment into militia groups, forced labor, sexual mutilation, disemboweling and brutal killings. While women and girls face the highest rates of rape, a country expert highlights the fact that “men and boys also face conflict-related sexual violence.”

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

The targeting of Christian men in these ways also serves to weaken their families as well as the wider Church. Church leaders are also targeted, especially if they have publicly denounced violence.

41) Mozambique

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

According to in-country sources, the most common violations affecting Christian women and girls in Mozambique are sexual harassment and rape – attributed to the incursion of Islamic militants – and forced marriage to militants. Mozambique has one of the highest rates of early marriage in the world, with [53% of girls](#) being married before they reach 18 (Girls Not Brides), fuelled by low education and employment opportunities for women and girls. Victims of forced marriage and rape have been psychologically and emotionally traumatized by these events.

Abduction is also commonly used as a tool for violating rights of freedom. During the WWL 2022 reporting period there have been numerous reports of abductions across areas of the country where jihadists and their cells exert influence. In addition to marriage, girls are also used for forced labor. The practice of viewing women more or less as domestic slaves and tools of sexuality has fuelled the abduction of women by insurgents to use for sex as well as domestic chores. This has especially been exacerbated by the rise in violence in the north of the country and has also been a driver of displacement. A country expert explained: "Many displaced young women and girls said they left their communities and fled to Pemba specifically because of the threat of abduction, detention, rape, and forced marriage to al-Shabaab fighters."

Converts from a Muslim or African Traditional Religion background are also vulnerable to persecution from within the family sphere. Many Muslim families living in Mozambique force suspected female converts to marry a Muslim man to ensure that they cannot get involved in Christian activities. If already married, converts face the threat of divorce and the loss of custody of their children. They may also be denied their due inheritance.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

According to country experts, *Islamic oppression* is the most common engine of persecution for Christians in Mozambique and Islamic insurgents have recently increased their operations, particularly in the north of the country.

It is reported that Christian men and boys have been particularly targeted by insurgents. Young boys have been abducted and forcibly recruited into militias. This practice has been [confirmed by reports](#) by Human Rights Watch (29 September, 2021). A country expert comments: “The particular nature of insurgency in Cabo Delgado Province [is a risk to male Christians] in that every time the insurgents attack, they mainly target the men and boys in order to recruit fighters from the community.”

42) Turkey

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Forced divorce
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Although the Turkish legal system is generally not prejudicial as regards religious freedom, “elevating Islam’s public role in this constitutionally secular republic has been more than a slogan; it has found

expression in many government policies,” according to the [Economist](#) (1 July 2019). As regards the rights of men and women, the prevailing culture and the lack of implementation of their equal rights under law allows for some gender inequality in practice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to sources, men and boys are more likely to be detained or threatened. They may be arrested and mistreated by the authorities, face job loss, inheritance loss or family rejection. During military service men are in an environment where, if their Christian religion is recorded in their ID, they are likely to be viewed with suspicion by their superiors and bullied by their peers. Despite obligatory military service, Christians are unlikely to rise in army ranks. Christians also have much difficulty finding employment in the public sector, while they also face discrimination in the private sector. A country expert notes, “the most common thing [at work] would be men who are pressured to attend Friday prayers at the mosque (or else lose their jobs)”

As men are the main financial providers, the violation of rights of male Christians can hit his wider family and community hard. It can cause anger, fear and anxiety. The psychological toll of being unable to provide for their families can be considerable.

43) Mexico

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

In a context of ongoing organized crime, Mexican women face a breadth of challenges, both from their own families and communities, as well as from criminal gangs. Within the WWL 2022 reporting period there has been an [increase in family violence](#) against women, which has been linked to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Global Voices, July 2021). Christian converts from indigenous communities face verbal and physical abuse (including sexual violence), used to pressure them into following the traditional religion. They also risk being pressured into marriage with a non-Christian indigenous man, although no instances of this were reported in the WWL 2022 reporting period.

Criminal gangs represent the other primary threat to women and girls. Since Mexico is one of the countries with the [highest rate](#) of human trafficking in the world, women are easy targets for recruitment for abduction and sexual slavery, most commonly by illegal armed groups (US Department of State, “2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mexico”). Criminal leaders target children of Christian homes, because their attitude of obedience is presumed, making it easier to instruct and indoctrinate them. Those who resist, face threats against their own lives as well as those of their families, motivating internal forced displacement. Some women and girls are also targets of abductions and killings since they are considered targets of criminal groups for their relationship with the cartel enemies.

Additionally, the fact that women are forced to maintain a relationship with members of criminal groups leads to an inevitable threatening of their Christian faith and that of the family; in many cases this dynamic leads to their separation and breakdown. Women who convert to Christianity and desert such groups are likely to find that their families face punishment in the form of violence or the threat of violence. These dynamics perpetuate cycles of violence, insecurity and social issues.

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

Within the context of ongoing violence and organized crime, the risk of young men and boys being killed in Mexico is high ([Vision for Humanity, 2021 Mexico Peace Index](#)). While there is no law which makes Christian men and boys particularly vulnerable to hostility on grounds of faith, in the areas controlled by criminal groups or drug cartels, young men are exposed to indoctrination and forced recruitment into these groups. Some young men accept this as an inescapable destiny due to their economic and social circumstance. Those who do not accept it - whether for reasons of Christian faith or otherwise – face threats and potential abduction and killing. Families, too, are bribed and intimidated to force their children to obey the gangs. The Jalisco Nueva Generacion Cartel (CJNG), the Gulf Cartel (CDG) and Los Zetas are the main criminal organizations for [recruiting](#) children and adolescents (Vanguardia, 30 April 2019).

The impact of the forced recruitment of Christian men and boys is far-reaching. A country expert comments: “The indoctrination and incorporation of young people into the ranks of criminal groups

affects the family not only against the rights of parents to educate their children according to their own beliefs but also weakens them, undermines their stability and consequently, society becomes weaker and more vulnerable to the actions of organized crime.”

Men in Mexico generally face intense pressure and violence as the heads of families and leaders of churches. Threatening the male head intimidates the wider families and communities. When armed criminal groups wish churches to cease functioning or to limit their activities, the threats are often aimed first at the religious leader of the church. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, there have been several examples of priests and pastors being beaten, kidnapped for ransom, and killed ([La Tribuna, January 23, 2021](#); [Agenzia Fides, 1 September, 2021](#)). Church leaders are also the most frequent victims of fines and extortion, since it is believed that they must have access to church funds. Leaders are also targeted in order to prevent them from conducting positive work within the community or speaking out against illegal activity, especially in the context of COVID-19.

Converts from an indigenous background face particular pressures; they may be beaten, harassed and rejected from the community. The level of pressure and violence increases if the convert is deemed to be a Christian leader, since such leaders are understood to be inciters of rebellion.

44) Cameroon

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

Cameroon is a secular country, yet the Far North region continues to suffer from the violent presence of Boko Haram. Christian women in northern Cameroon are subject to several forms of persecution related to their status in society. Boko Haram continues to regularly abduct women and girls, forcing them into marriage with one of their members or subjecting them to forced labor and rape. They are further put under extreme pressure to renounce their faith and embrace Islam (US State Department IRFR 2020). A country expert summarizes some of the risks: “Women are often abducted, raped and forced into marriage by militant groups. Because of the continuous insecurity in northern Cameroon, families are forced to keep their girls out of school for their safety.” Exemplifying just how dangerous these militants

are, country experts indicate that several girls have been forced to act as suicide bombers to further decimate Christian populations. Compounding these pressures, strong governance is lacking in Cameroon and [arbitrary arrests](#) have demonstrated the injustice of the legal system (RFI, 26 June 2020).

Female converts to Christianity from a Muslim or Animist background face further pressure within family and community. Linked partly to a lack of education, women in Cameroon are dependent on their husbands or fathers; when they make the decision to convert to Christianity, it can be considered an act of defiance. They can be denied the opportunity to socialize with other Christians and prevented from going to church. Unmarried converts risk being forcibly married to a non-Christian, particularly in the north of the country. Married converts conversely face the prospect of divorce, the loss of custody of their children and disinheritance. If a Christian marries a Muslim and they later separate, the family often refuses to hand over the children, because they insist the children must be brought up as Muslims. Poverty and [financial dependency](#) make Christian women and girls more vulnerable to such pressure (Relief Web, 23 October 2019).

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

Boko Haram also poses a major threat to Christian men and boys living in the northern regions of Cameroon, particularly church leaders. Men have been abducted by militant groups, tortured and used for forced labor. Others have been forcibly recruited into the ranks of militias. This leaves Christian families without a family head and provider, making them vulnerable to attacks themselves. Communities have become reduced in size due to such attacks, compounded by many men leaving the locality for safer areas. Conflict in the Anglophone region (also known as the Southern Cameroons region), has also fueled instability in the country and caused many people to flee, including Christians. A country expert summarized the situation as follows: “Christian leaders have been targeted and murdered by Boko Haram militants. Some of them have also been abducted. In the Anglophone regions, Christian leaders are targeted by separatist groups and government forces for speaking out against the violence.”

Christian men also face discrimination in the areas of job opportunities and promotion. Furthermore, they also experience hindrances from government officials where they oppose corruption. When a man refuses to get involved in unethical practices because of his Christian beliefs, he is taunted and called a coward.

When jobs are refused due to discrimination, the family cannot thrive. Boycotts also affect Christian families economically, financially and psychologically.

Male converts to Christianity also face pressure from family and community members. They may be rejected by their nuclear families and be denied their due inheritance.

45) Tajikistan

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

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

As Tajikistan is a predominately Muslim nation, female converts from Islam are particularly vulnerable to intolerance, discriminating pressure and violent persecution. Because Islamic teaching expects women to submit in all ways to the men in the family, in practice, women do not have the independence or freedom to choose their own religion. If their conversion is discovered, female converts run the risk of being locked up, beaten, rejected, sexually assaulted, or forced to marry a Muslim. As a country expert explains: “Forced marriages and bride abductions are culturally characteristic of the region and can affect converts significantly.” In particular, women and girls who had a premarital arrangement before their conversion will be forced to marry. Although there were no reported cases in the WWL 2022 reporting period, this remains an ongoing risk for converts. If a woman was already married before becoming a Christian, she will likely experience beatings from her husband and be forcibly divorced. In short, female converts are put under immense pressure to recant their new faith.

The state authorities in Tajikistan prohibit the use of religious clothes or symbols, including those worn by female Christians. Among some Baptists and Pentecostal groups, married women traditionally cover their

head with a headscarf. This headscarf is different to the one used by Muslim women, but there is concern that it could possibly become a future cause for arrest.

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

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

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

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

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

46) Brunei

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

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

Male and female converts to Christianity face the most pressure for their faith. Due to the ever-stricter implementation of Islamic laws, women are forced to wear a hijab and are punished by the religious authorities when they refuse to wear one. Within schools, universities and workplaces they would face discrimination if they did not conform in this manner. This generally does not apply to known Christian families, but to converts (although all women need to wear a veil if in government positions).

Similar to the experience of male converts, women and girls are usually disowned by the family when their conversion becomes known. The family often isolates them, and Imams are called to make them recant. They may also be forced to attend Islamic spiritual rehabilitation programs. For unmarried women, sometimes their families also threaten them with forced marriage to Muslim men they know. Married converts to Christianity are likely to have their children taken away from them in order to ensure they are raised as Muslims. As a country expert commented, the decision for custody of children comes down to one factor: “[Being] Muslim trumps all.”

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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Technological	-

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

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

47) Kazakhstan

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

In Kazakhstan the daily life of indigenous people is based on Islamic culture which puts women in an inferior position compared with men. They are expected to totally submit to their parents, and if married, to their husbands. This makes female converts from Islam more vulnerable to persecution, both as Christians and as women who challenge the existing order. Converts risk suffering physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats and being put under house arrest. One female convert reported that she had been regularly beaten by her husband a few years previously, and that he kicked her in her stomach while she was pregnant. Despite a strong relationship with her parents, she felt too ashamed to report the beatings to them for fear that she would be viewed as a bad wife. Her husband has since left her to provide for their children by herself, compounding her sense of shame.

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

While there have been no reported cases, the risk of being forcibly married to a Muslim remains an ongoing risk for converts. This is sometimes linked to abduction, as part of ‘bride kidnapping’ practices ([RFE/RL, 21 April 2021](#)). Women and girls living in rural areas are most at risk of falling victim to this tradition. While also rare (or at least, rarely reported) Christian female converts may also be vulnerable to sexual assault.

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

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

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

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

Pressure on Christian men comes from both the State, as well as the family and community spheres. State-based persecution has included interrogations, fines, detention and imprisonment. When a Christian gathering is raided, the leaders bear the brunt of the raid. This is in part, a country expert explains, “because Muslims view church leaders as primarily responsible for the conversion of their people.” Church leaders have also been imprisoned following these interrogations. Furthermore, obligatory military service for young men provides an extra potential risk of persecution because it is a highly controlled

environment in a Muslim-majority state. Further, those Christians, who for religious reasons, do not want to take up arms are still forced to join the army.

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

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

48) Nepal

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

Although the multi-cultural society of Nepal was granted religious freedom in the 2015 Constitution, anti-conversion and blasphemy laws continue to remain in place. It is dangerous for converts to Christianity to reveal their faith. When their faith becomes known, female converts face a variety of forms of pressure. “Initially they are emotionally tortured,” an country expert explains, “then gradually physical torture starts to take place. Finally, they are subjected to being social outcasts from the family and community.”

The immediate family members of female Christian converts may lock them up at home, often depriving them of basic needs and financial support.

On rare occasions, families make premarital arrangements to marry their daughters to a non-Christian man. This is done in order to save their family’s reputation. Within such marriages, women are highly pressurized to leave their Christian faith. If a woman is already married at the point of conversion and her

husband is not supportive of her faith, she is unlikely to be aware of the legal possibilities of defending herself and her children and may be divorced.

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

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

Christian men and boys are most vulnerable to persecution if they are recent converts, in public service, or church leaders of independent churches. Recent converts are particularly vulnerable to physical and mental abuse from family and society, and are made to feel like social outcasts. Converts are occasionally denied access to ancestral property by immediate family members and denied basic legal rights to a birth certificate and citizenship by local government administrators. Furthermore, known converts face harassment in public places such as markets and the workplace. Men and boys have also been victims of false charges and accusations, which have resulted in imprisonment on rare occasions.

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

Local independent church pastors and leaders are the main targets of harassment for faith related reasons. Hindu radicals will focus their attacks on church leaders firstly to set an example to other Christians in the area, and secondly because they are regarded as being the main actors behind the

increasing numbers of Christian conversions. Pastors are falsely accused of crimes, threatened with physical assault and on some occasions, forced to leave their communities. Exemplifying the dangers, in May 2021, a church leader was falsely accused of drug smuggling and was kept in custody for 48 days where he was physically and mentally abused by police. Because of the severity of the beating, he became paralyzed.

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

49) Kuwait

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

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

Reports indicate that the COVID-19 lockdown has [further intensified](#) the pressure experienced by domestic workers (The Telegraph, 20 Oct 2020). House-maids working in Kuwait often face sexual harassment or slave-like treatment. The ill treatment of migrant workers, including sexual abuse, has become an internationally high-profile issue. Although not primarily faith-related, many Christian domestic migrant workers, almost all of whom are female, experience sexual abuse.

According to [Chatham House](#), the passing of a new family protection law is “a major step forward for a country which has long suffered from high levels of domestic abuse” (Chatham House, 16 September

2020). Time is needed however to see how effective the implementation of this law proves to be in practice. For now, experts are concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on domestic violence levels.

Female Kuwaiti Christian converts will encounter severe family pressure to reject their new faith. They may be put under house arrest, pressurized to marry a Muslim or sexually harassed (although there have been no reported instances of forced marriage in the WWL 2022 reporting period). Women may also be threatened with the possibility of honor killings to restore the honor of the family following her conversion. If already married, female converts are vulnerable to being divorced by their husbands. Perhaps the most difficult law for Christian converts hoping to establish their own Christian household is that women from a Muslim background are restricted by [law](#) from marrying a non-Muslim (LOC, Prohibition of Interfaith Marriage, September 2015, p.12).

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

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

50) Malaysia

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

In a [November 2021 USCIRF publication](#) on religious freedom in Malaysia, it was observed that Malaysia has witnessed unprecedented political instability in recent years, with the sudden collapse of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition in February 2020, and then the collapse of the succeeding Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition in August 2021. “During this time,” the report summary notes, “Malaysian authorities from various political parties in several states and the federal government continued to pursue policies to further restrict religious freedom.” Rights have long been restricted for Muslim women and girls who are governed by Sharia law, which restrict their rights in relation to marriage, divorce and child guardianship.

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

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

The COVID-19 crisis has reportedly caused an [increase](#) in domestic violence, which is likely to have impacted Christian female converts (Free Malaysia Today, 4 May, 2021). On rare occasions, Christian women are also vulnerable to being detained and interrogated by the authorities about Christian networks and leaders, although this remains a greater source of pressure for men.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	-
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

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

51) Kenya

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

In the Muslim-majority regions of Kenya, Christian women and girls face multiple forms of persecution. Though the Constitution fully establishes gender equality, cultural practices in some tribes (such as funeral

rites, FGM, early marriage and polygamy) leave Christian women at greater risk of persecution if they oppose these practices. In addition, a lack of effective implementation of the Constitution has caused growing dissatisfaction among the Kenyan population. David Marage, Kenya’s Chief Justice, has [stated](#): “In my view the constitution of Kenya is one of the best constitutions in the world, if only we could implement it.” (BBC News, 30 August 2020).

In the northern regions, Christian women and girls continue to face harassment and social rejection. Women and girls are forced to comply with an Islamic dress code. If they fail to do so they could be asked to leave their school, harassed and threatened. Women even encounter discrimination in hospitals. Pregnant women in maternity wards have reportedly been neglected by Muslim medical practitioners in the country of Wajir, endangering the life of both the mother and baby. In addition, female Christians report that they are more vulnerable to sexual harassment and rape.

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

In extreme circumstances, northern Kenyan women have reportedly been kidnapped or deceived by al-Shabaab fighters and forced to be sex slaves or wives ([UNODC ‘Trafficking in Persons in the Context of Armed Conflict’, 2018](#)).

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

Christian boys and men in the north-eastern region in particular face the greatest danger of physical assault and execution at the hands of radical Muslims and al-Shabaab. Whilst instances are rare, men are also more likely than women to be imprisoned for their faith. Men and boys also face the threat of isolation and societal condemnation when they go against the cultural norms. Those who oppose negative cultural practices in some tribes (such as funeral rites, FGM, early marriages and polygamy) suffer varying levels of persecution. Their families are not accepted in the community as they are considered 'cursed' or

'not real men' (if they opt for hospital circumcision). Converts from a Muslim background may be denied their inheritance rights, putting them in a weak financial position. As men are the main providers in Kenya, this also affects the wider family.

52) Sri Lanka

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites
Security	Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

While Sri Lanka has made recent positive steps to address the protection of women (such as establishing an Office on missing persons and an Office for Reparations), the risk of sexual violence remains high and perpetrators frequently enjoy impunity (Report of the UN Secretary General, June 2020, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence”, p.42). Sexual assault is a weapon used against all women, regardless of religion. For a Christian woman however, she is doubly vulnerable because of her faith. When Christian women and girls - not just converts - are subjected to this kind of persecution, their families are more reluctant to allow them out for any church related work again. In recent years there have been few reported cases of rape, but sexual harassment has remained an ongoing issue. A country expert summarizes: “If there has been any kind of sexual assault due to their faith, most often it would be considered as a shame towards the whole family. This also in extension impacts their prospects for marriage.” This means that although sexual assault continues to be an issue, such cases are rarely reported.

Female converts are also at risk of being denied access to Christian religious materials and teaching, and can be cut off from churches which are a source of community and fellowship, as well as Christian teaching. One of the most common forms of persecution that affects female converts to Christianity is isolation and/or house arrest. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable in light of Sri Lanka’s patriarchal society. As a result, many female converts find it more difficult to follow their faith than new male converts and overcome the verbal harassment they receive from their families and communities. A Sri Lankan Christian comments: “Even her own children will oppose her. Women who convert are under great distress because their whole family will be scolding them.” On rare occasions, they may even be divorced by their husband due to their conversion.

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

Christian leaders often bear the brunt of attacks against a church. As men are often at the forefront, they are most often the victims of physical attack and threats (although Sri Lanka does have a comparatively high number of female church leaders). Pastors and Christian leaders (and their family members) who have a ministry or church in Sinhalese dominated areas are frequently targeted and harassed by Buddhist monks and villagers for faith related reasons. Pastors have been targeted and intimidated in their own homes and communities. Sri Lanka is a male-dominated, patriarchal society. As such, when a male gets physically assaulted, it also creates a sense of shame within rural close-knit communities. They can also be targeted by the authorities. A pastor shares: “Pastors in [some] areas are not given the deeds to the land they live in by government officials to make sure they do not build churches...Pastors also face challenges when trying to get building plans for their houses approved from the relevant government office. Officials would be reluctant to approve the plans and often suspect pastors of trying to build a church.”

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

53) Comoros

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

Many Comorian families traditionally have matrilineal inheritance, giving women a good deal of influence in the home that can often serve as a buffer against persecution. Nevertheless, female converts from Islam experience serious difficulties due to their conversion and are kept under close family scrutiny. Women and girls who convert to Christianity before they have received their inheritance face the danger of being disinherited for their faith, due to the shame that their conversion has brought upon the family. This leaves them at a financial disadvantage, leading to poverty and distress. In addition to being shunned, there is the possibility that they will be forced into marrying a Muslim in order to pressure them to return to Islam. There are currently no reports that Christians have been subjected to forced marriage, although pressure remains high. For women who refuse to marry, they face ostracism from their community.

A married woman who converts can be divorced for her faith. In some instances, husbands have been largely accepting of their new-found faith, although they have then come under huge pressure from their family and local community to initiate a divorce. Should a divorce occur however, she will remain responsible for the upbringing of her children and be able to share her Christian faith with them.

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

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

Male converts in Comoros are often dependent upon their extended families and lack independence. Comoros is a matriarchal society in which the cultural norm is for a married man to move in with his in-laws. In this situation, the family has the means to exert a great deal of pressure upon a convert to return to Islam. They are denied equal treatment in the home, verbally abused, and in some cases, occasionally denied food. Often their wife is put under pressure to divorce them and expel them from their home. In rare instances male converts have faced such extreme pressures and threats that they have fled to another town for safety, although no such cases were recorded in the WWL 2022 reporting period.

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

54) United Arab Emirates

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

In general, women are vulnerable in the UAE, as [domestic violence](#) and marital rape are permitted without legal consequence (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index: UAE”). The Georgetown [Women, Peace and Security Index](#) notes legal gender discrimination present; although the UAE has the best legal score in the MENA region, the region is the worst performing globally (Georgetown, 2021). Tribal society

regards women as ‘inferior’ members of society in need of male guardianship and this also affects the level of persecution experienced by female converts from Islam to Christianity.

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

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

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

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

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

man will be unable to find a family willing to give their daughter permission to marry him. Such pressure can cause some men to leave the UAE in search of greater freedom.

55) Tanzania

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Targeted Seduction; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

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

Additionally, Christian women are sometimes intentionally targeted (deceived) by organized Muslim men who pretend to be evangelical Christians, with the intent of coercing them to recant their Christian faith. Furthermore, there is coercion to accept negative cultural practices such as widow inheritance in Mwanza, female genital mutilation, polygamous unions and early child marriages among the Maasai.

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

Female converts to Christianity face the most intense persecution. They continue to face the prospect of forced marriage, forced divorce, isolation from their families and the denial of their inheritance and custody rights. Due to such religious persecution, Christian Tanzanian women are often demoralized, traumatized and consequently unable to work effectively. This is reported to have a negative economic impact on the wider Tanzanian Church, as many women are unable to contribute.

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

Christian men in Tanzania have in the past encountered discrimination and segregation in the workplace, particularly in Muslim companies, although this has not been reported in the 2022 reporting period. Their wages have been cut, and their overtime allowances unpaid. In addition, they have been forced to observe prayers during official prayer times and are commonly targeted by Muslims who wish to convert them. These pressures at work have placed a long-term economic burden on Christian men, as well as their families for whom they are the primary provider. The wider Tanzanian Church is further impacted, as without funds it struggles economically. It is also weakened in terms of attendance, as many men struggle to attend due to working hours.

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

56) Azerbaijan

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

Azerbaijan is a typical Caucasian country where family traditions and rules are very strict, and disobedience to senior family members is unacceptable. Patriarchal norms and discriminatory gender stereotypes remain prevalent and women are expected to remain within the home and prioritize domestic and familial duties ([UN News, 1 January 2022](#)). Within this context, women are not free to choose their own religion and will face persecution upon conversion to Christianity. Christian converts (typically from a Muslim background) are therefore most vulnerable to persecution - both as Christians and as women who dare to challenge the existing order. They are at a greater risk than non-converts of experiencing physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats, house arrest, discrimination and rejection by family and the Muslim community. Female converts in conservative regions also run the risk of being abducted and forcibly married to Muslim men, with the aim of forcing them to return to Islam. This happens infrequently, typically in remote rural areas and in cases where premarital arrangements had already been made before the conversion.

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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In Azerbaijan, male converts from Islam are at a greater risk than non-converts of experiencing physical and verbal abuse, harassment, threats, discrimination and rejection by family and the Muslim community. Known converts will be harassed and interrogated harshly by their family and community and some have been called to the police station for questioning.

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

57) Palestinian Territories

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

In the Palestinian Territories, male heads of household consider the choices and behavior of the women in their care to be deeply reflective of their leadership and personal honor. As such, women who stray beyond the culturally acceptable confines are at risk of retribution from their families. The Amnesty International country report has once again highlighted the suspected use of so-called 'honor killings' - mainly by male relatives - revealing the precarious position of women in this patriarchal society (AI 2021). This threat can be used to put pressure on women wishing to convert to Christianity. There is a strong sense of shame related to conversion from Islam; this has a significant practical impact on women and girls in particular because of their greater dependency within the family. Thus, they are more vulnerable to persecution from the family or close society, particularly in light of [insufficient legislation](#) addressing

domestic violence and violence against women (UNFPA and UNDP, 2019, Gender Justice and the Law: Palestine).

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

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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

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

As men are usually the main financial providers in Palestinian families, job discrimination against men serves to weaken the whole family. Some Christian men from a Muslim background have reportedly been exploited in the workplace and lost jobs on the basis of their faith. As Palestinians operate in a context of Israeli dominance, this and the dire economic situation can make Christian men in general feel powerless. Many Christian men want to leave the Palestinian Territories to find a job abroad and escape life under occupation. Such emigration seriously weakens the Palestinian Christian community, since only the more capable men have the necessary qualifications and financial means for finding a job abroad.

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

58) Djibouti

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

Those who are found to be converts in Djibouti face harsh treatment. Female converts in Djibouti are vulnerable to physical beatings and house arrest (particularly in rural areas). Although not common, reports in the past indicated that in some instances, Christian women have been abducted by radical Muslims and forced to marry Muslims without their consent. The majority of those who enter coerced marriages do so under pressure from their families and local communities who are eager to see them return to Islam. Female converts may be forced to marry older religious leaders in an effort to influence their faith.

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

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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-

Group	Male Pressure Points
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Although limited data is available, Christian men in Djibouti are at risk of physical attack, verbal harassment and intimidation. Some can be forced out of their homes, leaving them displaced and economically vulnerable. Others pay an even greater price and have reportedly been killed on faith-related grounds in the past (although there are no recent incidents of killing). As men are typically the bread-winners in Djibouti, their absence throws the family into emotional and financial turmoil. It also compromises the family’s physical security, particularly in remote parts of the country, as a husband/father’s absence could lead to looting of the family property and sexual attacks on his wife and daughters.

59) Kyrgyzstan

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

While laws in Kyrgyzstan give equal rights to men and women, traditional Islamic culture places women at a level subservient to men within the family context. Women and girls are excluded from decision-making processes and exposed to violence in a breadth of forms, including domestic violence, bride kidnapping, early marriages and physical abuse ([Girls Not Brides, Accessed January 2022](#)).

Within this context, women are not free to choose their own religion and will face persecution upon conversion to Christianity. The tight structure of society means that women are also targeted for

persecution as a means of inflicting psychological harm on their husbands or other family members. Over the years, Christian women and girls have been known to suffer from verbal and physical abuse, home detention, forced marriage, family violence and rape. An increase in domestic violence was reported across Kyrgyzstan following Covid-19 measures; local experts also reported a rise in family violence for female converts trapped in the home([UN Women, August 13, 2020](#)).

As noted in previous years, Kyrgyzstan has a long tradition of bride-stealing; in rural areas, female converts in conservative regions run the risk of being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim. If already married at the point of conversion, Muslim husbands commonly divorce their wives and deny them access to their possessions.

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

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

Male converts to Christianity face various forms of pressure and violence from family members and their local community. Over the years, Christian men and boys have been known to suffer from verbal and physical abuse, arrest, interrogation, fines, imprisonment, job loss, home detention, disinheritance, and exclusion from participation in communal institutions. According to experts, local authorities can cooperate with local Muslims to ensure access to communal forums are blocked.

Kyrgyz Christian men are most at risk when they are church and family leaders. When a businessman is known to be a Christian, the community may boycott or hinder his business. Men are usually the heads of their families and the main bread winners, so when a Christian man loses his job or business because of his faith, his whole family will suffer. When churches are raided, it is mostly church leaders who are

detained, interrogated and fined. Muslims will hold church leaders primarily responsible for the conversion of their people. There have been instances where Kyrgyz Christian leaders could no longer continue with their ministry because their (non-church) business was attacked. The persecution of a church leader (contextually, usually male) impacts the wider congregation, instilling fear and anxiety.

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

60) Bahrain

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

Despite some moves towards legal equality, women and girls continued to [be viewed as inferior](#) in Bahraini society (Wilson Center, 8 March 2020). Among the small number of converts to Christianity, pressure is most keenly felt by women and girls, followed by younger men, then older men (reflecting levels of status and freedom within the culture). Women must dress like Muslim women to avoid harassment and discrimination.

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

In addition to these challenges, female converts face oppression from their families. They are likely to be beaten by families, placed under house arrest, and may be threatened with honor killing (although no such cases have been reported in the WWL 2022 reporting period). Financial dependence on male family members, which can be common among female Bahrainis, provides another opportunity for persecution.

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

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

Persecution of male Christian converts in Bahrain typically manifests itself in the workplace. Men may lose out on promotion, or in some instances, lose their jobs altogether. This can lead to serious economic hardship which has major implications on the whole family, as the man is normally the financial provider of the family. Converts may also be ostracized from their families, threatened, intimidated and expelled from the family home. Their status and role in the family will come under threat. In light of such pressure, it is extremely challenging for Christians from a Muslim background to meet for fellowship.

61) Nicaragua

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

Compared to other Latin American countries, women and girls experience relatively few gender-specific forms of religious persecution. Those most at risk are female dissidents of the regime. Christian women – primarily Catholic – can fall into this category. They then easily find themselves at the mercy of criminal groups and allies of the government, who keep them under constant surveillance.

Ongoing state oppression under President Daniel Ortega has worsened in the past reporting year, placing women in a condition of extreme vulnerability. Due to a lack of confidence in the justice system, many victims have not reported the crimes against them. Perpetrators enjoy impunity, and even those imprisoned for their crimes are often later granted pardons.

Christian women and girls also suffer the loss of Christian men and boys, who are more vulnerable to being imprisoned, abducted or forced to flee Nicaragua (See Male gender profile for further details).

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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied food or water; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Men and boys are, in general, more likely to experience visible forms of persecution than women. This is primarily linked to the roles that men and boys assume. Male youths are more likely to take part in demonstrations demanding the resignation of the president and suffer government retaliation. Additionally, most church leaders (primarily Catholic) or ministry leaders are male.

When the government identifies a man associated with a church known for their opposition to the regime, he is more vulnerable to repression, and he will suffer hardships and pressure from state and non-state agents. Those who provided shelter and medical assistance to protesters in 2018 continue to experience government retribution years later, including slander, arbitrary investigations by government agencies and unfounded charges.

Catholic priests are especially vilified by President Ortega. As noted in a recent report by the Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights, “In 2020 the government’s hatred of the Catholic Church has not stopped; on the contrary, it worsens every day, having reached critical levels” ([CENIDH, 2020](#)). Priests and parishioners

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

Considering these pressures, many men – particularly church leaders - feel forced to flee the country, facing the dangers of possible capture by human traffickers and other criminal groups.

62) Russian Federation

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

The most vulnerable Christian women in Russia are converts from a Muslim background. In Russia's Muslim regions, daily life is based on Islamic culture which gives women inferior status. Traditional culture based on Islamic teaching puts women lower than men and requires obedience and [submission to men](#) in the family (CEDAW, 2015, “Concluding Observations on the Eighth Periodic Report of the Russian Federation”). For that reason, a woman cannot freely choose her own religion and will be persecuted if she converts to Christianity. If her faith is discovered, the first thing her family will do is lock her in the home and put high levels of pressure on her to return to Islam. In the northern Caucasus (and to a lesser extent in the mid-Volga region) converts also run the risk of being kidnapped and married off to a Muslim, particularly if premarital arrangements were made prior to the conversion. Such instances are, however, relatively rare.

Converts may also face threats, verbal insults, physical abuse and sexual assaults, all of which are unlikely to be reported due to a widespread culture of domestic violence, stigma around sexual violence, and impunity for perpetrators ([HRW, 8 March 2021](#)). A married Christian woman may experience beatings from her husband who can divorce her because of her faith, although no specific instances were reported in the WWL 2022 reporting period.

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

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

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

Men also experience economic pressure through being forced to pay fines and being imprisoned. The state regards non-ROC pastors and church leaders (contextually, mostly men) as primary targets to make a strong impression on the wider Christian community. When churches are raided, it is mostly the leaders who are detained, interrogated and fined. This often has a negative effect on whole congregations and can result in fear spreading among church members. Typical charges against church leaders include "distributing religious literature" and "carrying out unspecified missionary activity".

63) Chad

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

Group	Female Pressure Points
Technological	-

Women are subservient to men in Chadian society. Reflecting these norms, Chad remains one of just three countries in the world where married women require permission from their husband to open a bank account ([Georgetown, “Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20”](#)). Within this predominately Islamic, patriarchal context, Christian women are vulnerable both on account of their religion as well as their gender.

Christian women in Chad face both violent and non-violent persecution for their faith. Christian women are also vulnerable to sexual violence at the hands of Islamic militants. An expert explains, “Violence affects women and girls more because most extremist groups often abduct and sexually abuse women. These groups abduct women and girls and forced them to marry their members.” Women and girls who have been raped and consequently impregnated typically suffer ongoing psychological distress and low self-esteem. Traumatized rape victims sometimes view their children as a perpetual reminder of the crime committed against them. Local sources report that the wider society around them, too, is unsympathetic to their plight, viewing them as tarnished. More generally, sexual and gender based violence has been [exacerbated](#) by forced population movement in the country (UNOCHA: Chad Situation Report, 15 January 2021).

Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background face strong pressure from their family and local community, the aim being to make them recant. The practice of forced marriage is widespread across Chad, particularly in rural areas ([67% are married by 18; Girls Not Brides](#)). Parents of converts may forcibly marry them to a Muslim, with the aim of restoring them to Islam. Gender-based violence in such marriages is commonly reported. If already married at the point of conversion, the husbands of female converts are often pressured by their families and society to divorce them and deny them access to their children, to punish the ‘unfaithful’ and pressurize them into giving up their Christian faith.

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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical

Group	Male Pressure Points
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Christian men and boys in Chad are most vulnerable to persecution from Islamic militant groups such as Boko Haram. Some have reportedly been abducted, forced to convert to Islam and forcibly recruited into the ranks of jihadist groups to serve as fighters.

Initiation rituals in the southern regions of the country are also a cause for concern. These initiation rites usually take place every seven years and reportedly include floggings, sexual indignities, drugging, burning with coals and mock burials ([Open Doors USA, 16 Aug 2018](#)). Christians who do not flee will be forced to participate, and children of pastors will be especially targeted. Pastors who speak out against the dangers of these rituals have historically faced reprisals. In one case in 2018, Christians belonging to a church that had been vocal against the rituals were stripped, whipped and held in the woods until fines were paid. Upon return, these men struggled to look after their family due to the physical and mental trauma experienced. To prevent family disintegration, such men require support and education to reintegrate into Christian community.

In addition, men and boys also face challenges at work, being denied jobs and promotions. This is, in part, due to the fact that they are required to make a public religious oath in order to attain a job in State offices. Christians are, therefore, hindered from attaining positions of influence and pushed into tighter economic circumstances. Senior military and government positions are dominated by Muslims, and Christians are finding it increasingly difficult to attain such posts.

For male converts, when their conversion has become known, they have been isolated by family and local community. Some have also had their property burnt and damaged, been disinherited and expelled completely from their families, although no incidents have been reported in the 2022 reporting period. This places them in a difficult long-term economic position.

64) Burundi

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – sexual

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

Faith-based persecution compounds and exploits the existing societal pressures on women and girls in Burundi, especially those that arise from ongoing political instability and from women’s low status in society ([BBC News, 24 June 2020, Burundi Country Profile](#); [World Bank, October 2021](#)).

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

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

Christian men in Burundi commonly face challenges in the workplace on the basis of their faith. An elderly man recently lost his job after deciding to join an evangelical church, and now struggles to provide for his five children. Given Burundi’s high unemployment rates - exacerbated by Covid-19 - it is challenging for men to survive economically without the support of the family unit ([World Bank, October 2021](#)).

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

Christian men also risk being detained by State forces. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the rate of arrests increased. An expert comments: “The arrest were made not for the sake of covid restrictions, but they used covid to suppress freedom of religion.” Pastors are particularly vulnerable to being detained, as detailed by the [Burundi 2020 International Religious Freedom Report](#) (United States Department of State, May 12, 2021).

65) Venezuela

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

Within the context of Venezuela’s ongoing complex humanitarian emergency, Christian women face several vulnerabilities. Young girls are trafficked and can end up trapped in prostitution networks, exchanging sex for food or medicine ([The Borgen Project, 20 Feb 2020](#)). Christian women are often better paid because their purity is presumed, and desired. As an expert explains, “in this difficult context, desperation causes moral boundaries to be ignored in order to survive. Also, faced with the fear of raising children in such a problematic country, a small number of women are accessing clandestine abortions at the expense of their Christian beliefs.”

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

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

In rural areas, female church leaders face intimidation from guerillas. "The commanders take more advantage of intimidating and limiting their actions," a local expert shares, "thinking that because they are women they will be more afraid."

In summary, Christian women and girls are vulnerable to sexual exploitation in all contexts in Venezuela – whether on the move when fleeing the country, upon arrival in new countries, or when left alone and vulnerable by absent male family members.

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

Within Venezuela’s context of extreme violence and instability, Christian men and boys face a greater breadth of pressure than women and girls. Most notably, young men are at particular risk of being targeted by criminal gangs and guerrilla groups, especially along the Colombian border. They are also more likely to be recruited into the ranks of the Bolivian Guard or Venezuelan army, enticed by the promise of food and medicines. “They [armed groups] take advantage of the difficult economic and social situation,” an expert explains, “separating them from their families and forcing them to commit crimes. Christians who refuse to participate are targeted for harassment and attack, together with their families.”

In light of these pressures and exacerbated by the economic and political crisis, many men and boys are forced to leave the country in order to find work to support their families. While on the move, they are vulnerable to being captured and exploited by organized crime groups ([El Nacional, April 30, 2018](#)). Their families who they leave behind also become vulnerable, as highlighted in the female gender profile above.

Church leaders, who are predominately male, suffer the highest levels of persecution, with Catholic leaders typically most vulnerable. As an expert explains, “For Christians leaders advocating for the protection of human rights, the struggle is twice as hard since it is easier to recognize them as enemies of the regime, therefore, they not only face the social and economic crisis but also the direct reprisals of the government.” Church leaders reported that SEBIN officials continued to intimidate priests who criticized Maduro in their sermons ([USDS, 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom, Venezuela](#)).

Church leaders also face threats and economic exploitation from criminal gangs, particularly if they are involved in outreach efforts to young people, which could threaten gang recruitment levels. Pressure is

greatest in areas on the country’s border, where criminal groups fight for territorial control. In February 2021 an attack was reported on a Christian center involved with outreach to young people caught in gangs and drugs. As reported by the media, attackers violently entered the center and attacked attendees of the project; four young men suffered blows, cuts on their skin in the shape of a cross, and were forced eat pages of the Bible. The members of these groups demanded that they stop the activities they carry out there ([Sandy Aveledo, Feb 17th 2021](#)).

Reflecting the seriousness of threats against church leaders, in the past reporting year several were killed.

66) Angola

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

Although women are generally expected to be subservient to men in Angola, faith-specific gender-specific persecution is not widely reported. In some remote parts of the country, female Christian believers who have left Catholicism or African Traditional Religions (ATR) may be disinherited or lose custody of their children.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	Forced to flee town/country
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Gender-specific religious persecution against Christian men and boys in Angola has not been widely reported. Church leaders are most vulnerable when such persecution does occur; they may be mentally abused for faith-related reasons and targeted by security forces. Some have reportedly had to go into hiding to escape arrest by the police.

67) Rwanda

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

Despite Rwanda boasting the [largest female](#) Parliamentary representation in the world (Statista, 14 July 2021), patriarchal attitudes continue to dominate culture. As noted in a [2017 CEDAW periodic review](#), “there is a general lack of acceptance of women in decision-making positions and reluctance to implement decisions made by them.” These cultural norms can be exploited for the purpose of religious persecution against women.

In a country where forced marriage, abduction and female genital mutilation are [common in most regions](#), some forced marriages are fueled by religious motivation (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index: Rwanda”). Parents of female converts are known to marry them off to Muslims to try and restore them to the Islamic faith. An expert shares, “Muslim background believers are always living under this threat of being given to marriage without their will.” Converts are also vulnerable to physical, sexual and verbal attacks. Sexual abuse has been widely cited by regional experts as the primary challenge facing female converts.

If they are already married when they become a Christian, women from a Muslim or Animist background will most likely be divorced and subsequently refused custody of their children. Additionally, converts are often denied their inheritance rights, which can be hard for them to endure.

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Imprisonment by government

Group	Male Pressure Points
Security	Forced to flee town/country; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

Gender-specific persecution against Rwandan men and boys on faith-related grounds is not widely reported. When it does occur, it usually takes the form of physical violence or imprisonment. Pastors in particular are vulnerable to being detained. The pressures on church leaders in Rwanda and difficulties in registering churches has led to many migrating to Uganda and Tanzania.

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

68) Honduras

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

Irrespective of religion, it is dangerous to be a woman in Honduras. According to reports by the Violence Observatory, there were 278 reported violent deaths and homicides in 2020 ([CDM, Accessed 14th January 2022](#)). Rape and domestic violence are widespread, although women are slow to report abuses due to high rates of impunity granted to perpetrators ([ASJ, Accessed 14th January 2022](#)). As a local expert comments, “The climate of fear in both the public and private spheres and the lack of accountability for violations of women's human rights is the rule and not the exception.”

Increasing numbers of women and girls are fleeing Central America amid reports that criminal gangs are systematically targeting adolescent girls for sexual enslavement ([US Department of State, 2021, "Trafficking in Persons Report," p.273](#)). However, the majority of migrants fleeing Honduras are men, meaning many households in Honduras are being led by women.

Within this context of violence and instability, Christian women and girls can face additional challenges on the basis of their faith. There have been several reports of teenage daughters of pastors being victims of rape, sexual harassment and coercion to engage in pornographic activities at the hands of [gang members](#) (La Prensa, 5 March 2017). "Christian girls are the object of greater attention," an expert explains, "as their virginity is something they want to "take away" at all costs." They are further systematically targeted as a means of blackmailing or intimidating their families, in order to stop missional activity occurring in gang territory. Some girls have been abducted and killed for refusing to engage in sexual relationships with gang members. Survivors are left both physically and psychologically traumatized.

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

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

High rates of criminal activity and the presence of notorious gangs such as [MS-13](#) and Barrio 18 also pose daily security threats to Christian men and boys (BBC News, 14 February 2020). Church leaders are particularly vulnerable to attacks and threats, especially those involved in missional activities or seeking to stop the trafficking of narcotics. Extortion through fines and threats are commonplace. In the past reporting year, there have been several reports of pastors being violently abducted and killed (For example, see: [Proceso Digital, May 30th 2021](#); [La Prensa, May 18th 2021](#)). In February 2021, Edwin Arellano, a pastor of a youth group in an evangelical church was shot to death. His family suspect he was targeted for his outreach work to gang members ([La Prensa, February 8th 2021](#)).

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

Some gang members are permitted to leave gangs upon conversion to Christianity (particularly Evangelical Christianity), however will come under close scrutiny and monitoring from both their old gang as well as rival gangs. Any signs that they are not actively living out their faith can result in their death. Ex-gang member converts additionally face assimilation challenges; police and military who identify them as former gang members – typically by tattoos or scars - can submit or stop them at any time for suspected crimes.

In light of these pressures and cycles of violence, many Christian men and boys choose to flee Honduras, although remain vulnerable while displaced. As an expert explains, “even when Christians flee the country – because there are no safe zones inside the national territory – they continue under the mercy of the same, or different criminal groups involved with the trafficking of migrants.”

69) Uganda

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Forced out of home – expulsion; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied food or water; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

According to local sources, women in Uganda are generally viewed as inferior to men. In some tribes, women are not allowed to eat certain foods, such as chicken or eggs, which can lead to disproportionate malnutrition among women and girls. According to UN [statistics](#), 30% of 15- to 49-year-old girls had experienced physical or sexual violence in a 12 month period (UN Women). [Very few rape cases](#) result in conviction, fostering a culture of impunity (Save the Children, 1 March 2019). Within this context, Ugandan Christian women face pressures both on account of their gender, as well as due to their faith.

Christian women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, including rape. There were several reports of sexual violence over the past few years. In the 2022 reporting period, one example was given

of four women being raped on their way home from evening prayers. In secondary schools, a number of [gang groups](#) are reported to be fast rising. Notable groups include the "Virgin Hunters", who particularly target virgin girls or those who are presupposed to be innocent Christian girls (URNM, 23 Oct 2019). Sexual attacks leave victims feeling ashamed, embarrassed and unwilling to re-tell their ordeals.

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

The impact of the trauma of persecution on women has a long term impact on them, their family and their community. An expert summarises: "Women and girls normally suffer emotional trauma. This may cause them to be maladjusted for their entire life time and that becomes a cycle that affects the next generation and community at large."

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

Ugandan Christian men face both violent and non-violence challenges for their faith. This has included: travel restrictions, verbal abuse, threats from family members and discrimination in the work place – employees are marginalized and denied promotions unless they convert to Islam. More overtly violent challenges include physical assault, abduction, imprisonment, domestic violence, and the confiscation of property. Pressures are particularly high in the east of the country.

Church leaders are especially targeted. They have been falsely accused of crimes, physically beaten and threatened. One pastor was abducted by officials and interrogated about his supposed involvement in terrorism. Converts to Christianity, too, face considerable pressure from their families and surrounding communities. They may be forced out of their family home and be completely rejected by their parents.

Whilst women are usually the victims of targeted seduction, men and boys also face lower levels of this, being seduced into marriage and then forced to convert. Finally, Christian men are commonly affected by enforced participation in traditional ceremonies. Among the Gishu, for example, Christian boys are forced to perform certain rituals during the circumcision rites even when it is against their Christian faith.

70) El Salvador

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

Gender-specific religious persecution in El Salvador must be understood within a context of perpetuating cycles of violence, insecurity and criminal activity. Daily life is heavily impacted by the presence of gangs such as MS-13 and Barrio-18, which reportedly took advantage of COVID-19 security measures to expand their criminal activity ([BBC News, April 2020](#)). According to reports, numerous political leaders have been accused of collaborating with gangs in criminal operations, or negotiating with them for personal gain ([Human Rights Watch, World Report 2022: El Salvador](#)). Gang activity is far from being eradicated, either because of state and police complicity, or because they simply do not have means to stop them due to a lack of state control in areas co-opted by criminal gangs ([The Advocates for Human Rights, March 22, 2019](#)).

Within this context of violence and impunity for perpetrators, Christian women and girls fear a breadth of pressures, most notably being forced into relationships with gang members or raped. Refusal is not an option and may result in them being killed, or family members being threatened. Daughters of pastors who actively work in gang territory are particularly targeted, both for their perceived purity and assumed obedience, and secondly as a way of intimidating the victim’s parents and halting pastoral activities in their gang territory. Sexual violence as a weapon of punishing girls, their families and wider society is reportedly common across El Salvador ([AmecoPress, March 21, 2019](#)).

In addition to the pressures described in the previous answer, women and girls continue to suffer from stereotypes and prejudices about the role of women in the family and society. Women are slow to report domestic abuse, as the authorities consider such matters as marital problems, rather than a matter for the police. According to local experts, women have also been expected to act as care-givers for children

of gang members in prison. They are however, prevented from raising them in the Christian faith, else they would face reprisals from the biological parents.

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

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

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

Pastors and church leaders, usually men, are particularly vulnerable. As many church leaders have used their position to actively speak out against the activity of gangs, or to minister to gang members, they have faced threats and reprisals. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, several leaders have been fined, harassed, threatened and assassinated. Exemplifying the dangers, in April 2021 an evangelical pastor was murdered while on his way to visit congregation members. He had reportedly preached in gang-controlled areas ([El Salvador.com, April 1st 2021](https://www.elsalvador.com/en/2021/04/01/evangelical-pastor-killed-in-el-salvador/)) Church leaders have also been arbitrarily detained and questioned by State agents due to their ministry work with active and former gang members.

Gang members who convert to evangelical Christianity have historically been allowed to leave the gang on the grounds of their new religion. This is one of few possible pathways for members to leave gangs. According to one such member, there are [three options](#) available to young men in El Salvador: “You join the gang, you join the evangelical church. Or you leave El Salvador” (NPR, 2 July 2018). Gangs have however, become more reticent to allow converts to leave in 2020; having lost members through the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict with police, they have been slow to let remaining members go. New converts who are allowed to leave will be constantly monitored, both by their old gang as well as rival gangs, to make sure that they do not join a new gang. In addition to being monitored by gangs, converts

also experience challenges trying to reintegrate into society as Christians, particularly as many are visibly marked by scars and tattoos that indicate their former allegiance, making them more vulnerable to suspicion and arrest. “All these elements make the reintegration of the former gang very difficult,” an expert explains, “On many occasions it is not possible for them to continue their experience of faith, renouncing it and becoming part of the mara, in order to find the security offered by their gangs as soon as possible. In other cases, he is forced to change his faith and adapt it according to the faith experience imposed by the mara, which does not mean leaving criminal activities, but continuing to be an active member, with all that that implies.” In light of these pressures and constant threats, many Christian men choose to flee El Salvador.

71) Togo

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

As is the case for men, women and girls in Togo may find themselves involved against their will in traditional rites and practices, such as voodoo or 'generation parties', depending on the communities in which they live.

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

Female converts also characteristically face physical beatings, abandonment, sexual abuse including rape, verbal abuse, disinheritance, eviction and threats. If already married, significant pressure is also applied on their spouse to divorce them and refuse the convert custody of their children. It often occurs that an unmarried convert is forced to accept a marriage arranged by her parents to a non-Christian. If she refuses, this may lead to her being abducted and forcibly taken to the home of the intended man. Despite Togolese law stipulating that both parties must consent to marriage, forced marriages such as these

[continue to take place](#) in several communities (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index: Togo”). In extreme cases, forms of sexual slavery have been reported.

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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	-
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Denied food or water; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Christian men and boys can be affected by cultural traditions such as voodoo, which sometimes results in traditional practices inflicting suffering on children. This is particularly prevalent in rural areas. They can also be forcibly recruited by criminal gangs for drug trafficking. The harshest persecution is experienced by converts. Male Christians from a Muslim or Animist background can face physical abuse, verbal harassment, rejection, disinheritance, reduced food, threats and stigma because of their faith. Reports further indicate that Christians may be denied property lettings for a business, or let go in favor of a Muslim employee. Male converts come under harsh scrutiny in their local communities and can face intimidation and threats on a daily basis.

72) Gambia

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

While the Gambian State Constitution ensures that women are of equal legal standing to men and grants equal rights, [in practice](#) Gambia is a patriarchal society where men are the head of the household and women and girls are socialized into assuming a subordinate status (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index, Gambia”). In a country where almost 90% of the population are Muslims, it is challenging for Christian families to live according to Christian values. In a context of widespread child marriage and poor education for women and girls, female converts face additional vulnerabilities on the basis of their faith and gender ([Girls Not Brides, Accessed December 2021](#)).

Female converts to Christianity face the greatest pressures for their faith, both those from a Muslim and animist background. When converts share their new-found faith with their families, they may face physical and verbal abuse, disinheritance, abandonment and threats for betraying their parent’s religion. Forced marriage is also used as a weapon to apply pressure on converts, to encourage them to reject Christianity. Families may incentivize girls to enter these marriages freely by finding wealthy Muslim men who can provide for their material needs, or alternatively threaten them with the prospect of kidnapping and forced marriage. If already married, converts may also be divorced and have their children removed from them, in order to ensure the children do not grow up to be Christians. While no such instances have been recorded in the past reporting year, these remain live threats. Any family or church community that receives rejected women and girls will automatically become an enemy of those who evicted and disowned them.

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

Christian men and boys in Gambia experience physical, psychological and verbal abuse for their faith. This mostly affects converts who are punished for betraying the religion of their Muslim or animist families. Pastors and church leaders in particular are subject to harassment, mockery, death threats and kidnapping for their faith. Christian men may also face discrimination in the workplace, or be denied promotions. These forms of persecution serve to harm his wider family, as the man is usually the financial provider.

73) Guinea

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

In Guinea, female converts to Christianity are especially vulnerable to persecution. They are at risk of being isolated and cut off from their family. They might additionally be physically beaten, removed from school, placed under house arrest or, in some instances, be forced out of the family home. With the same intent, others are forcibly married to Muslims, particularly in Islamic strongholds such as Labe and Fouta. If already married, female converts face the possibility of being divorced by their husband and being denied custody of their children. Considering such pressure, many converts are economically vulnerable and emotionally damaged. Occasionally converts flee their homes, and indeed Guinea, for safety.

Christian women are also affected by cultural and tribal factors; the women’s secret society, [Sande](#), for example, shuns Christian women who have chosen not to join the society on faith-related grounds (Britannica, “Sande: African Secret Society”).

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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	-
Security	-

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

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

Additionally, In the same way that Christian women in Guinea face pressure from the female secret-society, Sande, men face persecution from the male secret-society, the [Poro](#) (Britannica, 19 Nov 2020). Non-members are excluded and looked down upon.

74) South Sudan

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

In South Sudan, the prolonged civil war has been a major instigating factor for the [increase in sexual violence](#) against women (Human Rights Watch, South Sudan: Events of 2020). According to a [report](#) of the Secretary General to the Security Council (S/2020/487, 3 June 2020, pp.27-28), sexual violence in Sudan has reached "appalling levels of brutality" and is "often committed with political and ethnic undertones". The report further noted that perpetrators often enjoyed impunity for their actions

Against this backdrop of complex ethnic and political tensions, it is difficult to discern the exact motivations behind the violence experienced by Christian women and girls. It is clear, however, that the use of rape as a weapon in armed conflict makes women and girls more susceptible to religious persecution by those opposed to their Christian faith, which mimics the war-practices in the country. Regional experts indicate that rape and gender-based violence is the most common form of persecution

affecting Christian women and girls. The trauma experienced prevents many of these women from forming stable relationships

Further, South Sudan is one of six countries in the world which has not specified a minimum age for marriage hence leaving a loophole for early and forced marriages. It has the [eighth highest rate](#) of child marriage in the world, with 52% of girls marrying by the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides, accessed December 2021). The prevalence of this practice, most often carried out because of extreme poverty and to secure much-needed assets for families, (including cattle, money, and other gifts via the payment of a bride price), creates an obvious avenue of repression and control of young female converts. Elders and ethnic leaders have reportedly forced young girls to marry people that they have not even met. Within these marriages, women and girls are exposed to domestic and sexual violence.

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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education
Political and Legal	-
Security	Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death
Social and Cultural	-
Technological	-

The 2013-2019 civil war led to the mass recruitment of males, particularly of boys who were halted in their education and targeted instead to become child soldiers. Within a context of ongoing fragility and insecurity, [exacerbated further by Covid-19](#), recruitment as a means of repression and control has become the most common form of persecution affecting men and boys (UN News, 23 June 2020). Whilst exact figures are lacking, thousands of children are believed to have been recruited into armed forces and groups by both sides of the conflict since 2013, with aid organizations fighting for their release ([UNICEF, 26 Feb 2020](#); [UNICEF, 18 Nov 2021](#)).

Men also run the risk of being killed by government forces upon suspicion of being part of rebel forces. Reports indicate that religious leaders and Christian workers are particularly in danger. As a regional expert writes, “if any pastor speaks against the current corruption, nepotism, rape, or other issues, he will be killed.”

The killing of men and forceful conscription of boys as child soldiers has a catastrophic impact on families and communities. As an expert explains, “Women are left without any way to fend for themselves while

mourning the loss of their husbands and sons. The resultant anguish greatly weakens their capacity to do anything either economic or development related”.

75) Ivory Coast

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code
Technological	-

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

Converts from Muslim and Animist backgrounds face the greatest breadth of pressure. Persecution takes forms of deprivation, as well as enticement. A female convert may be divorced and denied custody of their children. The pressure on her spouse to divorce her often comes from Muslim relatives or friends who see her Christian faith as a source of dishonor. If a Christian convert remains a Christian while married to a Muslim, she will not be permitted to raise her children as Christians. She may also face physical and psychological abuse. [The lack of legislation addressing domestic violence](#) leaves women easily exposed in this regard (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index, Côte d’Ivoire”).

Unmarried converts may be forced into marriage to older, rich Muslim men. An expert explains that this may be done “to stop them from expressing their faith.” Sources indicate that the parents of convert girls sometimes threaten them with the prospect of abduction and forced marriage in order to pressure them into returning to Islam. Some women and girls (including non-converts) are targeted for marriage by more subtle means. Young Muslim men are reportedly encouraged to marry Christian girls.

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

As is often the case in the region of West Africa, male Christians can be particularly subjected to hostility stemming from secret societies (such as the Poro), especially if they live in communities where these societies are active and men are forced to become members. If they refuse, they will be excluded from male-related activities and isolated.

Converts from Muslim and Animist backgrounds face the most intense forms of persecution. They may be verbally, physically or emotionally mistreated by their families, who may reject them entirely, evict them and threaten them with violence. They are also discriminated against in terms of their education; Muslim youth receive more opportunities to study abroad and parents will often stop financial support, halting the progress of their education. Upon discovery of their conversion, men may also be discriminated against in the workplace, possibly even losing their jobs. Shops have reportedly been targeted and boycotted because they belonged to Christians. As men are usually the financial providers of the family, these economic pressures harm their wider families and dependents.

In rare instances, converts may be killed for their faith. In the WWL 2021 reporting period, a young man was killed by his brother, who sprayed him with gasoline and set alight to him in his sleep.

76) Israel

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest)
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

Female converts from an Arab background typically face the greatest pressures for their faith, but conversions from one Christian denomination to another is also met with hostility. In some instances families resign themselves to their choice of religion, but often converts are made to understand that they are not allowed to talk openly about their new faith. While relatively rare, others have been placed under house arrest and denied contact with other Christians. Women are more vulnerable to this pressure, as have less freedom of movement than men. Traditional cultural norms in conservative religious families also places them in a subservient role within the family structure, under the authority of men.

Christian converts have also been forcibly divorced and denied custody of their children, in an effort to pressure them to return to their previous religion.

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

Christian men and boys experience relatively little gender-specific religious persecution. As they are generally more exposed to the public sphere than women and girls, they are more likely to be affected by physical persecution or social pressures. Religious leaders may be particularly vulnerable to pressures in conservative religious areas such as Jerusalem, in part as they are easily identifiable by their religious clothing. Attacks are however, very rare.