

World  
Watch  
Research

## Kuwait: Full Country Dossier

April 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	35	34	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

# WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Kuwait

## Brief country details

Kuwait: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
4,428,000	536,000	12.1

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

## Map of country



Kuwait: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	61	54
WWL 2023	64	52
WWL 2022	64	49
WWL 2021	63	48
WWL 2020	62	43

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Kuwait:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Government officials, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Clan oppression	One's own (extended) family, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials

*Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.*

### Brief description of the persecution situation

Expatriate Christians are relatively free to worship. However, the existing places registered for worship are very small for the number of people gathering and this can lead to tension between the different Christian groups. Obtaining property for gathering for worship is extremely difficult, although informal gatherings do take place. In addition, proselytizing is strictly forbidden and will lead to expulsion from the country.

Kuwaiti converts from Islam bear the brunt of persecution as they face pressure from both family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. They risk discrimination, harassment, the monitoring of their activities by the police, and intimidation by vigilante groups. Moreover, conversion from Islam to another faith is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters. Expatriate Muslims converting to Christianity experience pressure similar to that in their home countries, as they are often living within their own national or ethnic communities. Because of the potentially severe consequences, it is very difficult for converts to reveal their conversion, which is why there are hardly any reports of Christians being killed or harmed for their faith.

### Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Kuwait has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Kuwait is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christian converts experience pressure from their family and community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Children of Christian converts are automatically registered as Muslim (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians are harassed in the workplace and face discrimination because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26)
- Ownership and consultation of religious literature is severely restricted beyond international permitted limitations (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)
- Christians and their activities are monitored by the authorities and surrounding community (ICCPR Art. 17)
- Churches face several obstacles to obtain permits for the construction of new buildings (ICCPR Arts. 21 and 26)

### Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- It is not uncommon for Kuwaiti converts from Islam to Christianity seek refuge outside the country after their conversion because of family, societal and government pressure. This is a clear indication of the existing very high levels of pressure.
- Several Filipino domestic workers from a Christian background have been murdered in Kuwait in recent years ([Arab News, 28 January 2023](#)), but faith-related violent incidents against Christians are rarely reported. Incidents where Christian migrant workers are targeted probably go unreported because it is in nobody's interest to go public with any details (see below: *Violence, Christians attacked*).

### External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Arab News, 28 January 2023 - <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2240296/world>



# WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Kuwait

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Kuwait report	AI Kuwait 2022	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/kuwait/report-kuwait/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/kuwait/report-kuwait/</a>	13 July 2023
BBC News Kuwait profile - updated 18 December 2023	BBC Kuwait profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14644252">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-14644252</a>	15 March 2024
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Kuwait Report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/KWT">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/KWT</a>	13 July 2023
Crisis24 Kuwait report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Kuwait report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/kuwait">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/kuwait</a>	13 July 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Kuwait profile	EIU 2024 Kuwait profile	<a href="https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1372703320#">https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1372703320#</a>	15 March 2024
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Kuwait	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	13 July 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Kuwait not included	Democracy Index 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Kuwait	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/kuwait/freedom-world/2023">https://freedomhouse.org/country/kuwait/freedom-world/2023</a>	13 July 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries, Kuwait not included	Freedom on the Net 2023	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Kuwait profile	<a href="https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/kuwait/">https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/kuwait/</a>	13 July 2023
Girls Not Brides Kuwait report	Girls Not Brides Kuwait	<a href="https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/kuwait/">https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/kuwait/</a>	13 July 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2024 - Kuwait country chapter	HRW 2024 Kuwait country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/kuwait">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/kuwait</a>	15 March 2024
Internet World Stats as available in 2023	IWS 2023 Kuwait	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#kw">https://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm#kw</a>	13 July 2023
Middle East Concern – Kuwait report	MEC Kuwait report	<a href="https://meconcern.org/countries/kuwait/">https://meconcern.org/countries/kuwait/</a>	15 March 2024
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Kuwait	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/kuwait">https://rsf.org/en/kuwait</a>	13 July 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Kuwait	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/kwt">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/kwt</a>	13 July 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Kuwait - data updates as of 8 September 2022	UNDP HDR Kuwait	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/KWT">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/KWT</a>	13 July 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Kuwait	IRFR 2022 Kuwait	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kuwait/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kuwait/</a>	13 July 2023
USCIRF 2023 covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Kuwait not included	USCIRF 2023	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/countries">https://www.uscirf.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank GCC overview – updated 13 February 2023	World Bank GCC overview	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/overview">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/overview</a>	13 July 2023
World Bank Kuwait data (2021)	World Bank Kuwait data	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=KWT">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=KWT</a>	15 March 2024
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Kuwait - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Kuwait	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-kwt.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/65cf93926fdb3ea23b72f277fc249a72-0500042021/related/mpo-kwt.pdf</a>	13 July 2023
World Factbook Kuwait - updated 13 March 2024	World Factbook Kuwait	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kuwait/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/kuwait/</a>	15 March 2024

## Recent history

Kuwait became independent from Britain in 1961, with the Emir always belonging to the Al-Sabah family, which has ruled Kuwait since the mid-18th century. Oil was discovered in the 1930s which fundamentally changed Kuwait ever since. The Gulf war (1990-1991) saw Kuwait invaded by Saddam Hussein's Iraq and subsequently liberated by a coalition of forces led by the USA. Kuwait has become an even stronger US ally since then. In 1963, Kuwait was the first Gulf state to establish an elected parliament (BBC country profile). The Kuwaiti parliament is one of the strongest parliaments in the region, which has frequently led to political upheaval between elected (opposition) members and the authoritarian government.

In 2011, the Arab Spring uprisings inspired some protests in Kuwait but to little effect. However, the emir-appointed prime minister and his cabinet resigned in December 2011 due to alleged corruption. In October 2012, parliament was dissolved once more due to on-going tensions between government forces and the opposition composed of Islamic, tribal and secular factions. In the following decade, fueled by a younger, less tribal generation wanting reforms, the incongruity of having a strong parliament on the one hand and an authoritarian government led by the royal family on the other has become more and more obvious: The government has been rife with financial scandals, leading to increasing demands for accountability, with the royal family seemingly unwilling to give up their privileges ([POMED, 24 October 2022](#)). The Kuwaiti population responded by electing a greater number of opposition members to parliament in the most recent elections.

In an unprecedented step to solve the ongoing political crisis, the Emir approved a cabinet including three opposition lawmakers in December 2021 ([The Arab Weekly, 28 December 2021](#)). However, this did not solve the political deadlock and the cabinet resigned in April 2022. In a last bid to bring a solution, the Emir ultimately decided to dissolve parliament again and elections were held in September 2022, which saw the opposition with 33 seats taking the majority in the 50 seat parliament. Consequently, more unprecedented steps were taken by the government to allow more parliamentary independency ([Carnegie Endowment, 22 November 2022](#)). However, in March 2023 the Constitutional Court annulled the September 2022 election, stating government irregularities in dissolving the parliament and reinstated the 2020 parliament. Citing "the will of the people", the government responded by dissolving this parliament once more in May 2023, triggering new elections which again delivered a majority of parliamentary seats to the opposition. A fifth government in less than one year was installed in June 2023, with the political bickering continuing ([Al-Jazeera, 19 June 2023](#)).

In December 2023, Emir Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Sabah passed away and was succeeded by his 83 year old half-brother Sheikh Mishal al-Ahmad al-Sabah, who de facto already ruled the country. Although Sheikh Mishal is known to be a Reformist and averse to nepotism, no significant policy changes are to be expected ([Al-Jazeera, 20 December 2023](#)). The new Emir added a new chapter to the ongoing political saga by dissolving the parliament once more in February 2024 after parliament refused to remove alleged disrespectful remarks about the Emir's inaugural speech from the minutes ([Asharg Al-Aswat, 16 February 2024](#)). New elections are expected to take place in April 2024.

Meanwhile, while the only female MP had lost her seat during the 2020 election, two women were elected in the 2022 elections, with one retaining her seat in the 2023 elections. However, it is the Islamists who made most gains, with 17 MPs signing a "value pledge" before the 2022 elections, calling for gender segregation in education, among other things ([Fair Observer, 7 October 2022](#)). Their growing influence will probably hinder social reforms, including attempts to abolish the Penal Code's notorious Article 153, which treats so called 'honor killings' as a misdemeanor punishable by a fine. Despite the approval of the Family Protection Law in 2020, domestic violence, including honor killings, remains a serious issue ([The New Arab, 19 January 2023](#)).

In February 2018, a [diplomatic row erupted](#) between Kuwait and the Philippines, after a Philippine domestic worker was found dead in a freezer, revealing the tip of the iceberg of domestic worker abuse (The Washington Post, 3 April 2018). In reaction, Philippine President Duterte imposed a travel ban for Philippine migrants to Kuwait. After both governments came to an agreement about worker rights in May 2018, the travel ban was lifted. The solutions include the right for Philippine domestic workers to keep their passport during employment, even when taking a day off. Under the *kafala* system, domestic workers had to hand over their passport to their employers to prevent them from potentially running away. A Kuwaiti blogger pointed out that employers invest [thousands of dollars](#) to employ such workers and publicly criticized this new arrangement and was subsequently accused of having a 'slavery mentality' (World Gulf, 23 July 2018). Despite the changes and another travel ban in 2020, at least three other Filipino domestic workers have been killed by their employers since 2018 ([Arab News, 28 January 2023](#)). Abuse of domestic workers is a big problem in Kuwait but it is difficult to discern

to what extent an employee's Christian faith adds to their vulnerability.

## Political and legal landscape

Kuwait is a constitutional monarchy whose head of state is the Emir of the al-Sabah family and was the first Arab country in the Gulf to have an [elected parliament](#). In May 2005 parliament gave women the right to vote and stand as candidates in elections for the 50-seat National Assembly. However, it took until the 2016 elections before the first female MP was elected.

The current political upheaval between parliament and government has a long history behind it, which even saw parliament being unconstitutionally dissolved for years on end, namely between 1976 and 1981, and again between 1986 and 1992. The Emir's response to parliament's wishes to question a cabinet minister, often a member of the royal family, has usually been to appoint someone else or to dissolve parliament, rather than being held accountable. Hence, to the frustration of the Kuwaiti citizens, accusations of corruption and mishandling of funds are not being addressed. In addition, while the age of cabinet ministers is often high, the majority of the MPs are younger than 45 years old, indicating a generation gap as well ([MDC, 11 April 2021](#)). In contrast to other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, are publicly active and a significant number of MPs are aligned with them.

Kuwait tries to keep a neutral position at the international level and did not join Saudi Arabia and the UAE in boycotting Qatar. It had an active role in the reconciliation of the Qatari crisis (2017-2021): Emir Sheikh al-Sabah [stated](#) in October 2019 that "it is not acceptable to have a dispute among our brotherly GCC states" (Al-Jazeera, 29 October 2019). Its neutral position is also pragmatic, as Kuwait has a significant Shia minority (30%), while Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood enjoy support as well and have seats in parliament. Hence, normalizing ties with Israel (as carried out by the UAE and Bahrain via the Abraham Accords) would most probably jeopardize stability in the country.

Compared to other countries in the Arabian Peninsula, Kuwait generally ranks better in civil liberties and freedom of the press and Kuwaitis are proud of their tradition of active political participation. Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2024 ranks Kuwait "partly free", making it an exception in the wider region. However, Human Right Watch (HRW 2024 Kuwait country chapter) states:

- "Kuwaiti authorities used provisions in the penal code and national security and cybercrime laws to restrict free speech and prosecute Kuwaitis and non-nationals, particularly for comments made on social media." Those laws "criminalize speech deemed insulting to religion, the emir, or foreign leaders."
- "Authorities have discriminated against the Bidun, a group of about 100,000 stateless people who claim Kuwaiti nationality, since Kuwait's independence in 1961. The government rejects their claims and refers to them as "illegal residents." The government has failed to create a transparent process to determine their citizenship claims or provide them with a path to nationality while creating obstacles for Bidun to obtain civil documentation, receive social services, and access their rights to health, education, and work." (The term [Bidun](#) or Bidoon is not the same as Bedouin, which refers to a much larger social-cultural category of desert-dwelling, nomadic pastoralists in the region, although

there is some overlap - Minority Rights Group International, accessed 14 March 2024).

- "Two-thirds of Kuwait's population are migrant workers, who remain vulnerable to abuse, largely due to the kafala (sponsorship) system, which ties migrants' visas to their employers and requires that migrants get their employers' consent to leave employment or change jobs."

Indigenous and expatriate Christians enjoy some protection under the Constitution, but are also limited by it. Middle East Concern states (MEC Kuwait report):

- "The constitution of Kuwait enshrines Islam as the religion of the State and Islamic law as a main source of legislation. However, the constitution also affirms the principle of non-discrimination, including on the basis of religion. It guarantees State protection of freedom of religious practice, 'in accordance with established customs', provided that religious practice 'does not conflict with public policy or morals'. Public defamation of an officially recognized religious group or of their practices is a criminal offence. Nationality laws preclude the naturalization of non-Muslims."

### **Gender perspective**

Kuwait's legal landscape has long been restrictive towards women and girls. Kuwait's personal status law applies to Sunni Muslims (who make up the majority of Kuwaitis) and discriminates against women with respect to marriage, divorce and child custody. Women need the permission of their male guardians to marry and work, and are legally obliged to obey their husbands. The personal status rules that apply to Shia Muslims also discriminate against women (HRW 2024 Kuwait country chapter). Women from a Muslim background are restricted by law from marrying a non-Muslim, making it challenging for female converts to establish a Christian family (IRFR 2022 Kuwait).

Legislation fails to adequately address domestic violence, violence against women or marital rape. A 2019 study revealed that several female survivors of domestic violence were sent back to their abusers upon reporting abuse ([HRW 2021 Kuwait country chapter](#)). A [new law](#) introduced in September 2020 on domestic violence has been widely welcomed as a positive development, although it fails to address all areas of abuse (Kuwait Times, 24 November 2022). Escaping abusive marriages is also problematic; under Sharia law a man has the right to divorce his wife by *talaq* whereas a woman must file for divorce through the courts on specified grounds, often a lengthy and complicated process (Personal Status Act, 1984, Art 27).

## Religious landscape

Kuwait: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	536,000	12.1
Muslim	3,653,000	82.5
Hindu	173,000	3.9
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	0	0.0
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	12,100	0.3
Atheist	780	0.0
Agnostic	35,900	0.8
Other	17,900	0.4
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Kuwait), the majority of the 1.4 million Kuwaitis (70%) are Sunni Muslims. However, a significant majority (30%) is Shia, which makes the Sunni Kuwaiti government careful in its dealings with Iran. In addition to a very small number of Kuwaiti converts from Islam to Christianity, Kuwait has a small community of indigenous (non-convert) Christians who probably number just under 300 and originate from Turkish Christians who settled in Kuwait early in the twentieth century (see below: *Church spectrum*). The overall majority of Christians are expatriates.

According to Middle East Concern (MEC Kuwait report):

- "It is estimated that up to 26% of the expatriate population is Christian."
- "Expatriate Christians enjoy comparative freedom in Kuwait, provided that their activities are restricted to designated compounds and, in particular, that they avoid interaction with Muslims that could be construed as proselytism. Most churches find their current facilities inadequate, and church compounds are typically overcrowded on days of worship as they seek to accommodate multiple congregations of various nationalities and languages. Requests made in recent years for additional building or land have been refused. Some churches are frustrated by the limited number of visas available for clergy and staff."
- "The small number of indigenous Kuwaiti Christians (i.e. from Christian background) generally enjoy good standing in society. In 2018, a Parliamentary Committee proposed a change to legislation to allow for non-Muslims to be eligible for Kuwaiti citizenship, but that proposal did not progress."

- "Kuwaiti nationals or other Muslims who choose to leave Islam are likely to face strong family and societal pressure. In extreme cases those who leave Islam can face violent responses from family members. Those considered apostates could also face imprisonment under the defamation provisions, and sanctions such as forcible divorce and removal of child custody under personal status laws overseen by Shari'a courts."

Humanist International's [Freedom of Thought Report](#) (updated 30 November 2020) ranks Kuwait as having "grave violations" and notes that the Constitution limits Freedom of Religion and Belief:

- "The Constitution guarantees freedom of religious practice, nevertheless it specifies that such practice must not contravene public order or morals and must work in accordance with established customs (Article 35). The government does not recognize Bahai, Buddhist, Hindu or Sikh groups which are not included in the Islamic principle of Abrahamic faiths (ahl al-kitab: Muslims, Jews, Christians). It also denied the recognition of several Christian groups. The recognition by the state often take years for approval and is not transparent."
- During recent years, human rights activists and others have been convicted for spreading atheism and secularism.

Although Kuwait has accepted some of the major United Nations conventions on human rights (e.g. Kuwait entered the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1996) non-Islamic religions face much opposition. In 2012, a member of Parliament [announced](#) a bill to put a halt on non-Islamic places of worship being built (Arabian Business, 19 February 2012). The bill was not approved but churches still have to operate carefully. Proselytizing Muslims is both illegal and socially unacceptable and churches tend to apply self-censorship to avoid this. Criticizing Islam or the Islamic Prophet Muhammed will lead to public prosecution. Even the suggestion that the Kuwaiti Constitution should have priority over the Quran in state affairs can [lead to charges](#) and outbursts of public hatred (BBC News, 14 April 2016).

Despite the government's restrictive policies, the heavy pressure on Christians is not coming from the state authorities in the first instance: Christians have most to fear from members of Kuwait's conservative society. There is a clear dichotomy in the country between Kuwaitis (by definition Muslim, except for its tiny minority of Kuwaiti Christians) and the many immigrant workers, even more so if the latter are Christian. As a result, due to the already existing societal abuse and discrimination, Christians frequently exercise self-restraint for safety reasons.

## Economic landscape

According to the World Factbook Kuwait and World Bank data for Kuwait:

- **GPD per capita (PPP):** \$43,900 (2020 est.)
- **Unemployment:** 3.7%, with youth unemployment at 25.5% (2021), indicating the need for the creation of economic opportunities for the younger generation.
- **Percentage of population below national poverty line:** No data available, but probably low. The Kuwaiti government is known to take care of all citizens, except for the stateless Bidoon.

According to [World Bank's GCC Economic Update - April 2023](#) and [November 2023](#), and the Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Kuwait:

- **Economy:** "Economic growth is projected to decelerate sharply to 0.8% in 2023 due to a decrease in oil output, monetary tightening, and sluggish global economic activity. Following tighter OPEC+ production quotas and reduced global demand, oil GDP growth is expected to contract by 3.8% in 2023 but is anticipated to recover in 2024 as production quotas are relaxed—supported by higher activity from the [newly established] Al Zour refinery." At the same time, "Policy uncertainty caused by political deadlock is expected to undermine the implementation of new infrastructure projects."
- **Inflation:** "Generous subsidies, tight monetary policy, and falling import prices will keep inflation subdued."
- **Non-oil economic growth:** "Kuwait's non-oil sectors are anticipated to grow by 4.4% in 2023 driven primarily by private consumption."
- **Economic outlook:** "Economic growth is expected to slow to 2.7 percent in 2023 in response to a more cautious OPEC+ production approach and sluggish global economic activity. However, the newly established Al-Zour refinery will support growth in the oil sector, which is expected to reach 1.9 percent in 2023. Based on the recent trend, political uncertainty is projected to remain elevated and cause delays in deciding and implementing new infrastructure projects, as well as in pushing the reform agenda forward. Kuwait's non-oil sector is anticipated to grow by 3.4 and 3.7 percent in 2023 and 2024, respectively, driven primarily by private consumption."

Other sources report:

- The World Bank's [World by Income and Region](#) report (accessed 14 March 2024) puts the Kuwaiti economy in the high income category .
- The Fragile State Index (FSI 2023 Kuwait) shows improvement in the economic indicators on average following the COVID-19 crisis. However, "Economic inequality" increased, although remaining on the low side. "Human Flight and Brain Drain" continued to fall and remained low.
- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU 2024 Kuwait profile) expects: Emir "Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, or his anointed successor, will retain ultimate executive authority throughout the 2024-28 forecast period. However, his confrontational approach towards Kuwait's restive parliamentary opposition will sustain friction between the executive and legislature in the medium-term. The emir's decision to dissolve parliament in January, coupled with a sluggish bureaucracy, will sustain policymaking gridlock and deter some investors, slowing the stream of public-private partnership deals. Growth will slow in 2024-28 as hydrocarbons output steadies and oil prices fall, inflicting a negative knock-on effect on government spending."
- The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI 2022, p.4, 32) states: "Despite being one of the world's wealthiest countries, Kuwait faces a fiscal crisis. While the government has made substantial efforts to alter its market organization and has improved framework conditions to attract foreign businesses, profound achievements toward an economic diversification are still missing. The continuous high dependence on exporting oil leaves Kuwait vulnerable to global market fluctuations." However, with assets valued more than \$590 billion, the

Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute ranks the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) one of the wealthiest sovereign wealth funds in the world.

Oil and gas wealth has eliminated much poverty in Kuwait, although poverty among expatriate workers is probably under-reported. High oil prices led to significant growth until the global financial crisis came in 2008 and heavily affected the country's economic performance. Until now, its vast financial reserves have mitigated the budget deficits in recent years and high oil prices caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 helped to ease financial pressure.

Although probably not primarily faith-related, Christian expatriates also experience labor abuse, including low and non-paid salaries, confiscation of passports and other ways of unfair treatment. Kuwaiti converts from Islam to Christianity are very likely to face economic pressure. There is high chance they will lose employment and economic benefits provided by the state.

### Gender perspective

Women are among the most economically vulnerable in Kuwait, in part due to reduced employment opportunities and patrilineal inheritance practices. Under Sharia rules of inheritance, daughters inherit half that of a son (Personal Status Act, 1984). The labor force participation rate for women stands at 47.8%, compared to 85.7% for men ([World Bank, Gender Data Portal, 2023](#)).

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the World Factbook Kuwait:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Kuwaitis make up 30% of the population. The majority of the Kuwaiti population are from Arab descent. Other ethnicities include 'other Arab' (27%), Asian (40%) and African (1%) groups, among the wide variety of ethnicities that can be found within the expatriate community.
- **Main languages:** The official language is Arabic, with English being widely spoken as well.
- **Urban population:** In 2023, 100% of the population lived in urban areas, with an annual urbanization rate of 1.35%.
- **Literacy rate:** 96.5% of the population can read and write; with a small difference between men (97.1%) and women (95.4%)
- **Education:** On average, Kuwaitis are expected to have 15 years of schooling, with a significant difference between men (13 years) and women (16 years).
- **Population/age:** The total population is 3,100,000 (2023 est.) and non-Kuwaitis make up nearly 70% of the total population (2019 est.). The younger generation - up to 24 years of age - makes up 39% of the population, making it another country in the wider region with a young population in need of (economic) opportunities.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** Around 92,000 stateless persons reside in Kuwait. They belong mostly to the Bidun or Bidoon, descendants of (minor) Bedouin tribes who were not registered after Kuwait became an independent country (see above: Political and legal landscape).
- **Life expectancy:** 79.4 years on average; women (80.9 years), men (77.9 years).



According to the UNDP Human Development Report Kuwait:

- **HDI score and ranking:** Kuwait ranks #50 out 191 countries. The combined ratio of life expectancy, education and per capita income gives a very high score of 0.831 on the Human Development Index.
- **Gender inequality:** with a GDI (Gender Development Index) score of 1.009, men are slightly disadvantaged in comparison to women. The GDI measures the differences in life expectancy, years of education and GNI per capita per gender.

Society in Kuwait continues to be Islamic, patriarchal, conservative and organized along tribal lines. Sharia law prescribes a wide range of rules for personal, family and community life. According to Humanist International's Freedom of Thought Report (updated 30 November 2020), women face discrimination in law and practice. There are no laws against domestic violence or marital rape. According to the law, a male citizen of any religion transmits citizenship to their children. A Kuwaiti woman requires the permission of her father to marry. A Muslim man is allowed to marry Muslim, Jewish or Christian women; a female Muslim can only marry a Muslim man in accordance with Islamic law. The children have to be brought up in their father's faith and Islamic law is applied in marital disputes.

Under the official *kafala* sponsorship system, domestic workers had been tied to their employers, who confiscated their passport and often forced them to work excessive hours. This left them vulnerable to abuse and has since been adapted (see above: *Recent History*). However, according to Amnesty International, the government "established new financial and administrative barriers to family unity for migrant workers, and continued to use the *kafala* (sponsorship) system for employment of migrant labor, which puts migrants at heightened risk of exploitation" (AI Kuwait 2022).

Although not primarily faith-related, Christians in Kuwait do experience discrimination or abuse. Skin color and ethnical background play a significant role in determining who is vulnerable for abuse: Western (white) Christian expatriates are far less likely to experience harassment than African or Asian Christian expatriates. In addition, high-skilled expatriates will face less difficulties than low-skilled migrants. In short, a low-skilled Christian migrant from an African background will be most vulnerable in Kuwait.

### Gender perspective

During the COVID-19 pandemic, reports of domestic violence increased. The situation for migrant workers also worsened, as migrants found themselves at heightened risk of abuse by employers due to lockdown restrictions at that time. Reports suggest women in Kuwait are still hesitant to report incidents of sexual abuse and are currently pushing for an application that allows victims of sexual harassment to safely report violations ([Kuwait Times, 11 August 2022](#)). The case of the five sisters making urgent pleas for help in Turkey to avoid being forcibly returned to their home country further reflects the ongoing struggle against domestic violence in Kuwait and calls for heightened efforts to safeguard vulnerable individuals ([Al-Monitor, 19 January 2023](#)).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Kuwait):

- **Internet usage:** 97.3% penetration (January 2022)
- **Facebook usage:** 95.4% penetration (January 2022). Napoleon Cat ([February 2024](#)) reports that 61.5% of Facebook users are male and 38.5% female.

According to World Bank data for Kuwait:

- **Mobile phone usage:** 162.8 per 100 people

According to Freedom House's Global Freedom Index 2023 Kuwait, the advancement of communication technology and the increased use of social media has not led to an increased level of freedom of speech. The report states:

- "Freedom of expression is curtailed by state surveillance and the criminalization of some forms of critical speech, especially if it touches on the emir or the rulers of other Arab countries. The Cyber Crimes Law imposes prison sentences of up to 10 years as well as fines for online speech that criticizes the emir, judicial officials, religious figures, or foreign leaders."

Reporters without Borders (World Press Freedom 2023) ranks Kuwait #154, up from #158 in 2022, but down from #105 in 2021. It describes the freedom of the press as highly restricted:

- **Freedom of expression:** "The government exercises a significant degree of control over information, and freedom of expression remains limited, although many members of Kuwait's opposition in exile were recently pardoned."
- **Media restrictions:** "Some media outlets – such as *Al-Watan TV* in 2015 – have been closed for “anti-government” comments."
- **Journalism:** "The 2020 right to access information law is supposed to guarantee the work of journalists in Kuwait. But, in practice, the law is thwarted by censorship laws that prohibit journalists, bloggers and online activists from criticizing the government, the emir, the ruling family, its allies or religion. The same is true for the cybercrime law that took effect in January 2016."
- **Taboos:** Many subjects are taboo in Kuwait, and it is particularly difficult for journalists to tackle migrant worker rights, women's rights and corruption.
- **Prison sentences:** "While Kuwait is not known for murdering or imprisoning its journalists, some have recently been forced to flee the country to avoid serving prison sentences. Interrogations and short-term detentions have a chilling effect on the freedom to inform."

Like everyone else in Kuwait, Christians have to be careful when expressing their views (whether online or offline). Criticizing the Emir or Islam, or sharing material that can be perceived as proselytism can lead to deportation for expatriate Christians. The (non-convert) indigenous Kuwaiti Christian community is in a similar situation as expatriate Christians. However, Kuwaiti converts from Islam to Christianity have to hide themselves and can only be active on the Internet anonymously.

## Security situation

The security situation in Kuwait is stable. In the aftermath of the Iraqi-Kuwait war in 1990-91, Kuwait's security forces received training from Western countries to counter criminal, terrorist and foreign threats confidently. Even amid the heightened tensions between the USA and Iran in recent years, Kuwait seemed unaffected, despite the fact that around 30% of the population is Shiite.

As with neighboring countries, Kuwaiti citizens have been among fighters of the Islamic State group (IS) abroad, but this has not led to any attack in the country itself.

Christians are in general safe from violence and crime, as the country is well policed and violent religious groups or others who might endanger public safety have been successfully suppressed.

## Trends analysis

### **1) Although Kuwaiti society is rooted in conservative Islam, there are liberal influences emerging**

The conservative nature of society has produced an environment which is basically hostile to convert Christians from a Muslim background. The government is likely to allow this to continue (so long as it does not feel challenged in its administration of power) in order to appease the radical Islamic groups in society. However, there is also a growing influence of more liberal youth, especially coming from the large numbers of Kuwaitis who have studied abroad. This is encouraging for the Christian communities who are hopeful that the degree of acceptance will continue and be reinforced - but there is still a long way to go before the right to change one's religion is granted or respected. Converts with a Muslim background will continue to face pressure.

### **2) Despite the liberal influences, gains by Islamist-aligned MPs in latest elections are a serious concern**

Because of the governments failure to address public concerns, including allegations of corruption by members of the royal family, Kuwaiti voters are increasingly looking to the opposition, including Islamists, for a solution. Although political parties are forbidden and alliances are not always clear, the number of Islamist-aligned MPs has steadily increased in recent elections. It is feared that their growing influence will lead to increasing calls for a stricter imposition of Islamic norms, including dress codes and gender segregation ([Kuwait Times](#), 11 September 2022). In such a society there would likely be less respect for Freedom of Religion and Belief, thus affecting Christians in the country.

### **3) Despite growing nationalist rhetoric, foreign Christian workers are likely to continue coming to the country regardless of the existing pressure**

Despite regional and local turmoil (such as the tensions between Iran and the USA and the continuing political impasse between parliament and government), Kuwait has been politically quite stable during the WWL 2024 reporting period and there has been no significant rise in levels of pressure on Christians. The nationalist and anti-expatriate rhetoric used by parliament-

-arians has led to measures to limit the rights of expatriates residing in Kuwait ([Gulf International Forum, 4 January 2022](#)), but as long as the country maintains its openness to the world economy, Christian workers are likely to continue coming to the country.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: POMED, 24 October 2022 - <https://pomed.org/publication/snapshot-kuwait-can-the-opposition-dominated-parliament-lead-to-reform/>
- Recent history: The Arab Weekly, 28 December 2021 - <https://thearabweekly.com/kuwait-includes-opposition-lawmakers-new-cabinet>
- Recent history: Carnegie Endowment, 22 November 2022 - <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/88470>
- Recent history: Al-Jazeera, 19 June 2023 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/19/kuwait-forms-cabinet-with-new-oil-finance-and-defence-ministers>
- Recent history: Al-Jazeera, 20 December 2023 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/20/kuwait-new-emir-sheikh-meshal-takes-oath-of-office>
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- Recent history: Fair Observer, 7 October 2022 - <https://www.fairobserver.com/politics/crisis-looms-as-islamists-make-gains-in-kuwait/>
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- Recent history: diplomatic row erupted - [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/04/03/how-a-maid-found-dead-in-a-freezer-set-off-a-diplomatic-clash-between-the-philippines-and-kuwait/?utm\\_term=.2f4ea1628ab7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/04/03/how-a-maid-found-dead-in-a-freezer-set-off-a-diplomatic-clash-between-the-philippines-and-kuwait/?utm_term=.2f4ea1628ab7)
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- Recent history: Arab News, 28 January 2023 - <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2240296/world>
- Political and legal landscape: elected parliament - <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14644252>
- Political and legal landscape: MDC, 11 April 2021 - <https://dayan.org/content/kuwait-new-government-political-system-crisis>
- Political and legal landscape: stated - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/kuwait-emir-gulf-dispute-longer-acceptable-tolerable-191029095032440.html>
- Political and legal landscape: Bidun - <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/bidoon/>
- Political and legal landscape: HRW 2021 Kuwait country chapter - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/kuwait>
- Political and legal landscape: new law - <https://www.kuwaittimes.com/kuwait-marks-international-day-for-elimination-of-violence-against-women/>
- Religious landscape description: Freedom of Thought Report - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/kuwait/>
- Religious landscape description: announced - <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/kuwaiti-mps-call-for-ban-on-construction-of-churches-445971.html>
- Religious landscape description: lead to charges - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36046706>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's GCC Economic Update - April 2023 - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gcc/publication/gulf-economic-update-the-health-and-economic-burden-of-non-communicable-diseases-in-the-gcc>
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- Technological landscape: February 2024 - <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-kuwait/2024/02/>
- Trends analysis: Kuwait Times - <https://www.kuwaittimes.com/backlash-in-kuwait-after-conservative-candidates-propose-values-document/>
- Trends analysis: Gulf International Forum, 4 January 2022 - <https://gulrif.org/expatriates-rights-in-kuwait-between-rentier-economy-and-civil-society/>

## WWL 2024: Church information / Kuwait

### Christian origins

The earliest signs of Christian presence in Kuwait are the ruins of churches on the offshore islands Failaka and Akkaz. Archaeologists date these churches between the 5th and the 9th centuries. If this latter date is correct, Christianity survived the conquest by Islam longer than often assumed. (Islamic tradition - which is increasingly being subjected to historical scrutiny - sets the date of conquest very early at 633 AD.) The site in Failaka was a monastery with a church surrounded by a densely settled area and formed the focal part of a Nestorian community that lived on the island. The Kingdom of Hirah north of Kuwait had a large Nestorian population. By the 10th century these sites had been vacated and, from then on, there is no record of a Christian presence in Kuwait for almost a millennium. However, the country's position in the Arabic and Ottoman empires makes it highly likely that, at times, Christians from other parts of those empires lived and worked in Kuwait.

Only after the Sheikdom became a British protectorate in 1899, could mission work begin in Kuwait. Samuel Zwemer of the Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church in America moved to Kuwait in 1903 and opened a Bible shop. The National Evangelical Church of Kuwait was organized that same year, though it did not have a building for worship until 1926. In 1910 the Mission also opened a clinic that developed into a hospital for men; a hospital for women followed.

After the discovery of oil in 1937, migrant workers from Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, India and Egypt came to Kuwait bringing with them a diversity of churches, including Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Syrian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Church of South India and other denominations.

## Church spectrum today

Kuwait: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	96,100	17.9
Catholic	416,000	77.6
Protestant	12,800	2.4
Independent	7,700	1.4
Unaffiliated	3,600	0.7
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>536,200</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	11,000	2.1
Renewalist movement	108,000	20.1

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

**Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

The around 300 (non-convert) indigenous Christians stem from Turkish Christians who settled in Kuwait early in the twentieth century. Some of them worked together with the American Arabian Mission of Samuel Zwemer, which opened a bookshop (1903) and two hospitals (in 1913 and 1919) in Kuwait. Their National Evangelical Church (1931) is still in existence and is currently headed by a Kuwaiti Christian. Other churches followed in the 1950s and 1960s. Around the same time, the number of Christians began to rise with the influx of expatriate workers following Kuwait's oil-fueled 'Golden Era' (1946-1982).

(Source: Ross R K, Tadros M and Johnson T M (eds.), *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity. Christianity in North Africa and West Africa*, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, p.182)

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Kuwait is a very small country with the capital (Kuwait City) being the center of all activities. The risks that Christians face - especially converts from Islam to Christianity - depend on the sort of community Christians are part of, rather than the geographical area where they live. Kuwaiti converts face the highest risks as Kuwaitis are mostly conservative and family ties are strong. Western Christian expatriates are most often free to practice their beliefs, as long as they refrain from proselytizing. Non-Western Christians with lower levels of skills are more likely to face discrimination and abuse, especially female domestic workers. Many of these are from the

Philippines. It is a matter of debate to what extent their non-Muslim faith adds to their vulnerability in the case of abuse.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

Of the four WWL categories of Christianity, two are present in Kuwait:

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Of the total number of Christians in Kuwait, the majority of them are foreign workers. They are relatively free to worship. However, the existing places for meeting are very small for the number of people gathering. It is extremely difficult to obtain property for worship purposes.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022), there are seven officially recognized Christian denominations:

- The National Evangelical Church (Protestant)
- Roman Catholic
- Greek Catholic (Melkite)
- Coptic Orthodox
- Armenian Orthodox
- Greek Orthodox
- Anglican Church

The government allows some expatriate Christian groups to operate in rented villas, private homes, or the facilities of licensed churches. They can conduct worship services without government interference provided they do not disturb neighbors or violate laws regarding assembly and proselytizing.

**Historical Christian communities:** There is a small number of non-convert native Kuwaiti Christians residing in the country. There are reported to be 8 extended Christian families and a total number of not more than 275 Christians ([Al-Jazeera, 3 March 2018](#)). These do not exist as a separate category for scoring in WWL analysis; they are included in the category for expatriates above.

**Converts to Christianity:** Converts from Islam to Christianity face daunting challenges in many forms. The main drivers of persecution are family, community members, radical Muslims and, to a lesser extent, the authorities. They risk discrimination, harassment, monitoring by police and all sorts of intimidation. Moreover, a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** These do not exist as a separate category for scoring in WWL analysis; they are included in the category for expatriates above.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian communities and how they are affected: Al-Jazeera, 3 March 2018 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/3/3/father-emmanuel-and-the-christians-of-kuwait>

# WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Kuwait

## Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

## Position on the World Watch List

Kuwait: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	61	54
WWL 2023	64	52
WWL 2022	64	49
WWL 2021	63	48
WWL 2020	62	43

The fall in overall score during WWL 2024 was due to reductions in pressure in all *Spheres of life* and also in the violence score. Small improvements were noticed regarding the freedom of converts from Islam to Christianity to practice their faith. Nonetheless, Kuwaiti converts still face high risks as Kuwaiti families are generally conservative and family ties are strong. Western Christian expatriates are most often free to practice their beliefs, as long as they refrain from proselytizing.

## Persecution engines

Kuwait: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Not at all

*The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.*



### **Islamic oppression (Strong)**

As in many countries in the region, *Islamic oppression* is the main engine behind the persecution of Christians in Kuwait. It is operating strongly at both national and local community levels. Society is generally conservative – with the laws and Constitution also affirming the conservative nature of society. According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion and Islamic law (Sharia) is an important source for legislation. The government requires Islamic religious instruction for all pupils in state and private schools. Teaching Christianity in state-run high schools is prohibited, even to legally recognized Christian groups.

A significant part of Kuwaiti society harbors radical Islamic convictions and in the past a Kuwaiti Member of Parliament has advocated for the removal of all churches from the country. Some Kuwaiti citizens are known to have fought for the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria. In recent years, tolerance towards non-Muslim residents has come under further pressure due to increasing nationalist sentiment aimed against expatriates in the country. In addition, although political parties do not exist as such, a significant number of parliamentarians are believed to be aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Converts from Islam to Christianity, particularly those with a Kuwaiti background, face the highest levels of pressure. For converts from Pakistan or the Levant (e.g. Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories and Syria, among other countries), much depends on the response within their surrounding community in Kuwait. As long as they do not create unrest, they have less to fear from the Kuwaiti government, although their Kuwaiti employers may decide to end their work contract, which could result in deportation if they cannot find another job. Within those expatriate communities, the consequences for converts depend more on the cultural norms from their home country, than on the cultural practices of Kuwait. For expatriates, conversion to Christianity is sometimes easier than in their home country, because family and relatives are often far away and social pressure is less stringent.

While the country tries to be open and modern, a strict interpretation of Islam continues to have its grip on society. Society and government enforce conservative Islamic customs in public, e.g. by enforcing public dress codes, prohibiting the drinking of alcohol, by limiting the freedom of expression (i.e. criticism of Islam) and by allowing other religions only to worship in private.

### **Clan oppression (Strong)**

Typical for this Persecution engine are situations in which age-old norms and values shaped in a tribal context (such as family honor) are forced upon Christians. In the case of Kuwait, *Clan oppression* is clearly mixed with Islam. This particularly affects converts from Islam to Christianity, especially Kuwaiti converts, because of their strong family ties. Turning away from Islam is not only regarded as religious betrayal, but also as betrayal of the family and tribe. Converts are seen as disrespecting their own fathers and grandfathers, a disloyalty which is socially unacceptable. In general, families put strong social pressure on converts to make them return to Islam, leave the region or to be silent about their new faith. In many cases, converts are alienated from their families as a result of their conversion.

## Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

The government of Kuwait is restrictive in many ways. *Dictatorial paranoia* is behind most of the government restrictions on civil and political freedoms, as the country's ruling family does not want their hegemony threatened. Freedom of expression, freedom of press and freedom of association are thus restricted. Freedom of Religion and Belief also remains restricted in order to maintain public peace and ease radicals' and citizens' concerns about upholding Islamic values. This naturally also affects Christians and churches in the country. Although the country has one of the strongest parliaments in the region, the ruling royal Sunni family still dictates everyday life.

## Drivers of persecution

Kuwait: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	STRONG			STRONG				MEDIUM	
Government officials	Strong							Medium	
Ethnic group leaders	Medium			Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Medium			Medium					
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Medium			Medium					
One's own (extended) family	Strong			Strong					
Political parties	Medium								

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

## Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Extended family (Strong):** Although clearly mixed with issues of family honor, strongly held Islamic convictions are a significant reason for families to target family members who convert to Christianity. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is socially unacceptable in Kuwait. Families will most certainly expel converts from their home, as they see conversion not merely as being an attack on Islam, but also on the family honor.
- **Government officials (Strong):** Although there is no criminal penalty for conversion, it is socially unacceptable and a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized. Some Kuwaiti Christians (mostly converts from Islam to Christianity) have been interrogated by government officials, commanded to stop meeting, and have faced threats of losing their jobs and homes. Conversion is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status matters. For example, fathers who leave Islam are likely to lose custody of their children. Foreign Christians have to practice their faith carefully as the government will act against any Christian who makes an attempt to speak about the Christian faith publicly; proselytizing is illegal and punishable under the law. Christian expatriate workers have been interrogated and instructed not to share their faith, or risk losing their visas. No Christians have been

officially prosecuted for proselytizing, but some have been expelled from the country without due process in recent years.

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** The fear of hostile pronouncements or actions by Islamic leaders contributes to the high degree of caution converts feel compelled to exercise.
- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Medium):** Conservative Islamic society is a significant driver of pressure against Christians in Kuwait. Employees are bound by contract to their employers and thus vulnerable to their bosses' demands. The latter can easily discriminate, humiliate or abuse expatriate Christians, especially the poor and low-skilled workers from Southeast Asia and North Africa. Expatriate Christians also face discrimination or mistreatment by their fellow Muslim expatriates in some cases.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Family and tribal heads will make sure that Islam is respected within their tribe or extended family. They will put pressure on family members to force converts to recant their faith.
- **Political parties (Medium):** Kuwait has one of the strongest parliaments in the Middle East. Some of the elected politicians are hardline Islamists and openly encourage the government to take action against Christians, especially converts.

#### Drivers of Clan oppression

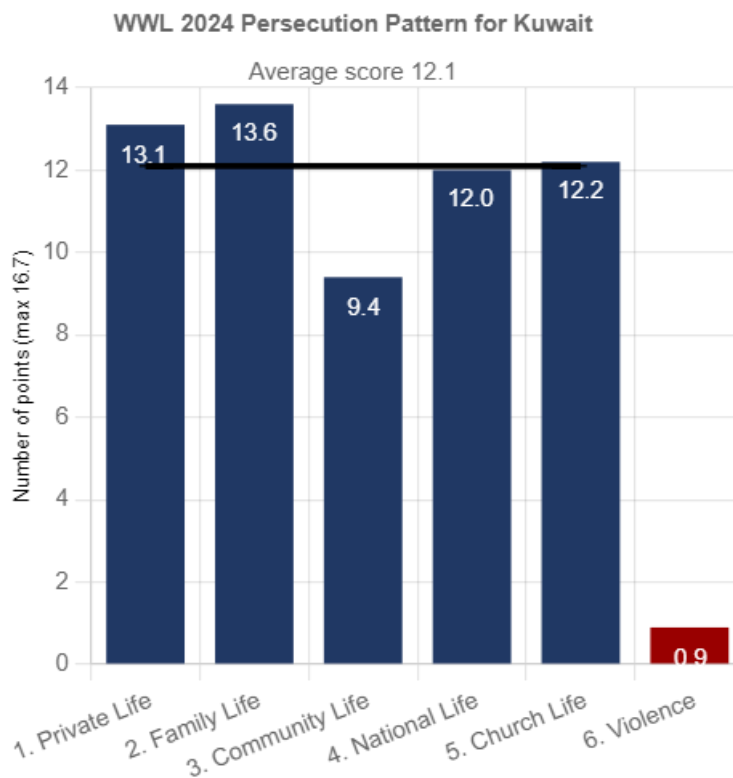
- **One's own (extended) family (Strong):** Although it is clear that the Islamic punishment for apostasy - capital punishment - is a key element in the reasons to persecute a convert family member, this cannot be viewed separately from the concept of 'family honor'. Age old norms (such as protecting family honor) are still intact. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is the betrayal of everything a conservative Muslim family stands for and brings shame upon the family name. Converts face the risk of being ostracized by their families and might even be killed for shaming their families.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Medium):** Tribal and family heads will make sure that the honor of their group is not 'defiled' by a member that converts from Islam to Christianity, which is felt as a great disgrace.
- **Government officials (Medium):** The government adds to the influence of *Clan oppression* in that they work to maintain the status quo in society and its cultural practices. The government will not protect a convert against its own family, but regard any punishment as a 'family matter'.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Medium):** Local imams will encourage the upholding of cultural norms, which are intertwined with Islamic principles.
- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Medium):** Tribalism still has a widespread influence within Kuwaiti society and the social standing of tribe and family is very important to Kuwaitis. Thus, there is social pressure to keep up societal norms in order not to shame the good name of the tribe and family.

#### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** The Kuwaiti government does not allow any criticism of state affairs, including how it manages religious affairs. The country is well policed, with the security forces monitoring activities in the country closely. Expatriates speaking out against

the government will most probably be deported. Freedom House ([Global Freedom Index 2024 Kuwait](#)) stated that journalists and social media users whose articles insult the Emir face prosecution and prison sentences.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Kuwait shows:

- The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level (12.1 points), decreasing slightly from 12.5 in WWL 2023.
- Pressure is highest in the *Family* and *Private spheres of life*, with very high levels also in the *National* and *Church* spheres of life. This reflects on the one hand the difficult situation for convert Christians who face very high pressure from their (extended) family and cannot have an official Christian marriage or Christian funeral. On the other hand, church life is difficult for both converts and expatriate Christians, as proselytizing and integrating converts from a Muslim background are socially unacceptable.
- The score for violence decreased from 1.1 points in WWL 2023 to 0.9 in WWL 2024. Kuwait is a typical Gulf country in that very high levels of pressure ensure that almost nobody 'crosses the line' and experiences violence.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the "WWL Scoring example" in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

## Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

### **Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.50 points)**

This mainly affects converts from Islam to Christianity. Kuwaiti converts are likely to face strong family pressure if the Bible or other Christian material is discovered in their possession. Technological solutions provide a way to circumvent familial monitoring (e.g. Bible app, websites), but would be taken as proof of apostasy if discovered. Although apostasy is legally not prohibited, families and communities are likely to punish a convert for their conversion. The risk for expatriate converts from Islam to Christianity largely depends on the community they are part of, but in principle discovery could lead to (increased) abuse or even deportation.

### **Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.50 points)**

The (extended) family are the primary driver of persecution for Kuwaiti converts. High levels of family pressure make it difficult for most Kuwaiti converts to discuss their new faith with family members. The pressure on expatriate converts is largely depending on their community of origin with whom they are residing in the country. In some cases, pressure on expatriate converts is less than in their home countries, because their family members are often not residing with them.

### **Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points)**

In a conservative and tribal society that regards leaving Islam as a betrayal of family values, conversion to Christianity always brings difficulties. As a result, even though the law does not formally prohibit conversion, both society and government put hurdles in the way for people who convert.

### **Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.25 points)**

Converts from Islam to Christianity face the highest risk as posting faith-related items online could lead to discovery of their conversion or expose them to social harassment. Expatriate Christians cannot openly proselytize or criticize Islam online without consequences, either.

### **Block 1 - Additional information**

All (religious) literature deemed offensive towards Islam is forbidden. Converts living with their family (both nuclear and extended) have difficulty worshiping or owning Christian materials as they have to be careful that they are not discovered.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

### **Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.50 points)**

All children born to Kuwaitis are considered to be Muslim. This principle also applies to the children of Kuwaiti converts.

### **Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)**

A female Kuwaiti Christian from a Muslim background is only permitted by law to marry a man also born Muslim; while a man would have freedom to marry a non-Muslim - but in both cases Islamic procedures apply. Hence, celebrating the marriage between an expatriate or non-convert Kuwaiti Christian and a Kuwaiti convert in a church would be impossible.

### **Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)**

Baptisms of converts must be conducted discreetly as open baptism might attract severe abuse and harassment from family members as well as from the community at large. In addition, a baptism of a convert is clear sign that proselytism has taken place. Hence, for churches the baptism of converts remains a very sensitive topic and can never be carried out in public.

### **Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.50 points)**

Children from Kuwait's (non-convert) indigenous Christian communities do not have access to Christian education within the state school system but must attend classes for Islamic instruction. Private schools, including those serving the expatriate communities, must adhere to government guidelines on curriculum content and must provide Islamic instruction. Although expatriate Christian children cannot receive Christian religious education within the school system, they can be exempted from Islamic religious education.

### **Block 2 - Additional information**

Particularly converts from Islam face serious challenges living as a Christian family. The prevailing circumstances in the country also put significant restrictions on expatriate Christian families. Both have to behave carefully in public. Speaking about their beliefs is difficult and does entail risks, because proselytizing in any way is strictly forbidden. Besides this, converts bear the brunt of persecution in the family sphere. Deceased converts are often buried according to Islamic rites in Muslim cemeteries, and there are very limited facilities for expatriate Christians. The law also puts restrictions on marriage - a Muslim female may not marry a non-Muslim man unless he converts to Islam. In addition, the law states that a marriage between a Muslim and someone who renounces his or her faith (in Islam) is void. These laws have a significant implication on questions of child-custody and inheritance as well.

## Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

**Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.25 points)**

Christians are in general monitored not only by the government but also by society, who will inform the security services if they are aware of any 'suspicious circumstances'. Especially expatriates suspected of evangelism will be followed by the security services.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.25 points)**

There is always pressure on converts to renounce Christianity, also at the community level. Known converts will be ostracized, probably lose their job and will not be seen as being part of the community anymore.

**Block 3.5: Christians have been put under pressure to take part in non-Christian religious ceremonies or community events. (3.00 points)**

During the month of Ramadan, Christians struggle to cope with the de facto requirement to fast imposed by the government and community. In addition, converts from Islam to Christianity will have to take part in all Islamic religious ceremonies in order to keep their new faith a secret.

**Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)**

Known Kuwaiti converts would definitely be discriminated against and have great difficulty in finding employment. It is also an accepted fact that Christian expatriate workers can experience discrimination on the work-floor. Their Christian faith is an extra vulnerability in this regard, although racism also often plays a very negative role.

### **Block 3 - Additional information**

In Kuwaiti communities, Christians are seen as foreigners (and infidels) and are sometimes directly or indirectly prevented from participating in community activities. Education is another area where Christians face challenges. The government requires Islamic religious instruction in state schools for all students and also in private schools that have one or more Muslim students. But the law prohibits organized religious education for faiths other than Islam in state-run schools ([Humanist International, 30 November 2020](#)).

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

### **Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)**

The [Constitution](#) declares that Islam is the state religion. The freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution does not meet international standards fully as it focuses purely on the observance of religious rites, which are not allowed to conflict with Kuwaiti (i.e. Islamic) morals - see Article 35. The Constitution does not guarantee the freedom to convert from Islam to Christianity.

### **Block 4.2: Officials have refused to recognize an individual's conversion as recorded in government administration systems, identify cards (etc.). (3.50 points)**

No convert from a Muslim background would apply to have their conversion officially recognized because they know that this cannot be granted (based on apostasy provisions of Islamic law) and because to make such an application would expose them to the authorities and so be dangerous.

### **Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)**

All Christians will try to keep a low profile in order to avoid pressure. Criticizing the Kuwaiti government or Islam is not acceptable and would very likely lead to deportation for expatriate migrants. Thus, for example, speaking about social justice from a Christian perspective can only be done with great sensitivity.

### **Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)**

Only Christian organizations with a clear benefit for Kuwaiti society, such as a hospital, will be welcomed. It is impossible to establish a Christian organization with the intention of proselytizing; any organization with a clear Christian profile would be under constant suspicion and opposed.

### **Block 4 - Additional information**

There are laws against proselytizing, and the government enforces them. The government also endorses a policy of funding and supporting Sunni Islam by financing Sunni mosques, imams and Sunni Islamic teaching and education. Although Kuwait does hold democratic elections, running for a public office as a non-Muslim is unthinkable. Several radical Islamic groups (as well as conservative hardline members of parliament) wish to get rid of all non-Muslim influences, such as the expatriate celebration of Christmas.



## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### **Block 5.14: Openly selling or distributing Bibles (or other Christian materials) has been hindered. (3.75 points)**

The selling of Christian materials is only permitted at outlets within a registered church compound. The free distribution of Christian materials is not permitted outside church compounds as this would be considered to be an act of proselytization. In practice, most Christians would exercise caution in distributing Christian materials, effectively exercising self-censorship. In previous years, the distribution of Christian material has led to the deportation of the expatriate offender.

### **Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.75 points)**

Criticism of Islam or the government is unacceptable and would most likely lead to deportation in the case of an expatriate Christian, including clergymen. In general, the expatriate community is not viewed as being part of Kuwaiti society, even if an expatriate was born and raised in Kuwait. They are considered guests and any criticism of Kuwaiti society would at best be seen as impolite; however, it would more likely lead to a backlash, which could result in one's residence permit being revoked, followed by deportation.

### **Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.50 points)**

The church compounds in Kuwait are usually too small to host all worshippers and church buildings are often used by multiple congregations. Requests to expand church buildings or build new ones generally remain unanswered by the government. Hence, many congregations have to meet in house churches or other facilities because of the lack of church space. In general, because of an increasing anti-expatriate environment, it is unlikely this situation will improve anytime soon.

### **Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.25 points)**

The government has prohibited non-Muslim missionaries from working in the country and from proselytizing Muslims. Openly integrating converts within church communities would be seen as a clear sign that proselytizing is taking place.

### **Block 5 - Additional information**

Church life in Kuwait is restricted. For example, to purchase a plot of land to build a church, the buyer must be a citizen of Kuwait. For converts to go and buy land for church construction would be very dangerous as this would expose their conversion to the general public. It is not uncommon that churches applying for licenses to build new places of worship have had to wait years for approval. A country researcher noted: "Most of the recognized Christian churches considered their existing facilities inadequate to serve their communities and faced significant problems in obtaining proper approvals from municipal councils to construct new facilities.

Municipal authorities obstructed religious gatherings in private spaces and pressured landlords who had leased property to unlicensed churches.” Besides the difficulties in obtaining church facilities, publishing religious material is also limited to one’s own church congregation. The government allows churches to import religious materials, but under the condition its content does not insult Islam. Signs and symbols on the outside of church buildings are forbidden.

## Violence

*Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:*

### **1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced**

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

### **2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons**

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

### **3. The use of symbolic numbers**

*In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.*

Kuwait: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	0	0
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	0	0
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	0	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	0	0
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10 *	10 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	5	0

### Christians attacked

Given the high number of Christian expatriates in the country, conservative estimates agree that at least 10 Christian house-maids were abused in the WWL 2024 reporting period, with their faith being one of the factors making them more vulnerable.

It is widely known that house-maids working in the domestic sphere are vulnerable to incidents of abuse. However, statistics are scarce (see note below) as almost all persons, organizations and states involved have no interest in revealing the true situation: Kuwait needs the domestic staff to work in households, but has a shame culture and does not want a bad reputation. Also, the home countries of the house-maids need the money coming in from the thousands of migrants working in the Gulf states and do not want to put their economic interests at stake.

However, Philippine President Duterte did impose a temporary travel ban to Kuwait, after the body of a Philippine maid was found in the [freezer](#) of a Kuwaiti home in February 2018 (Gulf News, 16 February 2018). Following two other murders, another travel ban was temporarily imposed in 2020. Yet, gruesome killings of domestic workers continue in Kuwait ([Arab News, 28 January 2023](#)). These few reported killings probably represent the tip of the iceberg as far as the abuse of domestic workers is concerned.

The employers of abused house-maids are either the perpetrators of the abuse themselves or have no real interest in their well-being. The house-maids themselves are often ashamed because of the abuse and do not want to be seen as 'dirty', whether in Kuwait itself or by their family at home. In addition, many provide a very much needed source of income for their families in their home countries. The home families are proud of the work being done in Kuwait, and the house-maid does not want to disappoint her family. Therefore, statistics and evidence of sexual abuse are very difficult to provide. It is also difficult to prove that any abuse is due to the house-maid being a non-Muslim.

#### Note on scarcity of statistics

It could be that thousands of expatriate Christians face abuse, but there is the problem of serious underreporting. The victim will usually want to keep his or her job and other actors (like the government) are not interested in recording such occurrences. It is also usually difficult to discern whether or not mistreatment was due to a worker's Christian faith. Despite promises to improve labor conditions, thousands of migrant workers continue to suffer from labor abuses, according to a report by [Amnesty International](#) - AI (AI, "All Work No Pay", 2019). [In an earlier report](#) (AI, "My Sleep Is My Break", 2014), AI highlighted practices of (sexual) abuse of especially female migrant workers, many of whom are Christian. AI's conclusions were confirmed again in a recent report on the plight of domestic workers in Qatar, a neighboring country, in which expatriates have to work in similar conditions ([AI, "Why do you want to rest?", 2020](#)).

## 5 Year trends

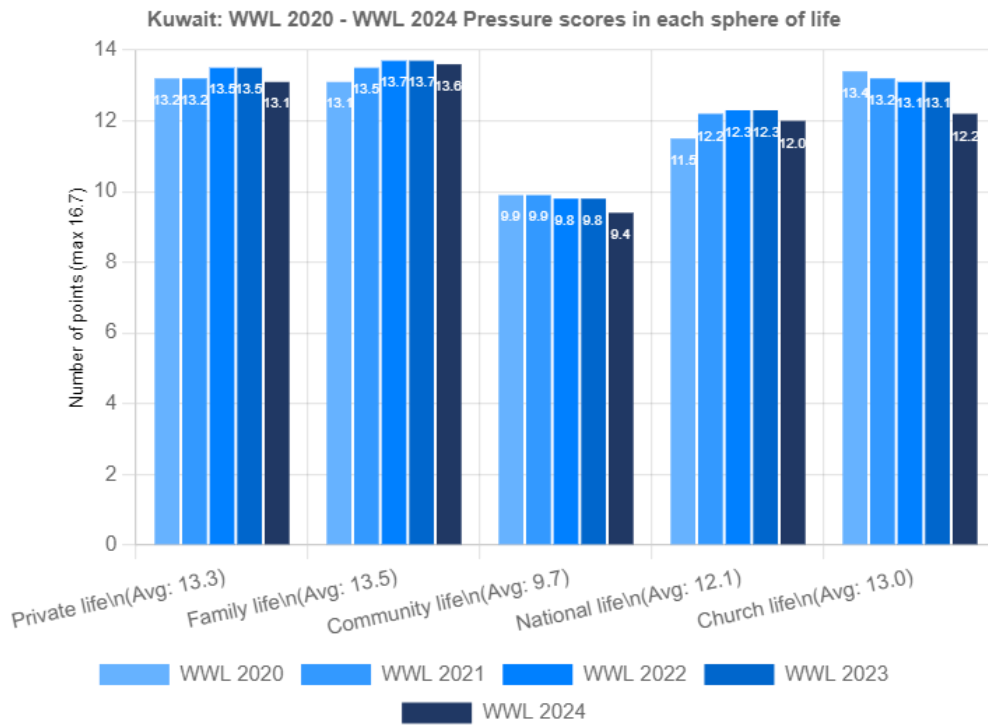
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Kuwait: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	12.1
2023	12.5
2022	12.5
2021	12.4
2020	12.2

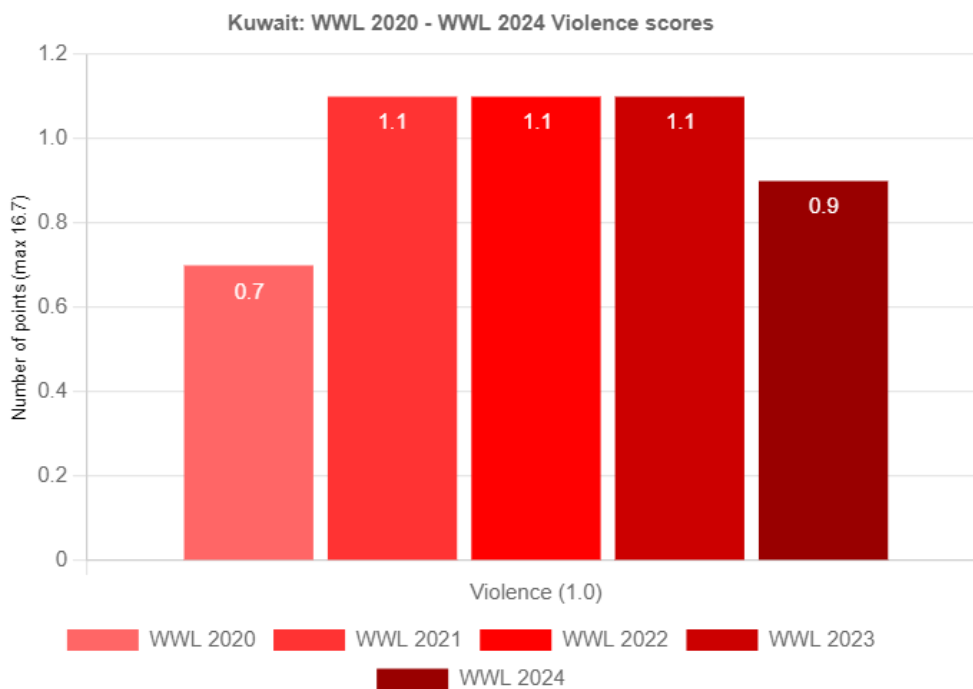
The average pressure on Christians has been stable within the range of 12.1 - 12.5 points.

## 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Pressure in all *spheres of life* has been more or less stable over the last five reporting periods, with slightly lower levels of pressure being reported for WWL 2024. Especially the *Church sphere of life* has seen some improvements, although the score remained at a very high level.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The number of violent incidents recorded in Kuwait has not changed dramatically over the years and the score appears to have stabilized at a very low level. High levels of pressure prevent Christians, both expatriate and converts alike, from crossing written and unwritten boundaries, leading to low levels of incidents.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Incarceration by family (house arrest); Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	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 known as being 'dirty'. 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 family protection law in 2020 was “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 to see how effective the implementation of this law proves to be in practice. Meanwhile, women are particularly vulnerable, as seen in the case of five Kuwaiti sisters (including two minors) who were forced to flee to Turkey to escape domestic violence and sexual abuse ([Al-Monitor](#), 19 January 2023).

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 2024 reporting period). A country expert recounted the case of an indigenous female Christian convert who shared about her faith with her family; she was threatened and forced to flee the country as she “felt like her life was in danger”. Women may 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). Any children resulting from such a marriage would be denied Kuwaiti citizenship, which a country expert describes as “a significant loss of prospects for the child,” and functions as another pressure to dissuade Kuwaiti female converts from marrying a believer.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	Forced divorce
Security	-
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.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Not only Christians have to face the sometimes oppressive hand of the government, other minorities (such as the Shia community) also experience discrimination and have to operate carefully. Although the sizeable Shia community has traditionally enjoyed greater levels of acceptance in Kuwait than in some other countries in the region, there are still restrictions on its religious freedom; this is primarily due to political changes concerning Kuwait's relationship to Saudi Arabia and Iran. However, these dynamics have so far not been strong, as Kuwait tries to maintain a neutral stance at the international level.

Religious groups such as Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs are relatively free to practice their faith in private, although they lack facilities to worship. Conservative groups within parliament view all non-Muslim religious activities with suspicion and regularly oppose them.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Kuwait):

- "Members of non-Abrahamic faiths and non-registered churches continued to state they remained free to practice their religion in private but faced harassment and potential prosecution if they disturbed their neighbors or violated laws regarding assembly and proselytizing. They ... avoided conflict with authorities by not proselytizing or disparaging the government or other faiths. ... they did not publicly advertise religious events or gatherings to avoid bringing unwanted attention to their organizations both from the public and from government authorities. ... Almost uniformly across these communities, members said they lacked sufficient religious facilities and religious leaders or clerics to lead prayers, bless births and marriages, and conduct appropriate death rituals."

## Future outlook

The future of Kuwait, like that of other countries in the Gulf, is intrinsically linked to the political situation in the region. The Middle East and the Gulf region remain unpredictable. The outlook for Christians can be summarized, viewed through the lens of the main persecution engines:

### Islamic oppression

Islamist influence is likely to remain influential. The rise in Sunni radicalism has been an issue not only for Christians in the region, but also for individual country leaders and the international community. Sunni majority countries, including Kuwait, are on the alert to make sure that militant groups do not establish their networks in their country. Yet, political Islam is increasingly gaining ground in Kuwait: MPs with Islamist leanings won a significant number of seats in the latest elections. If the government - i.e., the royal family ruling the country - continues to fail to address public concerns, especially regarding corruption, and if it is not able to solve the continuing deadlocks with parliament, it is not unlikely that more Kuwaitis will look to the Islamists for a solution.

### Clan oppression

Although urbanization, modernization and the rise of the Internet have also become a major influence on the younger generation, it is likely that clan influence will remain high. Globalization could even strengthen this factor since Kuwaitis may feel threatened and seek to protect their own identity. In such a climate, conversion from Islam to Christianity will remain a very sensitive issue.

### Dictatorial paranoia

The Kuwaiti government will continue to do everything necessary to avoid public unrest.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: Global Freedom Index 2024 Kuwait - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kuwait/freedom-world/2024>
- Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere: Humanist International, 30 November 2020 - <https://fot.humanists.international/countries/asia-western-asia/kuwait/>



- Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points): Constitution - [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait\\_1992.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kuwait_1992.pdf?lang=en)
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: freezer - <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/philippines/family-grieves-philippine-maid-found-dead-in-kuwait-freezer-1.2174514>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Arab News, 28 January 2023 - <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2240296/world>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Amnesty International - <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2207932019ENGLISH.PDF>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: In an earlier report - [https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/qatar\\_my\\_sleep\\_is\\_my\\_break\\_final.pdf](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/qatar_my_sleep_is_my_break_final.pdf)
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: AI, "Why do you want to rest?", 2020 - [https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2020-10/Report.pdf?VersionId=WnvR.WIE2vGNFiAo34DM92sa5QneV\\_5g](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2020-10/Report.pdf?VersionId=WnvR.WIE2vGNFiAo34DM92sa5QneV_5g)
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: CEDAW review - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2017/11/committee-elimination-discrimination-against-women-reviews-situation-women?LangID=E&NewsID=22341>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Chatham House - <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/09/kuwait-brighter-future-beckons-domestic-violence-sufferers>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Al-Monitor - <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/01/we-are-very-dangerous-situation-kuwaits-five-sisters-plead-help-stay-turkey>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: law - <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/llgldr/2018298480/2018298480.pdf>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Kuwait>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.