

# Iran : menaces pesant sur les personnes converties

Recherche rapide de l'analyse-pays de l'OSAR

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Ce rapport se fonde sur des renseignements d'expert-e-s et sur les propres recherches de l'analyse-pays de l'OSAR. Conformément aux standards COI, l'analyse-pays de l'OSAR fonde ses recherches sur des sources accessibles publiquement. Lorsque les informations obtenues dans le temps imparti sont insuffisantes, elle fait appel à des expert-e-s. L'OSAR documente ses sources de manière transparente et traçable, mais peut toutefois décider de les anonymiser, afin de garantir la protection de ses contacts.

# 1 Introduction

Le présent document a été rédigé par l'analyse-pays de l'Organisation suisse d'aide aux réfugiés (OSAR) à la suite d'une demande qui lui a été adressée. Il se penche sur les questions suivantes :

- Quelles sont les bases légales régissant la liberté religieuse en Iran ?
- Les personnes musulmanes converties au christianisme sont-elles menacées en Iran ?
- À quelles conséquences les personnes converties au christianisme doivent-elles s'attendre à leur retour en Iran ?

Pour répondre à ces questions, l'analyse-pays de l'OSAR s'est fondée sur des sources accessibles publiquement et disponibles dans les délais impartis (recherche rapide) ainsi que sur des renseignements de contacts experts.

## 2 Menaces pesant sur les personnes musulmanes converties au christianisme

### 2.1 Diffusion du christianisme et nombre de converti-e-s

**Données variables sur la diffusion du christianisme, pas de données fiables sur les converti-e-s.** La population chrétienne en Iran se compose d'Arménien-ne-s – le plus grand groupe chrétien d'Iran – et d'Assyro-Chaldéen-ne-s – l'un des plus anciens groupes présents en Iran (*Minority Rights Group International (MRG)/Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights* et *Centre for Supporters of Human Rights (CSHR)*, mars 2018). De plus, selon cette même source, il existe de grands groupes protestants et évangéliques, auxquels appartiennent de nombreux converti-e-s. Selon le rapport du *UK Home Office* de mars 2018, les données sur la diffusion du christianisme au sein de la population de l'Iran sont très variables. Les données sur leur nombre varient, selon les sources, entre 117 700 et 3 millions de personnes. Selon le recensement de 2011, qui prend uniquement en compte les chrétien-ne-s arménien-ne-s et assyro-chaldéen-ne-s, la population chrétienne s'élevait à 117 704 (MRG/CSHR, mars 2018). Selon le rapport d'août 2017 du *US Department of State (USDOS)* portant sur la liberté religieuse, il n'existe pas de données fiables sur les groupes protestants, y compris les groupes évangéliques, car de nombreux protestant-e-s et autres personnes converties pratiquent leur foi en secret. Selon USDOS (2017), des groupes chrétiens en dehors du pays estiment que les communautés protestantes comptent moins de 10 000 personnes. Selon des estimations non confirmées publiées par *Elam Ministries*, un groupe irano-chrétien basé au Royaume-Uni et menant des activités missionnaires en Iran et dans les pays voisins, entre 500 000 et 1,5 million d'Iranien-ne-s se sont convertis au cours des 30 dernières années (*Danish Immigration Service (DIS)*, juin 2014).

## 2.2 Dispositions légales concernant les chrétien-ne-s et les converti-e-s

**Dans la constitution iranienne, les chrétien-e-s sont reconnus comme une minorité.** Selon la constitution iranienne, les Zoroastrien-e-s, les personnes juives ainsi que les chrétien-e-s (à l'exception des converti-e-s) sont les seules minorités religieuses reconnues qui ont le droit d'accomplir des rituels et des cérémonies religieuses « dans les limites prescrites par la loi » et d'organiser leurs affaires personnelles et leur éducation religieuse conformément à leurs propres règles religieuses (« *religious canon* ») (USDOS, août 2017).

**Les converti-e-s ne peuvent faire enregistrer leur appartenance au christianisme et ne sont pas reconnus en tant que chrétien-ne-s.** Selon USDOS (août 2017), l'ensemble des citoyen-ne-s iranien-ne-s sont considérés comme des musulman-e-s s'ils ne sont pas enregistrés en tant que membres du christianisme arménien ou assyrien, du sabéisme-mandéisme, du judaïsme ou du zoroastrisme. Selon certains rapports, les chrétien-ne-s qui ne peuvent prouver que leur famille était chrétienne avant 1979 sont elles et eux aussi considérés comme membres de l'Islam. Les membres de ces minorités reconnues doivent s'inscrire auprès des autorités. Les personnes converties ne peuvent enregistrer leur appartenance religieuse. En conséquence, les converti-e-s continuent d'être considérés comme des membres de l'Islam devant la loi (USDOS, août 2017).

**Les converti-e-s ne jouissent pas des mêmes droits que les chrétien-ne-s reconnu-e-s.** Les converti-e-s ne pouvant pas s'enregistrer en tant que chrétiens, ils ne jouissent pas des mêmes droits que les membres des groupes chrétiens reconnus (USDOS, août 2017). Les non-musulmans ne sont pas autorisés à travailler dans l'appareil judiciaire, dans les services de sécurité (« *Security Services* », distincts des forces armées régulières) ou comme directrices ou directeurs d'écoles publiques (USDOS, août 2017). Si les non-musulman-e-s enregistré-e-s sont par exemple autorisés à consommer de l'alcool à des fins religieuses, les personnes converties au christianisme s'exposent à des sanctions pour une telle pratique (USDOS, août 2017 ; *Mansour Borji*, cité par DIS, 2014). Par ailleurs, selon les indications transmises au *Danish Immigration Service* (DIS) dans le cadre d'une Fact-Finding-Mission de 2014 par *Mansour Borji*, porte-parole de l'initiative *Article 18* du *United Council of Iranian Churches (Hamgaam)*, un mariage chrétien entre personnes converties n'est pas reconnu par les autorités iraniennes (DIS, juin 2014). Selon cette même source, un mariage purement civil sans mariage religieux (islamique) n'est pas reconnu en Iran (DIS, juin 2014 ; *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* (IRB), décembre 2001). Les converti-e-s ne peuvent se marier légalement que conformément à la loi islamique. Pour enregistrer son mariage, un couple doit, selon cette même source, présenter un contrat de mariage islamique (*Mansour Borji* à DIS, juin 2014).

**Peine de mort pour prosélytisme à l'égard de musulman-e-s.** Selon USDOS (août 2017), le Code pénal iranien prévoit la peine de mort pour les non-musulman-e-s qui convertissent des musulman-e-s au christianisme ou prêchent la foi chrétienne auprès de musulman-e-s.

**Renier l'Islam est passible de la peine de mort.** Selon USDOS (août 2017), renier l'Islam est passible de la peine de mort. Bien que l'apostasie (reniement de la foi) ne soit pas spécifiquement définie comme un crime dans le Code pénal, des poursuites pour ce motif sont possibles (ancien Rapporteur spécial des Nations Unies sur la situation des droits de l'homme en République islamique d'Iran, *Asma Jahangir*, cité par le HCR, mars 2017). Le Code pénal

iranien et l'article 167 de la Constitution stipulent que la *charia*, ou la loi religieuse islamique, s'applique dans les cas non réglementés par la loi (*Iran Human Rights Documentation Center* (IHRDC), juillet 2014 ; *Christians in Parliament APPG et APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015). Bien que le Coran ne mentionne pas de punition de l'apostasie, la majorité des juristes islamiques s'accordent à dire que l'apostasie devrait être punie par la mort (IHRDC, juillet 2014). Selon la *charia*, les femmes risquent la prison à vie pour apostasie et les hommes peuvent être condamnés à mort (*Christians in Parliament APPG et APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015).

**La conversion de l'islam à une autre religion n'est pas autorisée.** Selon USDOS (août 2017), les citoyen-ne-s musulman-e-s ne peuvent pas, conformément à la loi, changer ou renier leurs croyances religieuses, seule la conversion d'une autre religion à l'Islam est reconnue. Dans le Code pénal iranien, il n'existe pas de lois spécifiques interdisant la conversion (*Mansour Borji*, cité par DIS, juin 2014). Néanmoins, même en cas de conversion, il peut être fait référence à la constitution iranienne : selon l'article 167, la *charia* est applicable et les juges peuvent, selon leur appréciation, invoquer les fatwas et d'autres sources religieuses (*Mansour Borji*, cité par DIS, juin 2014). *Ali Younesi*, conseiller principal pour les affaires des minorités ethniques et religieuses auprès du Président *Hassan Rohani*, aurait, selon un rapport des deux groupes parlementaires britanniques *Christians in Parliament APPG et APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015), déclaré publiquement dans une interview accordée en octobre 2014 qu'une conversion de l'Islam à « diverses sectes » était illégale et que les minorités religieuses n'étaient pas autorisées à mener d'activités de prosélytisme.

## 2.3 Arrestations, poursuites et autres mesures de répression

### 2.3.1 Perception des converti-e-s par les autorités

**Grande méfiance envers les chrétien-ne-s et les converti-e-s, qui sont perçus comme un instrument de l'Occident.** Selon les indications données à DRC/DIS (février 2018) par une *personne étrangère ayant des contacts avec des chrétien-ne-s en Iran*, la perception des chrétien-ne-s par les autorités iraniennes a généralement changé. Selon cette source, après la « révolution verte » de 2009, les autorités ont développé une « paranoïa » contre les chrétien-ne-s, ceux-ci étant considérés comme à l'origine « d'idées libertaires ». Cette même source ajoute que, au fur et à mesure que s'est ouvert le pays, les autorités ont renforcé leurs mesures contre ces idées. La conversion en Iran est ainsi interprétée par les autorités comme un rapprochement vers l'Occident et une opposition au système. Les activités liées à la conversion sont réprimées par les autorités parce qu'elles sont perçues comme des activités politiques (RDC/DIS, février 2018). Selon des déclarations d'*Open Doors* faites lors d'une interview accordée en août 2017 au *UK Home Office*, les Gardiens de la révolution et les services de renseignements iraniens pensent que les chrétien-ne-s sont des espions de l'Occident (*UK Home Office*, mars 2018). Selon *Christians in Parliament APPG et APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015), les converti-e-s sont considérés par certaines autorités iraniennes comme une menace et un moyen pour l'Occident de saper les structures politiques et religieuses du pays.

### 2.3.2 Pas d'amélioration de la situation des converti-e-s sous le Président Hassan Rohani

**Aucun changement concernant la situation des droits humains sous le gouvernement Rohani, certaines sources font état d'un nombre croissant d'arrestations de chrétien-ne-s.** Selon la *US Commission on International Religious Freedom* (USCIRF, avril 2017), le nombre d'arrestations de membres de minorités religieuses en raison de leur foi a augmenté depuis l'élection de *Hassan Rohani* en 2013, bien que son gouvernement ait décidé la libération de certains prisonniers politico-religieux. Le même rapport suggère que le président *Rohani* n'a pas tenu sa promesse de renforcer les droits civils des minorités religieuses. Selon le rapport de *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *d'APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* de mars 2015, les mesures de persécution à l'encontre des chrétien-ne-s sont toujours aussi répandues sous le président *Rohani*, malgré ses promesses de renforcer le respect des droits humains. Selon les informations fournies en octobre 2017 par *Middle East Concern* au *Danish Refugee Council* (DRC) et au *Danish Immigration Service* (DIS) dans le cadre d'une Fact-Finding-Mission menée en septembre et octobre 2017, les arrestations de chrétien-ne-s n'ont pas diminué ces dernières années (DRC/DIS, février 2018). Le 2 décembre 2014, *Ajay Sharma*, membre du *Foreign and Commonwealth Office* britannique, a souligné que la situation des droits humains en Iran n'avait pas beaucoup changé depuis l'élection de *Rohani* et qu'il fallait même parler d'une détérioration (*Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015).

### 2.3.3 Arrestations

**Arrestations arbitraires de converti-e-s par les autorités iraniennes.** L'ancienne Rapporteuse spéciale des Nations Unies sur la situation des droits de l'homme en Iran, *Asma Jahangir*, a souligné dans son rapport au Conseil des droits de l'homme des Nations Unies en mars 2017 que les autorités iraniennes et le clergé s'en prennent de manière ciblée aux musulman-e-s converti-e-s au christianisme en usant de mesures strictes et au travers d'arrestations arbitraires (HRC, 2017). *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (2015) font également état d'arrestations arbitraires de chrétien-ne-s. Selon des indications de *Mansour Borji*, il est devenu courant au cours des dix dernières années que, dans différentes villes iraniennes, des converti-e-s chrétien-ne-s soient arrêtés par les forces de sécurité pendant la période de Noël (*Center for Human Rights in Iran*, janvier 2016). Dans un entretien avec le *UK Home Office* en juillet 2017, l'organisation *Article 18* a souligné que les arrestations de converti-e-s sont rarement conformes aux exigences légales (*UK Home Office*, mars 2018). Selon cette même source, dans la plupart des cas, les personnes concernées ne sont pas convoquées, ne reçoivent pas de mandat d'arrêt au moment de leur arrestation et ne sont pas informées des charges retenues contre elles.

**Nombre disproportionné d'arrestations de converti-e-s.** Selon USDOS (août 2017), les chrétien-ne-s en exil ont fait état d'un nombre disproportionné d'arrestations, en particulier de chrétien-ne-s évangéliques et de musulman-e-s converti-e-s au christianisme. Selon USCIRF (2017) et l'agence de presse *BosNewsLife* basée à Budapest (cité par ACCORD, 14 juin 2017), les forces de sécurité iraniennes ont arrêté environ 80 chrétien-ne-s entre mai et août 2016. USCIRF (2017) ajoute que la majorité des détenu-e-s ont été interrogés puis libérés après quelques jours, mais certains d'entre eux ont été détenus sans inculpation pendant des mois. Plusieurs d'entre eux se trouvent toujours en détention. Les groupes de défense



des droits humains estiment cependant que tous les cas ne sont pas signalés et que le nombre de chrétien-ne-s appréhendé-e-s par les autorités pourrait être beaucoup plus élevé (*BosNewsLife*, cité par ACCORD, 14 juin 2017). En décembre 2016, environ 90 chrétien-ne-s ont été emprisonnés ou placés en détention provisoire pour leurs activités religieuses ou leurs croyances (USCIRF, 2017).

**Les personnes converties sont arrêtées lors de rafles dans des églises de maison, à leur domicile ou en d'autres lieux encore.** Selon des déclarations de témoins faites à *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015), les rafles et arrestations de chrétien-ne-s à leur domicile sont monnaie courante en Iran. Selon les informations transmises à DRC/DIS par une *source en Iran bien informée sur les chrétien-ne-s*, les personnes qui pratiquent leur foi dans des églises de maison font l'objet de rafles systématiques (RDC/DIS, février 2018). Selon *BosNewsLife*, rien qu'en août 2016, les forces de sécurité ont mené des rafles dans au moins quatre églises de maison (cité par ACCORD, juin 2017). Selon *Mansour Borji*, les autorités mènent de telles rafles afin d'instaurer un climat de peur (DIS, juin 2014).

Les converti-e-s courent également un risque élevé d'être arrêtés en tout lieu. Selon le rapport publié en 2017 par l'*Organisation norvégienne des requérant-e-s d'asile (NOAS)*, le *Conseil chrétien norvégien*, l'*Église norvégienne* et *Stefanus Alliansen* (NOAS, *Norges Kristne Råd*, *Den Norske Kirke* et *Stefanus Alliansen*), les rafles n'ont pas uniquement lieu lors de réunions spécifiquement chrétiennes. *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* rapportent l'histoire d'un homme qui a été battu et menacé de mort parce qu'il écoutait des chants chrétiens dans sa voiture. Il a ensuite été emmené au bureau central du renseignement de sa ville, arrêté et interrogé quant à sa possession éventuelle d'une Bible (*Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015). D'autres sources rapportent des exemples d'arrestations sur le lieu de travail, lors de funérailles, de pique-niques ou de fêtes familiales (CSW cité par DIS, juin 2014 ; *Mohabat News*, août 2016 ; *Mohabat News*, octobre 2017 ; *World Watch Monitor*, octobre 2017).

**Les arrestations lors de rafles dans les églises de maison concernent aussi bien les responsables d'église que les membres réguliers.** En septembre 2017, *Elam Ministries* a déclaré au *UK Home Office* que, lors de rafles dans des églises de maison, toutes les personnes présentes sont arrêtées : aussi bien les personnes nouvelles et inactives que les responsables d'églises (*UK Home Office*, mars 2018). D'autres sources indiquent que, si ce sont surtout les responsables d'églises qui sont dans le collimateur des autorités, qui cherchent ainsi à affaiblir les églises de maison, les membres réguliers risquent eux aussi d'être arrêtés (informations fournies à DRC/DIS par *une source anonyme* et *Middle East Concern*, une organisation œuvrant pour les chrétien-ne-s au Moyen-Orient et en Afrique du Nord, février 2018). Selon les indications de l'organisation chrétienne *Open Doors* transmises au *UK Home Office*, les autorités considèrent toute personne qui assume une fonction ou une compétence quelconque dans une église de maison comme un-e responsable. C'est le cas, par exemple, lorsqu'une personne organise une cérémonie dans une église de maison pour seulement quatre ou cinq personnes (*UK Home Office*, mars 2018). Alors qu'en 2015/2016, les églises de maison comptaient environ 20 à 30 membres, elles sont entre-temps devenues beaucoup plus petites (information transmise par *Elam Ministries* au *UK Home Office*, mars



2018). Selon *Elam Ministries*, les responsables religieux ayant été arrêtés, des membres réguliers ont dû assumer le rôle de responsable. Les structures des églises de maison ne sont pas clairement définies.

### 2.3.4 Obligation de travailler comme informateurs/trices, surveillance, répression et situation précaire après la libération

**Pour être libéré-e-s, les converti-e-s doivent verser une caution, renier leur foi, agir comme informateurs/trices et/ou quitter le pays.** Diverses sources signalent qu'une libération nécessite une caution élevée (*Elam Ministries*, cité par ACCORD, juin 2017 ; CSW, cité par DIS, 2014 ; NOAS et al. 2017). *Middle East Concern* nomme des montants allant jusqu'à 200 000 dollars US (197 279 CHF, taux de change du 6 juin 2018) (RDC/DIS, février 2018). Selon NOAS et al. (2017), les converti-e-s sont libérés et leur poursuite retirée s'ils acceptent d'agir en tant qu'informateurs pour les autorités. Selon cette même source, il est également d'usage que les personnes converties soient tenues de signer une attestation dans laquelle elles déclarent renier leur foi ou promettent de ne plus visiter d'églises de maison, de couper tout contact ou de renoncer à tout autre activité chrétienne. Si une personne est appréhendée pour une infraction supplémentaire, les nouvelles accusations sont considérablement renforcées, ajoute NOAS et al. (2017). Diverses personnes concernées auraient ainsi été tenues d'assurer aux autorités qu'elles quitteraient le pays (NOAS et al, 2017). D'autres sources rapportent également que certaines personnes ont été contraintes par les autorités à quitter le pays (*Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015 ; DIS, juin 2014).

#### **Situation précaire : après libération, les converti-e-s sont placé-e-s sous surveillances, peuvent perdre leur emploi et se retrouvent dans une situation de détresse économique.**

Les converti-e-s libéré-e-s de détention ou de prison continuent d'être surveillés (« *monitored* ») par les autorités (*Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015). Ainsi, une personne libérée de la prison d'Evin rapporte que, en particulier au cours de la première année qui a suivi sa libération, la police l'a surveillée en permanence et a mis son téléphone sur écoute (*Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015). Selon diverses sources (information transmise par *Middle East Concern* à RDC/DIS, février 2018 ; NOAS et al., 2017), les converti-e-s perdent souvent leur emploi après leur arrestation sans qu'aucune raison ne leur soit indiquée. Les ancien-ne-s détenu-e-s sont confrontés à de grandes difficultés pour obtenir les documents ou permis nécessaires, par exemple pour ouvrir leur propre entreprise. Pour ces personnes, il est donc « extrêmement difficile de survivre » (NOAS et al., 2017). Dans certains cas, les personnes doivent en outre vendre leur maison et leur propriété, afin de payer la caution pour la libération (NOAS et al., 2017). Selon *Middle East Concern*, lorsqu'une personne prend la fuite après avoir été libérée sous caution, il arrive que les autorités confisquent ses biens (information transmise par *Middle East Concern* à RDC/DIS, février 2018). Tous ces facteurs, conjugués à la grande incertitude liée aux procédures judiciaires en cours et au risque de ré-emprisonnement, conduisent de nombreuses et nombreux converti-e-s à quitter l'Iran (NOAS et al., 2017). Même lorsque les personnes arrêtées n'ont jamais été officiellement inculpées et que le procès a été ajourné, il y a toujours un risque pour les personnes concernées que la procédure soit ouverte (information transmise par *Middle East Concern* à RDC/DIS, février 2018).

### 2.3.5 Poursuites pénales et procédure inéquitables

**Les personnes converties au christianisme sont souvent accusées de crimes de nature politique et de « crimes contre la sûreté nationale ».** La conversion n'est pas explicitement définie comme un crime en Iran (voir chapitre 2.2). Les autorités judiciaires utilisent les lois de sûreté nationale pour punir les personnes converties (MRG et al. mars 2018). *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015) soulignent que les chrétien-ne-s traduit-e-s en justice sont souvent condamnés sur la base de chefs d'accusation politiques plutôt qu'explicitement religieux. DRC/DIS (février 2018) indique également que les converti-e-s sont généralement accusés non pas d'apostasie mais de mise en danger de la sûreté nationale. Selon cette même source, l'accusation se fonde normalement sur la section « Lois de sûreté » du Code pénal iranien, exprimée de manière vague et souvent appliquée de manière abusive. Les chrétien-ne-s arrêté-e-s sont généralement traduits devant les tribunaux révolutionnaires (« *Revolutionary Courts* »). Il s'agit en fait de tribunaux de sûreté nationale (RDC/DIS, février 2018 ; *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015). Selon l'ancienne Rapporteuse spéciale des Nations Unies *Asma Jahangir* (UNHRC, 2017), les chrétien-ne-s évangéliques sont accusés par le gouvernement iranien de crimes contre la sûreté nationale et de propagande contre l'État. Selon *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015), ces « crimes contre la sûreté nationale » sont vagues et couvrent un très large éventail d'activités. Entre autres choses, les personnes converties peuvent être accusées de propagande contre le système, de collusion contre le gouvernement par le biais d'assemblées et d'églises de maison, d'outrage au chef suprême ou au président, de « troubles à la conscience publique » ou de « conspiration avec des ennemis étrangers de la République islamique » (*Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion and Belief*, mars 2015).

**Procédures injustes et non conforme à l'Etat de droit.** Le rapport de *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* 2015 indique que, pour la plupart des chrétien-ne-s, le droit à une procédure conforme à l'Etat de droit n'est pas respecté. Ainsi, de nombreuses personnes sont maintenues en détention pendant des semaines ou des mois sans inculpation formelle ni accès à une assistance juridique. Selon cette même source, leurs déclarations seraient considérées comme irrecevables par le tribunal. NOAS et al. (2017) indique qu'il peut s'écouler beaucoup de temps avant que les personnes détenues soient informées des accusations dont elles font l'objet et qu'elles bénéficient d'une procédure légale régulière. Selon *Article 18*, il est « hautement probable » que les chefs d'accusation portés devant les tribunaux ne soient plus les mêmes que ceux qui ont été – éventuellement – portés au début de la procédure (*Article 18* cité par *UK Home Office*, mars 2018). Selon les témoignages recueillis par NOAS et al. (2017), les converti-e-s se voient rarement attribués un avocat. Souvent, l'avocat-e n'a par ailleurs pas accès à la documentation nécessaire (NOAS et al., 2017). L'organisation chrétienne *Christian Solidarity Worldwide* (CSW), basée au Royaume-Uni, déclare qu'il existe de nombreuses indications selon lesquelles même les procédures judiciaires menées récemment à l'encontre des personnes converties ne sont pas équitables (CSW, 2017). *Article 18* souligne dans son entretien avec le *UK Home*

Office que certaines personnes sont détenues pendant trois mois et un jour, afin qu'elles aient un casier judiciaire (UK Home Office, mars 2018).

**Récemment, les personnes converties sont condamnées à des peines particulièrement lourdes.** En règle générale, les peines infligées aux chrétien-ne-s s'élèvent à un à huit ans de prison (*Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015). Cependant, des converti-e-s ont récemment été condamnés à des peines de prison excessivement lourdes (données fournies à l'OSAR par courriel le 15 août 2017 par une *personne de contact de Pearl of Persia*, une des organisations irano-chrétiennes missionnaires en exil membres des *222 Ministries*). Depuis les récentes élections présidentielles de mai 2017, CSW et l'Initiative *Article 18* ont identifié un nombre particulièrement élevé de converti-e-s ayant été condamné-e-s à des peines de prison excessivement lourdes (CSW, juillet 2017). Rien qu'entre mai et juillet 2017, le juge *Ahmadzadeh*, président du 26<sup>e</sup> tribunal révolutionnaire, a condamné au moins seize chrétien-ne-s à cinq à dix ans de prison (CSW, 2017). Selon cette même source, une personne a été condamnée à 15 ans de prison. Les peines prévues par la loi ont ainsi été dépassées dans tous ces jugements.

**Condamnations à mort contre les personnes converties et les personnes ayant « renié l'Islam ».** Selon des sources recueillies par le *Danish Refugee Council* (DRC) et le *Danish Immigration Service* (DIS) en octobre 2017, la peine de mort pour conversion n'est pas une peine courante en Iran (DRC/DIS, février 2018). Diverses sources ont cependant indiqué à DRC/DIS (février 2018) que, ces dernières années, des converti-e-s et des personnes ayant « renié l'Islam » ont été condamnés à mort : *Amnesty International* et une *ambassade occidentale* ont ainsi indiqué à DRS/DIS (2018) qu'*Ali Taheri*, fondateur du groupe spirituel « *Erfan-e Halgheh* », avait été condamné à mort en 2015 pour s'être converti. En 2016, il a été acquitté, puis inculpé à nouveau immédiatement après. Il a finalement été condamné à mort en août 2017 pour « propagation de la corruption sur terre » (« *Spreading Corruption on Earth* »). En octobre 2017, la *Supreme Court* a de nouveau renvoyé l'affaire devant une juridiction inférieure pour que des clarifications supplémentaires soient menées. *Amnesty International* a également indiqué, concernant les condamnations pour conversion au christianisme, que, après avoir été condamné à mort en 2012, *Yousef Nadarkhani* a finalement été libéré plus tard. En mai 2017, il a été à nouveau arrêté et condamné à dix ans de prison pour « propagation d'églises de maison » et « sionisme chrétien ». *Middle East Consultancy Service* a indiqué à DRC/DIS (2018) concernant les procédures ouvertes contre des converti-e-s que *Sina Dehghan* avait été condamné à mort par exécution en mai 2016 pour avoir mené une campagne de protestation d'enseignant-e-s et pour blasphème dans des publications en ligne. La sentence a été confirmée par la Cour suprême. Dans une autre affaire, *Hesameddin Farzizadeh* a été condamné à mort pour apostasie en juin 2015 par le tribunal pénal de Meshkinshahr dans la province d'Ardabil (information transmise par *Middle East Consultancy Service* à DRC/DIS, 2018). En novembre 2014, *Farzizadeh* a été arrêté à son domicile par des agents en civil et condamné pour son livre « *From Islam to Islam* ». L'accusation d'apostasie porte sur ce livre, qui questionne l'Islam chiite.

**Confiscation de Bibles et de textes chrétiens, indications divergentes concernant les conséquences de la possession d'une Bible.** Diverses sources (USDOS, août 2017 ; *Mohabat News*, août 2016 et octobre 2017 ; DIS, juin 2014) rapportent que des Bibles et du matériel chrétien sont confisqués lors de rafles. Selon le site d'information irano-chrétien *Mohabat News* (août 2016), la seule possession d'une Bible ou de documents chrétiens est considérée comme une infraction pénale. Selon le rapport publié conjointement par le *Danish*

*Immigration Service (DIS), le Danish Refugee Council et Landinfo (février 2013), la possession d'une Bible ne devrait pas être un problème. Cependant, si une personne est surprise avec plusieurs Bibles, elle doit alors s'expliquer. Si celle-ci est déjà dans le viseur des autorités et fait déjà l'objet d'une enquête, la possession d'une Bible peut être utilisée à son encontre. Selon USDOS (août 2017), les livres publiés par des minorités religieuses, quel que soit leur contenu, doivent être assortis d'une mention attestant que leur auteur n'est pas chiite.*

### **2.3.6 Sévices physiques et psychologiques**

**Sévices physiques et psychologiques à l'encontre des chrétien-ne-s en détention et au cours d'interrogatoires.** Selon USDOS (août 2017), NOAS et al. (2017) et *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015), les chrétien-ne-s placé-e-s en détention sont soumis à de graves sévices physiques et psychologiques. Selon *Mohabat News*, ces mauvais traitements comprennent parfois des passages à tabac et un isolement cellulaire (cité par USDOS, août 2017). NOAS et al. (2017) signalent que des personnes converties ont été détenues à l'isolement jusqu'à 75 jours. Le rapport de *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015) fait également état, sur la base de témoignages, de mauvais traitements physiques et psychologiques graves ainsi que de cas d'isolement cellulaire lors d'interrogatoires de détenu-e-s converti-e-s. CSW fait état de tortures et de passages à tabac graves de la part du personnel pénitentiaire et des autres détenu-e-s (CSW, cité par DIS, juin 2014 ; voir aussi *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015). Selon des témoignages recueillis par NOAS et al. (2017) et par *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015), les converti-e-s placé-e-s en détention ne sont souvent pas détenus séparément des personnes condamnées pour crimes graves et crimes violents. Selon des organisations de défense des droits humains, les détenu-e-s, y compris certain-e-s chrétien-ne-s, se voient refuser par les autorités pénitentiaires tout traitement médical (USDOS, août 2017 ; NOAS et al., 2017 ; CSW, cité par DIS, juin 2014). Les converti-e-s sont menacés d'exécution (NOAS et al., 2017) ou de violences sexuelles (*Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015) pendant les interrogatoires et en détention. Des fausses informations sont utilisées comme moyen de pression : il est ainsi annoncé aux détenu-e-s que leurs parents sont malades, que leurs conjoint-e-s sont infidèles ou que leurs parents âgés ont également été arrêtés (*Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015). CSW et NOAS et al. rapportent en outre que les autorités font subir aux converti-e-s placé-e-s en détention des intimidations en leur refusant des visites familiales sans justification (DIS, juin 2014, NOAS et al., 2017).

**Usage de la force lors de rafles.** Selon les témoignages recueillis par NOAS et al. (2017), la police se montre brutale lors des rafles et fait usage de la violence contre les personnes concernées et leurs proches. *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015) font également état de l'usage de la force lors des rafles.

## **2.4 Harcèlement de la part des acteurs de l'Etat**

**Harcèlement et intimidations de la part des autorités.** Selon USDOS (août 2017), les chrétien-ne-s évangéliques et les chrétien-ne-s converti-e-s font en particulier l'objet de harcèlement et de surveillance de la part des autorités. Selon *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015), les ancien-ne-s musulman-e-s converti-e-s au christianisme et les personnes qui célèbrent le culte en persan sont victimes des plus graves actes de harcèlement et d'agression. Ainsi, il arrive que les converti-e-s soient exproprié-e-s de leurs propriétés d'habitation et de leurs biens par les autorités. Les personnes converties risquent également de perdre leur emploi lorsque leur conversion est révélée (*Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015). Elles se voient en outre refuser l'accès à l'éducation en raison de leur foi (USDOS, août 2017). *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015) rapportent le cas d'une femme suspendue de l'université après l'arrestation et l'interrogatoire de sa pasteure par le Ministère du renseignement et de la sécurité MOIS (*Ministry of Intelligence and Security*).

**Les familles de personnes converties elles aussi la cible de harcèlement et de menaces de la part de l'État.** Diverses sources indiquent que l'entourage familial des converti-e-s chrétien-ne-s peut être victime de harcèlement de la part d'acteurs de l'Etat (*Elam Ministries*, cité par ACCORD, juin 2017 ; *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief*, mars 2015). *Elam Ministries* rapporte le cas d'un garçon de douze ans qui a été interrogé sur sa foi et battu, puis arrêté avec ses parents convertis (ACCORD, juin 2017). Selon les informations fournies à DIS par *l'organisation internationale en Turquie*, les membres de la famille d'une personne convertie risquent de perdre leur emploi ou de se voir refuser l'accès aux études supérieures (DIS, juin 2014). Un autre exemple mentionné concerne le cas des personnes âgées harcelées par les autorités de l'État en raison de la conversion de leur enfant. L'arrestation de la personne qui subvient aux besoins de la famille a également des conséquences financières, d'autant plus que des sommes importantes doivent être mobilisées pour payer la caution et obtenir une libération provisoire (*Elam Ministries*, 2017, cité par ACCORD, juin 2017 ; CSW, cité par DIS, juin 2014). Selon CSW (cité par DIS, juin 2014), les montants fixés sont intentionnellement élevés afin de causer le plus grand préjudice financier possible à la famille. *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015) mentionnent un pasteur chrétien ayant fui à l'étranger après avoir été menacé d'arrestation et dont les proches ont subi des menaces quasi quotidiennes avant de finalement devoir déménager dans une autre ville, le MOIS ayant informé les autorités locales qu'ils étaient apostats.

## 2.5 Rejet, exclusion sociale et dénonciation par des tiers

**Pression, rejet, menaces et même, selon une source, crimes d'honneur contre les personnes converties de la part des membres de la famille.** Les personnes musulmanes converties au christianisme sont confrontées à des pressions sociales et au rejet de la part de l'entourage familial ou des membres de la communauté (information fournie par diverses sources à RDC/DIS, février 2018 ; CSW, cité par USDOS, août 2017). Pour cette raison, de nombreux converti-e-s chrétien-ne-s dissimulent leur conversion aux membres de leur famille (*Amnesty International*, cité par RDC/DIS, février 2018). *Mansour Borji* (cité par DIS, juin 2014) souligne aussi que, si les converti-e-s sont principalement persécutés par l'Etat, ils subissent parfois aussi des mauvais traitements de la part de leur famille. Selon les informations fournies à DIS par une *organisation internationale en Turquie* (juin 2014), une personne



convertie peut être menacée par sa famille, par exemple si un membre de sa famille occupe un poste important au sein des autorités. Selon *Union Church* (cité par DIS, juin 2014), ce sont surtout les proches parents (parents et frères et sœurs) qui causent les plus gros problèmes, la personne convertie constituant à leur yeux un déshonneur pour la famille. Les converti-e-s seraient expulsés de leurs familles (*Union Church*, citée par DIS, juin 2014 ; renseignement fourni à l'OSAR par courriel le 15 août 2017 par une *personne de contact de Pearl of Persia*). Enfin, selon une source, il est même possible que les personnes converties soient victimes de crimes d'honneur de la part des membres de leur famille (*Union Church*, cité par DIS, juin 2014).

**Dénonciation par des membres de la famille ou des voisins.** Selon *Amnesty International* (AI, cité par DIS, juin 2014), pour une personne convertie, le risque d'être dénoncée par la famille dépend de son degré de religiosité et de ses liens avec les autorités. Il est possible qu'une personne convertie soit dénoncée par un membre de sa famille ou par des voisin-e-s (AI ; *Mansour Borji*, tous deux cités par DIS, juin 2014). Diverses sources citées dans le rapport de DRC/DIS estiment qu'il est peu probable que les membres de la famille dénoncent aux autorités une personne convertie (DRC/DIS, 23 février 2018). Cependant, cela peut se produire lorsque le proche travaille pour le gouvernement ou lorsque son statut est affecté par la conversion (*Middle East Concern*, cité par DRC/DIS, février 2018). De nombreuses familles sont fidèles au régime et comptent parmi elles des membres des *Basij*<sup>1</sup>. Le risque existe également que les enfants informent les enseignant-e-s à l'école des activités qui se déroulent chez elles/eux (information transmise par une *source anonyme* à RDC/DIS, février 2018).

## 2.6 Obligation de garder le secret, surveillance et églises de maison

**Contrôle strict des églises reconnues, baptêmes et visites d'églises interdits aux personnes converties.** Selon *Ahmed Shaheed*, l'ancien rapporteur spécial des Nations unies sur la situation des droits de l'homme en Iran, les autorités ont interdit aux musulman-e-s converti-e-s au christianisme de fréquenter les églises arméniennes ou assyriennes reconnues par l'État (USDOS, août 2017). Ces églises sont ainsi fermées lorsqu'elles baptisent de nouvelles personnes converties ou prêchent en persan. Selon le *Iranian High Council for Human Rights* (2016, cité par MRG et al., mars 2018), il n'y a que deux églises protestantes de langue persane dans le pays. Les autorités interdisent par ailleurs à toutes les personnes chrétiennes non enregistrées ou non reconnues d'entrer sur les sites ecclésiastiques (USDOS, août 2017). Les églises qui permettent cependant l'accès à ces personnes sont fermées par les autorités, et les converti-e-s sont arrêtés (USDOS, août 2017). Les pasteurs d'églises évangéliques et protestantes reconnues doivent dresser la liste de leurs membres et n'autoriser l'accès qu'à ces personnes, sinon ils risquent d'être arrêtés (*Elam Ministries*, cité par DIS, juin 2014). En outre, les églises sont contrôlées par l'*Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps* (IRGC) et les forces de sécurité effectuent des contrôles d'identité devant les bâtiments religieux (USDOS, août 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> Pour davantage d'informations sur les Basij: OSAR, Iran, Ausstieg aus der Basij, 25 janvier 2013 (en allemand) : [www.fluechtlingshilfe.ch/assets/herkunftslaender/mittlerer-osten-zentralasien/iran/iran-ausstieg-aus-der-basij.pdf](http://www.fluechtlingshilfe.ch/assets/herkunftslaender/mittlerer-osten-zentralasien/iran/iran-ausstieg-aus-der-basij.pdf).

**Les personnes converties au christianisme doivent dissimuler leur foi et fondent de plus en plus d'églises de maison.** Les personnes converties au christianisme sont contraintes d'exercer leur foi secrètement et de se rassembler dans des églises de maison illégales (USDOS, août 2017 ; ACCORD, juin 2017). Selon les informations fournies par diverses sources à RDC/DIS (février 2018), le nombre d'églises de maison est en augmentation.

**Les églises de maison sont considérées comme illégales parce qu'elles ne se voient pas accorder les autorisations nécessaires ou qu'elles constituent un groupe susceptible de perturber la sûreté nationale.** Les rapports officiels et les médias présentent les églises de maison comme des « réseaux illégaux » et des « institutions de propagande sioniste » (USDOS, août 2017). Selon le gouvernement iranien, ces églises sont illégales parce qu'elles n'ont pas reçu les autorisations nécessaires de la part des autorités (*Ahmed Shaheed*, ancien rapporteur spécial sur la situation des droits humains en Iran, cité par ACCORD, 14 juin 2017). Les responsables d'églises de maison peuvent être inculpés pour activités missionnaires, conversion, apostasie ou en raison de la gestion d'une église non enregistrée (*Union Church*, cité par DIS, juin 2014). En outre, la constitution de groupes peut être punie par la loi : Selon l'article 498 du Code pénal iranien, la formation d'un groupe de plus de deux personnes dans le but de « perturber la sûreté nationale » est passible de dix ans d'emprisonnement (information transmise par AI à RDC/DIS, février 2018). Les membres d'églises de maison peuvent ainsi être accusés d'avoir violé la loi pour s'être rassemblés illégalement (*Mansour Borji*, cité par DIS, juin 2014). En mars 2017, le converti chrétien *Ebrahim Firouzi* a ainsi été condamné à cinq ans de prison pour avoir formé un « groupe visant à perturber la sûreté nationale » (RDC/DIS, février 2018 ; voir aussi MRG et al., mars 2018).

**Forte surveillance des activités religieuses, risque constant pour les personnes converties d'être identifiées.** Selon USDOS (août 2017), les activités religieuses sont surveillées par le *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance* et le *Ministry of Intelligence and Security* (MOIS). USDOS indique que les chrétien-ne-s évangéliques et les chrétien-ne-s converti-e-s font en particulier l'objet d'un haut degré de surveillance. Selon *l'organisation internationale en Turquie* citée dans le rapport de DIS, les autorités utilisent également des mouchards pour obtenir des informations sur les conversions. En outre, les *Herasat* (représentants des services secrets et de sûreté de l'Etat) sont présents sur les lieux de travail, dans les universités, les organisations publiques et les écoles. Selon cette même source, lorsqu'une conversion est portée à la connaissance des *Herasat*, les employé-e-s et les étudiant-e-s concerné-e-s risquent respectivement d'être licenciés ou suspendus de l'université. Une personne fréquentant une église de maison déjà placée sous surveillance, menant des activités de prosélytisme ou partageant sa foi avec d'autres personnes court le risque d'être dénoncée. Une personne faisant du prosélytisme à quelqu'un à qui elle croit à tort pouvoir faire confiance peut être dénoncée aux *Herasat* ou à quelqu'un d'autre. Pour les converti-e-s, qui considèrent le prosélytisme comme une partie essentielle de leur foi, ce risque est très prononcé. En outre, dans les quartiers, les *Basij* sont connectés aux mosquées locales et peuvent exiger de certaines personnes qu'elles fréquentent la mosquée (DIS, juin 2014).

**L'islam est un élément important de la culture iranienne ; si une personne ne s'y engage pas, cela se remarque immédiatement.** *Middle East Concern* a indiqué en octobre 2017 à RDC/DIS (février 2018) que le concept de « chrétien-ne-s silencieux-ses » (« *silent Christians* ») n'avait pas de sens. Les personnes concernées sont ainsi contraintes d'éduquer leurs propres enfants selon les coutumes musulmanes et de renier leur identité religieuse. Il n'est



pas possible, selon cette même source, de simplement se comporter discrètement, les personnes concernées devant souvent agir contre leur propre foi et renier leur propre religion. Dans la vie quotidienne, par exemple, il faut constamment fournir des informations sur sa religion et sa foi (*Middle East Concern*, cité par DRC/DIS, février 2018). Ainsi, au moment de l'embauche ou de l'inscription à l'école ou à un examen d'entrée à l'université, il faut souvent indiquer son appartenance religieuse (information fournie par le *Secrétariat général* d'AI à DIS, juin 2014). Les personnes converties ne peuvent pas donner ouvertement ces informations, parce qu'elles craignent que leur conversion ne soit rendue publique (*Secrétariat général* d'AI, *Mansour Borji*, tous deux cités par DIS, juin 2014). Selon une *organisation internationale en Turquie* (organisation anonyme citée par DIS, juin 2014), dans les écoles secondaires, par exemple, il est attendu des élèves qu'ils participent à la prière commune. S'ils n'y prennent pas part, ils peuvent attirer l'attention des autorités. Si un enfant ne se comporte pas de manière musulmane à l'école, les autorités sont alors contactées (*Elam Ministries*, cité par DIS, juin 2014). Même si la majorité de la population iranienne n'est pas très religieuse, de nombreuses coutumes et traditions sont liées à l'Islam. Une personne qui ne participe pas à ces traditions se ferait remarquer et serait stigmatisée (information fournie par *Middle East Concern* à DRC/DIS, février 2018). *Amnesty International* souligne également qu'une conversion peut être découverte par l'entourage sociale (« *surrounding community* ») lorsque les personnes concernées ne participent pas aux coutumes islamiques. De nombreuses normes sociales et activités culturelles en Iran sont liées à l'Islam (RDC/DIS, février 2018). *Borji* indique que les converti-e-s n'ont pas le droit de mener une vie de chrétien-ne-e et sont donc considéré-e-s comme des citoyen-ne-s de seconde classe (DIS, juin 2014).

**Les autorités mènent des rafles pour obtenir des informations sur les réseaux chrétiens.** Selon des témoignages récoltés par *Christians in Parliament APPG* et *APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief* (mars 2015), un grand nombre de rafles menées chez des particuliers sont orchestrées par les services secrets iraniens MOIS. Selon DIS (juin 2014), lors de ces rafles, les autorités sont souvent à la recherche de personnes spécifiques ou à l'affût de détails précis et obtiennent ainsi des informations personnelles sur d'autres personnes membres du réseau. Les autorités tentent également de recueillir autant d'informations que possible sur les réseaux chrétiens en confisquant ordinateurs et téléphones portables lors des descentes (DIS, juin 2014). NOAS et al. (2017) rapportent dans ce contexte que même les jeux électroniques pour enfants ont été confisqués et que les personnes présentes ont été forcées d'indiquer leurs codes d'accès aux appareils électroniques et aux médias sociaux.

**Surveillance et infiltration d'églises de maison par des informatrices et informateurs.** Bien qu'il soit difficile pour les autorités iraniennes de contrôler les églises de maison, qui sont dispersées et non structurées (information fournie par diverses sources à RDC/DIS, février 2018), elles prennent toutefois des mesures contre leur expansion et les surveillent. Pour ce faire, elles se servent d'informatrices et d'informateurs, qui se font passer pour des converti-e-s et infiltrent les églises de maison (information fournie par *Middle East Concern* à DRC/DIS). Ces informatrices et informateurs sont identifiés et sélectionnés par les autorités (une *source anonyme* et une *source en Iran bien informée sur les chrétien-ne-s*, citées par RDC/DIS, février 2018). Selon une *source anonyme*, une des stratégies des autorités consiste à surveiller ou à arrêter des membres d'une église de maison, puis à les libérer et à les utiliser comme informatrices ou informateurs (DRC/DIS, février 2018). Selon cette même source, les autorités peuvent utiliser les informations concernant ces personnes pour exercer des pressions sur elles. Lorsqu'une église de maison est surveillée, les autorités cherchent avant tout

à obtenir des informations sur ses membres, raison pour laquelle elles n'interviennent pas immédiatement (une *source anonyme* et *Elam Ministries*, tous deux cités par DRC/DIS). Si la personne poursuit ses activités chrétiennes, les autorités augmentent la pression : d'abord, la personne est convoquée à un interrogatoire puis est relâchée ; ensuite, elle reçoit des appels téléphoniques (information fournie par *Elam Ministries* à UK Home Office, mars 2018). Les autorités prennent des mesures en fonction des activités de l'église de maison et de la taille du groupe (information transmise par AI à DRC/DIS, février 2018).

**Surveillance téléphonique et en ligne.** Les activistes des minorités ethniques et religieuses, ainsi que les membres de groupes politiques connus sont constamment surveillés en ligne et dans leur quotidien (*Article 19*, une organisation spécialisée dans la liberté de la presse et basée au Royaume-Uni, cité par ACCORD, 12 juin 2017). Selon des informations fournies par diverses organisations à DIS (*Elam Ministries*, *Secrétariat général d'AI*, *Organisation internationale en Turquie* ; juin 2014), internet en Iran est contrôlé par les autorités. Les autorités iraniennes contrôlent les communications privées en ligne et recueillent des « informations personnelles identifiables » liées aux croyances des citoyen-ne-s (USDOS, avril 2018). Par exemple, les autorités peuvent, par le biais de la surveillance téléphonique et sur internet, obtenir des informations sur des personnes possiblement baptisées (*Elam Ministries*, cité par DIS, juin 2014). De nombreux sites Web à contenu chrétien se voient filtrer ou bloquer. Les cybercafés font également l'objet d'une surveillance stricte. Des mots clés tels que « église », « Jésus », « chrétien » ou « baptême » déclenchent une surveillance électronique (information fournie par *Middle East Concern* à DRC/DIS, février 2018).

## 3 Menaces pesant sur les personnes converties à leur retour en Iran

### 3.1 Menaces pesant sur les personnes converties à leur retour

**Nombre de personnes souhaitant se convertir au christianisme doivent se rendre à l'étranger pour être baptisées.** Le rapport d'une *Fact-Finding-Mission* du *Danish Immigration Service* (DIS) de 2014 décrit, sur la base de diverses déclarations, la situation des ressortissant-e-s iranien-ne-s qui se sont convertis au christianisme à l'étranger, en Turquie, en Arménie, en Europe ou ailleurs. Selon les informations fournies à DIS par *Mansour Borji*, porte-parole de l'Initiative *Article 18*, les églises iraniennes ont peur d'effectuer des baptêmes pour les personnes souhaitant se convertir et y renoncent depuis 2006/2007. En conséquence, les personnes souhaitant devenir chrétiennes se rendent à l'étranger pour être baptisées. Cependant, certaines églises de maison en Iran effectuent encore des baptêmes (DIS, juin 2014).

**Les personnes converties de retour en Iran encourent des risques si leur conversion est découverte. Même les personnes qui ne sont pas découvertes ne sont pas libres d'exercer leur foi.** D'après des informations concordantes provenant de diverses sources, les converti-e-s de retour en Iran encourent des risques si leur conversion est connue ou découverte par les autorités (information fournie par *Amnesty International* et *Middle East Concern* à DRC/DIS, février 2018 ; information transmise par courriel par une *représentante*

d'Elam Ministries et une personne de contact de Pearl of Persia, toutes deux datées du 15 août 2017 ; CSW, Elam Ministries, organisation internationale en Turquie, Union Church ; toutes citées par DIS, juin 2014). Amnesty International a indiqué à DRC/DIS (février 2018) que les converti-e-s iranien-ne-s de retour en Iran après une décision négative en matière d'asile sont interrogés par les autorités. Amnesty International (RDC/DIS, février 2018) indique en outre que la situation peut être problématique si les personnes déclarent qu'elles se sont converties à l'étranger. Une telle conversion est généralement considérée comme une atteinte à la sûreté nationale et les personnes concernées sont alors poursuivies en justice. Selon diverses personnes de contact (courriels d'une représentante d'Elam Ministries et d'une personne de contact de Pearl of Persia, tous deux datés du 15 août 2017), une personne convertie au christianisme qui n'est pas découverte par les autorités à son retour n'est pas libre d'exercer sa foi. Elle doit garder sa foi secrète afin de ne pas éveiller les soupçons des autorités et que la conversion ne soit pas démasquée (Mansour Borji, Elam Ministries, organisation internationale en Turquie, Union Church, CSW ; tous cités par DIS, juin 2014). Middle East Concern (RDC/DIS, février 2018) indique également que les converti-e-s de retour en Iran sont identifiés et deviennent la cible des autorités si, par exemple, ils fréquentent une église. La personne vit avec la crainte que sa conversion soit découverte à tout moment (information transmise par courriel à l'OSAR par une représentante d'Elam Ministries en date du 15 août 2017). Si une personne exerce ouvertement sa foi, elle encourt alors de graves risques (courriel d'une personne de contact de Pearl of Persia du 15 août 2017 ; CSW, Elam Ministries, tous deux cités par DIS, juin 2014). C'est également le cas si la personne ne pratique sa foi ouvertement qu'après une longue pause après son retour (information transmise par courriel par une personne de contact de Pearl of Persia le 15 août 2017). Selon deux sources, il est souvent difficile pour les converti-e-s de retour en Iran de garder leur foi secrète, la conversion ne pouvant passer inaperçue auprès de l'entourage (courriel d'une personne de contact de Pearl of Persia daté du 15 août 2017 ; Elam Ministries, cité par DIS, juin 2014). De plus, le prosélytisme actif constitue souvent un élément essentiel de la foi des personnes converties. Selon des indications fournies à DIS par l'organisation chrétienne CSW, basée au Royaume-Uni, de graves menaces pèsent de toute façon sur la personne même si elle ne fait pas de prosélytisme actif, les autorités la considérant comme une menace dans la mesure où elle a renié la foi – l'islam chiite (DIS, juin 2014).

**Même en cas de révocation du baptême, les menaces continuent de peser selon une source.** Selon les informations transmises par Union Church à DIS (juin 2014), les personnes baptisées à l'étranger rentrant en Iran restent menacées même si elles révoquent leur baptême et déclarent que celui-ci faisait partie de leur stratégie pour se rendre en Occident. Cela fonctionnerait pour la famille, mais, selon cette même source, pas pour les autorités de l'Etat.

**Les menaces pesant sur les personnes converties de retour en Iran peuvent être renforcées par plusieurs autres facteurs.** Le Secrétariat général d'Amnesty International (AI) a indiqué à DIS qu'il est difficile d'obtenir des informations sur les risques éventuels en cas de retour en Iran après une conversion à l'étranger (DIS, juin 2014). Selon une information transmise par courriel le 15 août 2017 à l'OSAR par une représentante d'Elam Ministries, ainsi que d'autres sources, la situation des converti-e-s de retour en Iran dépend de divers facteurs :

- **Déclarations actives et publiques sur sa foi, en Iran et à l'étranger.** Selon diverses sources, s'exprimer ou s'être exprimé de manière active ou publique sur sa foi, à l'étranger comme au pays, peut jouer un rôle pour les personnes converties rentrées

en Iran (information transmise par *Middle East Concern* à RDC/DIS, février 2018 ; courriel d'une *représentante d'Elam Ministries* daté du 15 août 2017).

- **Déclarations sur les réseaux sociaux.** Exposer sa conversion sur les réseaux sociaux peut également attirer l'attention des autorités et conduire à une surveillance ou à une arrestation (information transmise par une *ambassade occidentale* et *Middle East Concern* à RDC/DIS, février 2018).
- **Identité connue des autorités iraniennes avant le départ.** Une personne peut également être menacée si elle était déjà connue des autorités iraniennes avant de quitter le pays (courriel d'une *représentante d'Elam Ministries* daté du 15 août 2017 ; *Mansour Borji*, cité par DIS, juin 2014).
- **Parents ou proches ayant des liens avec l'État iranien.** En outre, selon un courriel d'une *représentante d'Elam Ministries*, un autre aspect pertinent sont les liens et le type de lien que les membres de la famille ou les proches entretiennent avec le gouvernement. *Mansour Borji* mentionne également qu'il arrive que des membres de la famille ou d'autres personnes signalent aux autorités des converti-e-s rentré-e-s au pays (DIS, juin 2014).
- **Existence de preuves d'un baptême portées à la connaissance des autorités.** Selon les indications de *Middle East Concern* à RDC/DIS (février 2018), le baptême d'une personne entraîne souvent l'existence de preuves solides de sa conversion au christianisme. Il existe ainsi souvent des certificats, des photos et d'autres documents. Ces preuves peuvent constituer un problème pour les personnes concernées après leur retour en Iran si les autorités les découvrent. Selon les estimations d'une autre source, les photos sur Internet qui font état d'une conversion font l'objet d'une vérification par les autorités iraniennes et ne donnent lieu à des poursuites que si un lien avec le christianisme existait avant le départ (indications d'une *source anonyme* à RDC/DIS, février 2018).
- **Liens avec d'autres croyant-e-s ou réseaux à l'étranger.** En outre, des menaces pèsent sur une personne si, par exemple, elle est liée à d'autres croyant-e-s ou entretient des liens avec des réseaux à l'étranger (*Union Church, Elam Ministries, organisation internationale en Turquie*, tous cités par DIS, juin 2014). Selon *Amnesty International* (RDC/DIS, février 2018), les autorités ont réagi de manière très sensible ces deux dernières années lorsque des citoyen-ne-s iranien-ne-s ont montré des liens avec l'étranger. *Amnesty International* indique en outre qu'il convient de tenir compte de la perception des converti-e-s par les autorités iraniennes. Ainsi, il est possible que les personnes qui rentrent en Iran soient considérées comme des converties par les autorités iraniennes en raison de leur participation à des formations continues et à des événements à l'étranger, même si elles n'ont pas été officiellement baptisées (informations transmises par le *Secrétariat général d'AI* à DIS, juin 2014).
- **Souçons des autorités en raison d'une demande d'asile rejetée.** Selon les indications transmises par une *organisation en Turquie* à NOAS et al. (2017), le simple fait de retourner en Iran en tant que « demandeur d'asile débouté » suffit souvent à attirer l'attention des autorités.

- **Durée du séjour à l'étranger.** Enfin, selon *Elam Ministries*, la durée du séjour à l'étranger peut également jouer un rôle. Les personnes qui rentrent au pays après une longue période de temps sont plus susceptibles d'être soupçonnées d'espionnage par les autorités (DIS, juin 2014).

**Aucune différence de traitement de la part des autorités, qu'une personne ait été baptisée ou convertie à l'étranger ou en Iran, ou que la personne convertie ait été baptisée ou non.** Selon *Elam Ministries* (cité par DIS, juin 2014), la situation d'une personne qui retourne en Iran après s'être convertie en Europe est la même que celle d'une personne qui s'est convertie en Iran. Lorsque la conversion est révélée et qu'elle est portée à la connaissance des autorités, la personne est soupçonnée d'entretenir des liens avec des organisations étrangères ; ceci s'applique à la conversion dans les pays voisins ou proches comme dans les pays occidentaux. Tant *l'organisation internationale en Turquie* citée dans le rapport de DIS que *Mansour Borji* et CSW soulignent que, concernant le traitement par les autorités iraniennes, il importe peu qu'une personne de retour en Iran ait été convertie dans un pays étranger voisin, en Europe ou aux États-Unis. Selon les indications d'une *source anonyme* et les informations transmises par *Amnesty International* à DRC/DIS (février 2018), il importe peu aux autorités iraniennes qu'une personne convertie soit effectivement baptisée ou non. La *personne étrangère ayant des contacts avec des chrétiens en Iran* doute également qu'il soit déterminant pour les autorités iraniennes que la personne ait été baptisée ou non (RDC/DIS, février 2018).

**Exemples concrets d'arrestations et de poursuites contre des personnes converties de retour au pays.** Le rapport publié en 2017 par NOAS et al. contient des témoignages de deux personnes converties revenues de Norvège en Iran. Les deux personnes ont connu des expériences de retour similaires : Immédiatement après avoir quitté l'aéroport, elles ont été éconduites pour être interrogées. Une personne a été conduite de force dans une voiture par plusieurs personnes en civil, les yeux bandés, puis interrogée quant à sa conversion au christianisme. L'autre personne décrit des événements similaires. Toutes deux ont été détenues en isolement cellulaire pendant une longue période et ont subi des interrogatoires. Une personne a été forcée de se tenir debout pendant des heures. Toutes deux ont été humiliées et soumises à des violences physiques. Les deux personnes ont été accusées d'avoir renié l'islam et d'avoir sapé l'État iranien. Des menaces de mesures à l'encontre de leur famille ont été portées. Une personne a été emmenée à plusieurs reprises pour être prétendument exécutée. L'exécution a toujours été annulée à la dernière minute. Il a été promis aux deux personnes qu'elles seraient relâchées si elles acceptaient d'agir en tant qu'informateurs/trices pour les autorités (NOAS et al., 2017). Une personne souffrait déjà de problèmes de santé avant sa détention, qui n'ont toutefois pas été pris en compte par les autorités qui la détenait. Une personne estime qu'elle a été emprisonnée pendant environ sept semaines, l'autre personne estime qu'elle a été emprisonnée pendant environ deux mois. Toutes deux croient qu'elles doivent leur libération à leurs relations avec des personnes au sein du système et à leur consentement d'agir en tant qu'informateurs/trices (NOAS et al., 2017).

*Mansour Borji* mentionne à DIS (juin 2014) une famille retournée en Iran qui a secrètement fréquenté une église de maison. Après son retour en Iran, la famille a subi des menaces et a été surveillée et harcelée. La famille a supposé qu'elle avait été dénoncée aux autorités par des parents ou d'autres personnes. Finalement, la famille a décidé de quitter à nouveau l'Iran. *Elam Ministries* (cité par DIS, juin 2014) fait état de divers cas portés à leur connaissance d'arrestations survenues immédiatement après le retour de Turquie, où les personnes avaient



séjourné pour des formations continues. Selon *Elam Ministries*, les arrestations peuvent avoir lieu directement à l'aéroport, sur la route après le passage de la frontière ou quelques jours après le retour au pays. Au cours des trois dernières années depuis le rapport (2014), plus de 500 personnes ayant des liens avec *Elam Ministries* ont été arrêtées et interrogées et, pour la seule année 2013, ce chiffre s'élevait à 200. *Elam Ministries* estime que les autorités iraniennes ont des agent-e-s en Turquie et ont des connaissances sur les activités d'*Elam Ministries*.

**Les personnes converties de retour au pays peuvent être perçues par leurs propres familles comme une menace pour leur bien-être.** Selon les estimations rendues à DRC/DIS (février 2018) par une *personne étrangère ayant des contacts avec des chrétien-ne-s en Iran*, les converti-e-s qui rentrent d'Europe parce que leur demande d'asile a été rejetée rencontrent des problèmes s'ils informent leur famille que leur motif d'asile à l'étranger était leur conversion. Même si la personne concernée se comporte de manière discrète, elle peut rencontrer des problèmes avec sa propre famille, celle-ci estimant qu'elle lui causera des difficultés. Toutefois, selon cette source, il ne faut pas partir du principe général que la famille signalera la personne concernée aux autorités.

## 3.2 Surveillance à l'étranger

**Rapports sur la surveillance et les agent-e-s iranien-ne-s à l'étranger.** Selon les estimations d'*Amnesty International* transmises à DRC/DIS (février 2018), les autorités iraniennes sont également très actives à l'étranger dans la surveillance de leurs ressortissant-e-s. Diverses sources mentionnées dans le rapport de DIS de 2014 font état de cas de surveillance en Turquie, par exemple par la présence d'agent-e-s et d'informatrices et informateurs dans les églises (*Secrétariat général d'AI, Organisation internationale en Turquie, Elam Ministries*, tous cités par DIS, juin 2014). Le *Secrétariat général d'AI* fait état d'un doctorant iranien en Belgique, qui a été convoqué par les services secrets lors de ses vacances en Iran et qui a été sommé d'espionner les étudiant-e-s iranien-ne-s en Belgique. Selon *Amnesty International*, après avoir refusé, il a été condamné à six ans de prison pour avoir « agi contre la sûreté nationale en communiquant avec des gouvernements ennemis » (DIS, juin 2014).

**Surveillance sur les réseaux sociaux.** Diverses sources (information transmise par *Middle East Concern* et une *source anonyme* à DRC/DIS, février 2018) indiquent que l'annonce sur *Facebook* d'une conversion à l'étranger est très susceptible d'entraîner une surveillance par les autorités iraniennes. NOAS et al. fait état de deux personnes converties qui ont été interrogées et arrêtées immédiatement après leur retour en Iran. Selon cette même source, la police était étonnamment bien informée de leurs activités sur les réseaux sociaux en Norvège. Elle s'est également montrée intéressée par les numéros de téléphone norvégiens et les noms contenus sur le téléphone mobile de l'une des personnes concernées (NOAS et al., 2017).

**En Allemagne, plusieurs cas d'espionnage par les autorités iraniennes ont été révélés et condamnés.** Selon le rapport allemand sur la protection de la Constitution (*deutscher Verfassungsschutzbericht*) de juillet 2017, le *Ministry of Intelligence and Security* iranien (MOIS) est le principal responsable des activités menées contre l'Allemagne. La tâche centrale du service de renseignement iranien est d'espionner et de combattre les mouvements d'opposition en Iran et à l'étranger. En juillet 2016 et mars 2017, deux personnes ont été

condamnées par la Cour d'appel de Berlin à respectivement deux ans et quatre mois d'emprisonnement et quatre ans et trois mois d'emprisonnement pour avoir agi en Allemagne en tant qu'agent-e-s secrets pour l'Iran. Ces personnes avaient espionné l'opposition iranienne en exil en Allemagne pour le compte de MOIS et de la *Quds Force* iranienne (unité militaire spéciale). Selon le *deutscher Verfassungsschutzbericht*, la résidence légale du MOIS à l'ambassade d'Iran à Berlin est principalement dirigée contre des cibles en Allemagne, mais parfois aussi contre des personnes ou des institutions dans toute l'Europe.

**En Suisse aussi, les communautés exilées sont dans le viseur des services de renseignement de leur pays d'origine.** Selon le rapport annuel du Conseil fédéral suisse de 2016 (*Chancellerie fédérale suisse*, 14 février 2018), des activités interdites de renseignement ont lieu en Suisse. Selon le Conseil fédéral, l'espionnage par voie électronique, en particulier, a pris une grande ampleur. Le rapport souligne que des représentations étrangères et des organisations internationales sont également la cible d'activités interdites de renseignement. Les communautés exilées sont dans le viseur des services de renseignement de leur pays d'origine.

## 4 Sources

ACCORD, 14. juin 2017:

**«Sources note that Protestant “house churches” are illegal in Iran (RNZ, 23 December 2016; HRC, 26 May 2016, p. 17). In his May 2016 report to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the (then) UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, quotes the Iranian government as saying that the running of house churches is illegal since they have not obtained the necessary permits from the authorities (HRC, 26 May 2016, p. 17). (...)**

**2) Situation/rights of practising Christians (including the situation of Christians after the closure of Assemblies of God [AOG] church (...)**

**BosNewsLife, a Budapest-based Internet news agency covering issues relating to persons of Christian and Jewish faith worldwide, quotes a number of human rights groups as reporting on the treatment of Christians in Iran: (...)**

**Between May and August 2016 security forces arrested at least 79 Christians, according to activists, family members and friends. 'The majority of those arrested were interrogated and detained for periods ranging from a few days to months.' the groups said. 'At the time of writing some of these 79 Christians remain in detention and have still not been formally charged.' Rights groups say 'the true number of Christians apprehended by the authorities could be notably higher' as 'many' arrests would have gone unreported. In 2012, Iran's government began to bar converts from Muslim backgrounds from attending services in official churches. Instead Christian converts 'are forced' to gather in informal groups known as 'house churches', the activists said. 'These gatherings are considered illegal by authorities and are often raided. In August 2016 alone security agents allegedly raided at least four house churches and the house church members were arrested and interrogated.' (...)**

**3) Treatment by state authorities of Christian converts' family members**



**A representative of Elam Ministries, in an email response of March 2017, notes the following with regard to the treatment of family members of Christian converts by state authorities:**

**“We can certainly confirm that family members of Christians (especially Christian converts) are not spared suffering. For example, in one case of a house raid and arrest of a Christian couple perpetrated by Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence (MOI) in July 2014, the 12-year old son of the couple was at home during the house raid. He was hit by the officers while being questioned about his own faith. He was also arrested along with his parents. Further, we have heard examples of elderly parents being harassed regarding their child’s conversion to Christianity.” (Elam Ministries, 28 March 2017) (...)**

**The March 2017 email response by Elam Ministries notes that family members of imprisoned Christians are also affected in ways other than direct actions by state actors:**

**“Of course the family members of those in prison for their faith suffer deeply through loss of their loved one. For example, Pastor Farshid Fathi was in prison for 5 years between 2010 and 2015. His son was about 1 years old when his father was imprisoned for his faith. He was without his father for over 5 years and had no memory of his father when he was finally released. Many families also suffer financially when the primary breadwinner is imprisoned. For example, Ebrahim Firouzi is currently imprisoned for his faith in Rajai Shahr prison (Karaj) and his sister and mother are struggling financially because he was the primary breadwinner for the family. Families suffer severely financially in other ways. Extortionate bail sums are demanded for the temporary release of Christian detainees.»** Source: Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), Query response on Iran: House churches; situation of practising Christians; treatment by authorities of Christian converts’ family members, 14 juin 2017: [www.ecoi.net/local\\_link/342012/486058\\_de.html](http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/342012/486058_de.html).

ACCORD, 12 juin 2017:

**«Article 19 reported in 2 July 2015:**

**“According to the findings of this study, ethnic and religious minority activists (the Baha’i’s and the Dervishes more than others), as well as members of known political groups, are kept under constant offline and online surveillance. This is intended both to control and suppress those activities of members of these groups that may lead to their recognition, and it is often carried out by special units of the intelligence services dedicated to monitoring minority activists. Methods used by the authorities include continuous blocking of websites, as well as ordering hosting providers to remove data and stop providing services to particular groups.” (Article 19, 2 July 2015, p. 24)»** Source: Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), Query response on Iran: Capacity and methods of authorities to monitor online activities and religious activities of Iranians living abroad, 12 juin 2017: [www.ecoi.net/local\\_link/342092/486063\\_de.html](http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/342092/486063_de.html).

Bundesministerium des Inneren (Ministère allemand de l’intérieur), juillet 2017:

**«Die Ausspähung und Bekämpfung oppositioneller Bewegungen im In- und Ausland bleibt die zentrale Aufgabe des iranischen Nachrichtendienstapparates. Darüber hinaus**

beschaffen die Dienste im westlichen Ausland Informationen aus den Bereichen Politik, Wirtschaft und Wissenschaft.

**Hauptakteur der gegen Deutschland gerichteten Aktivitäten ist weiterhin das Ministry of Intelligence (VAJA, zumeist MOIS abgekürzt).** In seinem Fokus stehen insbesondere die „Volksmodjahedin Iran-Organisation“ (MEK) und ihr politischer Arm, der „Nationale Widerstandsrat Iran“ (NWRI). Daneben belegen nachrichtendienstliche Aktivitäten im In- und Ausland ein anhaltendes Aufklärungsinteresse des MOIS in den Bereichen Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik. (...)

**Daneben hat die Legalresidentur des MOIS an der Iranischen Botschaft in Berlin eine wichtige Funktion bei der nachrichtendienstlichen Ausspähung.** Zu ihren Aufgaben zählt neben der Durchführung eigenständiger nachrichtendienstlicher Operationen die Unterstützung zentral gesteuerter Aktivitäten der MOIS-Zentrale. **Diese richten sich hauptsächlich gegen Ziele in Deutschland, vereinzelt aber auch gegen Personen oder Einrichtungen im europäischen Ausland.** (...)

**Am 27. März 2017 verurteilte das Kammergericht Berlin einen 31-jährigen pakistanischen Staatsangehörigen zu einer Freiheitsstrafe von vier Jahren und drei Monaten wegen geheimdienstlicher Agententätigkeit. Der Verurteilte stand seit dem Jahr 2011 in Kontakt zu einer Person, die der iranischen Quds Force angehört und dort für nachrichtendienstliche Aufklärungsaktivitäten in Europa zuständig ist.** In deren Auftrag hatte er spätestens seit Juli 2015 eine Wirtschaftshochschule und einen dort tätigen Professor in Paris sowie den damaligen Präsidenten der Deutsch-Israelischen Gesellschaft (DIG) in Berlin gegen Zahlung eines Agentenlohns ausgeforscht. Gegen ihn war am 5. Juli 2016 Haftbefehl erlassen und Untersuchungshaft angeordnet worden. Ausgangspunkt hierfür waren die Ergebnisse vorausgegangener nachrichtendienstlicher Maßnahmen des BfV.

**Am 19. Juli 2016 verurteilte das Kammergericht Berlin einen 32-jährigen iranischen Staatsangehörigen zu einer Freiheitsstrafe von zwei Jahren und vier Monaten wegen geheimdienstlicher Agententätigkeit. Er hatte für das MOIS zahlreiche und umfassende Informationen über die MEK und den NWRI beschafft.** Das Verfahren gegen einen ebenfalls angeklagten iranischen Staatsangehörigen wurde am 10. Juni 2016 unter Auflagen eingestellt.» Source: Bundesministerium des Inneren, Verfassungsschutzbericht 2016 (Deutschland), juillet 2017, p. 274-277: [www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilung/DE/2017/07/vorstellung-verfassungsschutzbericht-2016.html](http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilung/DE/2017/07/vorstellung-verfassungsschutzbericht-2016.html).

Center for Human Rights in Iran, 4 janvier 2016:

**«Borji noted that in the past ten years it has become common for security agents to arrest Christian converts in various cities around Christmas.** “By making these arrests around this time the government hopes to intimidate converts by threatening them with heavy punishments... so that they would either leave the country or stop their [religious] activities.”» Source: Center for Human Rights in Iran, Persecution of Christian Converts Continues under Rouhani, 4 janvier 2016: [www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/01/maisam-hojati-isfahan-christian-convert-arrested/](http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/01/maisam-hojati-isfahan-christian-convert-arrested/).

Christians in Parliament APPG et APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, mars 2015:

**«The Inquiry heard that the persecution of Christians in Iran has not diminished since Hassan Rouhani took the presidential office, despite his pre-election promises of greater respect for human rights. (...) Christians continue to be arbitrarily arrested and interrogated because of their faith-related activities. They continue to be treated harshly, with some facing severe physical and psychological torture during periods of detention. The judiciary continues to construe legitimate Christian activities (such as meeting in private homes for prayer meeting and bible studies, or being in contact with Christians outside of Iran) as political activities that threaten the national security of Iran. Therefore Christians continue to be issued long prison sentences and/or corporal punishment. Churches continue to be pressured into ceasing all services or activities in the national language of Persian (Farsi), or are closed down. Property belonging to Christians has continued to be seized, and Christians continue to face discrimination in the workplace and in educational institutions. «There has been no substantive change in Iran's human rights record since the election of President Rouhani; in fact by some indicators you could argue that things have gotten worse.» Ajay Sharma, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Westminster hearing, 2 December 2014. (...)**

**The panel gathered evidence of continued widespread and targeted persecution of Christians in Iran under Rouhani. The most severe abuse is faced by Christians who have converted from a Muslim background, and those who engage in ministry among Persian - speaking people of a Muslim background. However, restrictions and discrimination are faced by all Christians. (...)**

**Iran's non - tolerance of conversion from Islam (apostasy) was articulated publicly in October 2014 by Ali Younesi, Rouhani's senior advisor on Ethnic and Religious Minority Affairs. During an interview with the conservative news agency, Fars , Younesi declared that " Converting to different sects is illegal in our country" and also that evangelism is illegal for minority faith groups. It has long been known that Iran does not tolerate conversion to minority faiths, nor evangelism, but this interview is the most recent, direct and public affirmation of these policies from a senior figure. (...)**

**«If you talk to anyone, they are very careful about phones. They know they can't send emails or Skype... they have to be very careful about where they meet, how they meet... everyone says the same story. The constant theme is pressure.» David Yeghnazar, Elam Ministries, Westminster hearing, 2 December 2014**

**The Inquiry heard that following release from detention or imprisonment, Christians often continue to be monitored and harassed: «The first year [following my release from Evin prison] was so hard because we could see police around our home, and we could hear they were listening to our telephone. The first year was very hard. I think that they really wanted to show us that they are still checking us. Many times when we were going out, we could see they were near to our house.» Sara Akhavan Fard, Westminster hearing, 16 December 2014.**

**Often the MOIS particularly target Christian leaders, but family members of the individual can also find themselves targeted for harassment. For example, threats were faced for many years by a Christian internet pastor called Farhad, according to Elam Ministries. Farhad had learnt that the MOIS knew about his involvement in the distribution of Christian scriptures and books, which would provoke a harsh punishment. After a Christian friend of his was arrested and interrogated, Farhad feared he too would soon be arrested, and he decided to leave**

*Iran. Following Farhad's departure, Farhad's elderly mother, and his sister and brother-in-law have continued to face threats on an almost daily basis. They have also had to relocate to another city because agents of MOIS informed the local community that they are 'apostates' from Islam. (...)*

*Witnesses testified that raids on private homes of Christians, and subsequent arrests and detentions, are widespread in Iran. These raids are most often reported to have been orchestrated by agents of MOIS, and can sometimes involve violence. (...)*

#### **4.6. Arrests and arbitrary detention**

*Christians are often arrested in private homes following house raids and taken to detention centres or prison for interrogation. However this is not always the case. The Inquiry heard Yaghoob explain how he was arrested in July 2014:*

*I was listening to Christian songs in my car, when all of a sudden, a car pulled in front of me. There were four people dressed in black. They all got out of the car. They opened the door of my car, and took me to their own car... The person who had been standing further back opened the door and sat next to me in the car, and started hitting me. They were asking me continuously, 'Where are the New Testaments?' As he was hitting me, he would keep asking the same question over and over... He would threaten me, saying, 'I will kill you.' Yaghoob, video testimony, filmed 26 November 2014.*

*Yaghoob was detained and interrogated for many weeks following his arrest. (...)*

*Interrogations of Christian detainees or prisoners are most often perpetrated by agents of the MOIS. Detainees often endure sessions of interrogation that last many hours, and face regular sessions across many days or weeks, **in between which they are generally held in solitary confinement.**(...)*

*The methods of interrogations in jail have become harsher. In several cases, Christians were seriously physically and mentally abused, including threats of execution.*

*«They took me to the central intelligence office in our city. Then they started beating me up again. I don't know how long it took; maybe 10 to 15 minutes. My lips were split. My mouth was full of blood... He pushed me off the chair, and then put his hand on my throat as if he was choking me. The main question was, 'Where do you get the New Testaments from?」 Yaghoob, video testimony, filmed 26 November 2014*

*«For the three sisters, most of the time a familiar female voice was broadcast as if she was being tortured, and they constantly heard it while they were being interrogated. It affected them very badly psychologically... In one of the interrogations of one of the ladies, they hit her several times in the face with a shoe, and one of the other ladies, they kicked her so much that she fell down to the floor. But they kept on kicking her.» Elham, video testimony, filmed 26 November 2014. (...)*

*Mistreatment and abuse, both physical and psychological, are rife in Iran's detention centres and prisons, where many Christians are housed to serve sentences or during pre-trial investigation.*

«They put me in a very small cell... I had to sleep on the floor. They gave me very dirty clothes. For 26 days, I was in my cell alone.» Sara Akhavan Fard, Westminster hearing, 16 December 2014

«I had no shoes or socks during those 17 days in the detention centre. And at the end of my time I couldn't even stand up because of the pain in my feet.» Yaghoob, video testimony, filmed 26 November 2014. (...)

The Inquiry heard from Faraz Dolatkhah about a group of Christians in Iran who were arrested in early 2013, but whose cases continued to be under investigation at the time of the Inquiry (December 2014): «This dear sister said to me: '**They would torture us sexually with sexual threats...** They would say the house groups are a place of prostitution - not worship. They would look at us with sexual desires.'» Faraz Dolatkhah, Westminster hearing, 2 December 2014

Despite Iranian laws which dictate that **prisoners of conscience should be imprisoned separately from prisoners convicted of violent crimes, in reality, this rule is often violated. Farshid Fathi (Christian pastor, imprisoned since December 2010) suffered an injury in April 2014 during a violent raid on ward 350 of Evin prison. He was subsequently moved in August 2014 to a more brutal prison: Rajai Shahr (Gohardasht).** At time of printing, he remains there, incarcerated alongside hardened criminals. (...) Farshid Fathi was not the only Christian prisoner who was violently beaten in 2014: Behnam Irani, Saeed Abedini, Silas Rab-bani, Maryam Naghash Zargaran and Amin Khaki **were also reported to have been physically abused while serving their sentences. The most common form of mistreatment of Christians in prisons and detention centres is psychological. Christians are told that loved ones are sick, that spouses have been unfaithful, or that elderly parents are also imprisoned, to put pressure on the prisoner. Some guards, as well as interrogators, torment prisoners with psychological games.** «One of the guards came to our cell, and said, 'Sara, get ready, you should come with us.' And my sister [Leila] asked them, 'Where are you taking Sara?' The guard laughed, and said, 'We are going to kill her'. And I really got scared... I changed my clothes and I followed her, and as I followed her, I understood they were not going to kill me: they were going to let me out of the prison. But they said this lie to Leila to put her under more pressure.» Sara Akhavan Fard, Westminster hearing, 16 December 2014 (...)

**Those Christians whose cases are brought to court tend to be convicted on political rather than explicitly religious charges, usually under the vague and often abused 'Security Laws' section of the penal code. Sentences issued to Christians tend to range between one year and eight years. (...)**

**A Christian defendant has not been reported to have been sentenced to death since Yousef Nadarkhani received a death sentence in 2010 for apostasy (abandoning Islam). However, most Christians who have been detained report that they were threatened with the death penalty many times by interrogators and guards. The possibility remains that male Christians could be sentenced to death for apostasy: although apostasy is not encoded in Iran's laws, judges can invoke Article 167 of Iran's Constitution, which allows them to refer to 'authentic Islamic sources or authoritative Fatwas' when making their judgements. Under Sharia law, apostasy is punishable by death for men and life imprisonment for women. Christians could also potentially face death sentences for the afore mentioned crimes of Moharebeh or Mofsed - e - filarz (...)**



#### 4.10. Pressure to flee

**To avoid serving unjust prison sentences, many Christians and their families flee Iran, meaning that Iran's harsh policies are prompting an exodus of Christians from the country. (...)**

#### 4.11. Lack of due process

Article 32 of Iran's Constitution states that all detainees must be formally charged in writing within 24 hours of detention. Article 32 of the Code of Criminal Procedure allows for detainees to be held for longer without charge if a judge has issued a temporary detention order for cases involving the Security Laws, but article 33 gives the accused the right to appeal his/her detention order within 10 days. **Each year, scores of Christians are detained for weeks or months without being formally charged, without access to a lawyer, and without any opportunity to be brought before a judge. Due process is flagrantly violated in the cases of most Christians.**

They arrested everybody in the house. The leaders asked, 'Do you have warrants to arrest us?' **But they didn't show any warrants.** Faraz Dolatkhah, Westminster hearing, 2 December 2014

At first, **they didn't allow me to have a lawyer. But after - I think - one and a half months, then they allowed me to have a lawyer. But they didn't let me meet him.** Some days before the court, my wife found a human rights activist lawyer, and at the court I had two lawyers: one by force and one by choice. **At the court, the judge didn't let me talk normally. He had decided to do anything he wanted.** They gave me a ten-year sentence. Mostafa Bordbar, video testimony, filmed 27 November 2014 (...)

#### 4.13. Appropriation of property

**The authorities seized a large and valuable private home belonging to a prominent Iranian Christian leader, because of his Christian ministry.** An appeal against the confiscation was heard, and was unsuccessful, in early 2014. The property is now in the possession of the government. (...)

**Armenian and Assyrian Christians are recognised as legitimate religious minorities under Iran's Constitution. However, they do face difficulties in Iran, and do not have the same status or the same rights as Shia Muslim citizens.** Before the law, in society and civic life, constitutional recognition does not protect them from discrimination. (...)

#### 4.15. Discrimination in education and employment

Iran's laws and policies, which create a framework of discrimination and which directly impede religious freedom, have not changed since Rouhani became President. (...)

**Furthermore, conversion away from Islam can lead to the loss of a job in state institutions, or in cases where the employer does not tolerate conversion.** The Inquiry heard from Ermia who was sacked in summer 2013:

*I worked in a pharmacy of a state hospital in Tehran. From the boss of the department, I was given a letter, because my colleagues had found out that I had become a Christian. And the boss also heard about this. Despite all my colleagues testifying that I was a good employee and was conscientious in my work, still they gave me a letter telling me I was sacked... Because of the connections between the hospitals, I wasn't able to find work in another hospital. Ermia, video testimony, filmed 26 November 2014.*

*With regards to education, according to Dr Shaheed, University regulations continue to officially grant admission only to Muslims or members of officially recognized minority religions. **Christian converts and unrecognised religious minorities can face pressure within academic institutions; or lose opportunities for education or the right to complete educational courses because of their faith. Elham, Ermia's wife, was removed from her university course a few months after her pastor was detained and interrogated by the MOIS.***

***When my pastor was freed from prison, she said to me, 'During interrogation, I was given a list and your name was on the list'... I was thrown out [of university].** I cannot give any reason why they threw me out: morally and educationally I had no problems. I asked them to let me study my last term on my own, if my presence was causing problems. They didn't let me stay. They didn't even give me any documentation about the courses I had completed... They said, 'The rules of the university do not allow us to keep you here.' Elham, video testimony, filmed 26 November 2014. (...)*

***Members of "non - registered" religious communities** continue to experience police harassment, surveillance or even criminal sanctions, as their activities are deemed illegal by the State or certain State agencies. Restrictive measures continue to include the confiscation of property, financial sanctions, imprisonment and in some cases even **the use of torture**. Target groups may include communities that have been denied registration status against their will and communities not wishing to obtain any such legal status. (...)*

*This year, converts report that they are specifically targeted for harassment and sometimes prosecution, because **some Iranian officials see them as a threat to the governing political and religious systems, and sometimes as a tool of the West to undermine these structures. They argue that despite no longer being threatened by the charge of apostasy, Christian converts still face the threat of being charged with vague and overly - broad "national security" crimes, such as propaganda against the system, acting against national security, assembly and collusion against the system, insulting the Supreme Leader or the President, or "agitating the public consciousness."*** (...)

*This continues to be evident in the cases of Christians arrested this past year where we see many hallmarks of the legal issues faced by religious minorities in Iran. That is, **they are routinely charged with acting against national security; of conspiring with the Islamic Republic's foreign "enemies"; and of collusion against the Government by "organizing" gatherings or house churches. And they are usually tried in Revolutionary Courts, which are effectively national security courts.***» Source: Christians in Parliament All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)/ All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for International Freedom of Religion or Belief: The Persecution of Christians in Iran, mars 2015, p. 3-18: [www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf](http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf).

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), juillet 2017:



«**Since the latest presidential elections on 19 May 2017, both CSW and Article 18 have noted a particularly sharp increase in the number of Christians who have received excessive sentences** after being convicted of vaguely worded and unsubstantiated national security-related charges, such as ‘acting against national security’, ‘insulting the sacred’ or ‘propaganda against the state’. Following their initial arrests, many have also been detained for extended periods prior to being charged.

**Previously, the maximum sentence issued in such cases was five years, and in cases where defendants received two five-year sentences, these were reduced to five years on appeal. According to records compiled by Article 18, in the last three months Judge Ahmadzadeh, head of the 26th branch in Islamic Revolutionary Court, has sentenced at least 16 Christians to between five and ten years’ imprisonment. One defendant received 15 years, and two more cases are pending. In at least two cases defendants have been charged with ‘promoting Zionist Christianity’. The charges and sentences meted out in these cases are illustrative of an official propensity for utilising legislation and the judiciary to silence or punish any kind of perceived dissent.**

**The excessive nature of the charges appears pre-determined, and they have been handed down despite a paucity of supporting evidence.** From the beginning of the trial until the time of sentencing no material witnesses were called and no testimony offered in support of the charges. In at least one instance the presiding judge is alleged to have shown an extremely limited understanding of Christianity, and to have been reading from papers. **Nevertheless, each trial has resulted in sentences that far exceed the lengthiest sentence stipulated by law.** (...) However, in the Iranian theocracy conversion from Islam to another religion (or to none) is often viewed as a grave sin or even a betrayal of the universal Islamic community, and such apostasy is also deemed a threat to the integrity of the state. As such, the majority of these defendants are converts to Christianity, although one is an Assyrian Christian.»  
Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), Iran, Rising Judicial Harassment of the Christian Community, juillet 2017.

Danish Immigration Service (DIS), juin 2014:

«Concerning the obstacles Iranian converts face in Iran because of their conversion to Christianity, an **international organisation in Turkey** did not consider that there would be any issues if this is not made known. However, if a convert is active in informal church activities or proselytizing, problems may arise with the authorities. Additionally, **if conversion comes to the knowledge of the authorities, an individual might lose his or her job. The source explained that at workplaces in Iran, there are offices of Herasat (representatives of the ministry of intelligence and state security) that monitor the employees. They are also present at universities, state organizations and schools. Private companies of a certain size will also have a Herasat office. If Herasat gets news of a person’s conversion, he or she could risk being fired from his or her job. Additionally, family members could also risk losing their jobs or be denied access to higher learning.**

**Converts who are attending university may be expelled or in some cases merely suspended. Asked how a person’s conversion might be discovered and when it would be reported, the source explained that if a convert is visiting a house church already under surveillance or proselytizing and sharing his faith with others, this person will risk being reported. A person may proselytize to someone he or she trusts, however mistakenly,**

**and consequently be reported to the Herasat or others. It was added that some converts may get into such a situation because proselytizing is fundamental to their faith. Both proselytizing and disseminating the bible are two essential tenets to the evangelical groups.**

**When asked how a Christian convert may catch the eye of the authorities, the source said that in neighborhoods of towns and cities, there are Basij connected to the local mosques and a person may be asked to attend mosque and this could especially be expected of men of a certain age. It was added that according to the Islamic rules, the religious obligations for girls and boys to start praying begin at the ages of nine and fifteen respectively, where congregational prayers in mosques are encouraged as part of communal activities. The expectation to attend mosques in neighborhoods can be viewed as part of societal norms and may depend for instance on the mosque or Friday imam's attitude and sensitivities.**

**At universities for example, attending prayers is not obligatory but there are certain quotas for children of Basij and Sepah officials and the presence of Basij members or supporters give way to an informal way of monitoring of students at universities. Such persons may report on students who display deviant behavior and are proselytizing. Also, in high schools, students are expected to attend mass prayers and those who do not may stick out. This is rarely the case in metropolitan areas. (...)**

**Additionally, in Iran there is generally a high degree of regulation and filling of forms where one is obliged to state one's religion, for example when, registering at schools, and signing up at the educational centers in order to take the concours for university entrance. (...)**

**According to Mansour Borji, Article 18 Committee, situations in which the convert is faced with obstacles vis à vis the authorities include when registering as a student at university where registration of religion is required or when young men register for military service where registration of religion is also required. In both situations a Christian convert cannot honestly state his or her religion without fear of being exposed. (...)**

**Asked which legal consequences a Christian convert may risk, Mansour Borji explained that in Iran there are no direct laws against conversion in the Penal Code. According to article 167 of the Iranian Constitution, if there is no provision, in the penal code for a particular matter, judges may consult Islamic sources and fatwas. The law therefore gives a judge the discretion to make use of fatwas and other religious sources in cases regarding conversion. (...)**

**When asked what consequences a convert faces in relation to his family or social network, an international organisation in Turkey considered that a convert may be threatened by family members for example in the instance that a member of his family holds a higher ranking official position. This person may force him or her to stop his Christian activities.**

**Regarding the risks of maltreatment from actors other than the authorities, the AIIS considered that the question of whether risks could emanate from family, would very much depend on how religious the family was or whether it had close ties to the authorities. As an example, it was explained that a member of the family who holds a government position for example, may be asking themselves whether they could be risking their position by having**

a convert in the family. Depending on such factors, **it was considered that there is a possibility that a family member may report on a convert.** (...)

**Some Christian converts may risk maltreatment from their own family members and relatives but mostly, Christian converts are facing persecution at the hands of the state, according to Mansour Borji. The source found that it could happen that family members would report on their own family if somebody has converted to Christianity, often with good intentions hoping that an encounter with the authorities will have a 'deterrent' effect on them and make them forget about conversion. It could also happen that neighbors report on a convert, however, the source considered that the threat of persecution stemmed mainly from the authorities.**

**Asked if the Christian converts would also face problems in relation to their own family members because of their conversion, a non - governmental organization in Turkey informed that according to refugees their problems are mainly related to the authorities. It added that the Iranians are informing them that the interrogation by the authorities and the psychological torture they are exposed to are pressuring many to leave the country. The reasons for fleeing are mostly based on the oppression from the authorities than the day to day social oppression.** (...)

**As regards the consequences of a conversion in relation to family and social network, the representatives of the Union Church informed the delegation that it is often the immediate family members that may create the biggest problems for the convert including brothers and sisters, mother and father. The reason for this is that they consider that the convert has shamed the family.** (...)

**Mansour Borji further explained that Christian converts are considered second class citizens who have no right to live a Christian life and who have to keep their religious conviction a secret. Converts have to balance between their belief to share their Christianity with others and the daily risk they may face if their faith is exposed to the authorities.**

**Mansour Borji added that the question of the upbringing of children is also a big issue for convert families in Iran. In school children have to participate in religious education and learn about Islamic principles. In such situations the child of a Christian convert may not realize the security issues if he or she speaks about their situation at home where the family practices a Christian life. The source further referred to the fact that a Christian wedding between converts is not recognized by the Iranian authorities. The only way for converts to Christianity to marry legally in Iran is according to Islamic law.** (...)

**An Iranian pastor informed the delegation that the problems for converts to Christianity also involve other aspects of life than immediate fear of persecution from the authorities. For example in marriage, a man and a woman who have converted to Christianity from Islam cannot marry as Christians. Such a couple must marry according to Islamic Law. In order to register their marriage, they must have an Islamic marriage contract. There is no civil marriage in Iran. The source said that all Iranian children, and therefore children of converts are taught Islamic teachings from their first year of school and thereby taught a different religion than that of their family.**

Whether a convert family experiences problems in connection with sending their children to school, **Elam Ministries** considered that it very much depends on the school. What issues may arise in such a situation will depend on the school, however, normally a school will have an Islamic supervisor and **if this person hears information about a child acting anything other than Islamic, then the family may risk that the authorities are informed. Consequences could be that the family is forced to recant their faith, the child is continually ostracized at school and the family is taken in for questioning. (...)**

#### **1.6 Situation of converts who return to Iran after having converted abroad, i.e. in Europe/Western countries**

**Mansour Borji** explained that 20 years ago, it was possible for a Christian convert to be baptized in a church in Iran. Over time, the churches that did baptize paid the price and due to gradual pressure, this possibility has now been eliminated. **Since 2006 - 2007, converts are no longer baptized in Iranian churches as no one was willing to run the risk of performing a baptism. Christian converts consequently started travelling to Turkey and other neighboring countries to get baptized. Asked if house churches perform baptism, the source said that some churches might.**

**With regard to the situation of converts who return to Iran after being baptized abroad, be it in Turkey, Armenia, UAE or another country, the source found that they may return to Iran quietly and not encounter any problems. If the person is already monitored by the authorities, he or she could risk consequences upon return to Iran.**

**According to AIIS it is difficult to obtain information on potential risks an individual may face upon returning to Iran after conversion abroad. If Iranian informants have gathered information regarding an individual who has returned to Iran, the authorities may arrest them for questioning. It is possible that charging and conviction will ensue the arrest and questioning. (...) Regarding whether baptism abroad would put a person at risk from the authorities in Iran, AIIS considered that the importance of baptism should be balanced against how the Iranian authorities perceive a convert. A person who has attended trainings and sessions abroad may be considered a convert, although he or she may not have officially been baptized.**

**Asked about the situation for a convert who returns to Iran after having converted abroad, i.e. in Europe or a Western country, Mansour Borji found that there would be no difference in the way the Iranian authorities would deal with the case. If the person is known to the authorities and they have shown an interest in him or her before he or she left the country, there could be a risk to him or her upon returning. If the person is unknown to the authorities, the source did not consider that there would be a huge threat towards him or her. The source referred to a case of a family who went back to Iran and upon return, they were threatened and followed around/harassed. It was considered that perhaps relatives or others had reported them to the authorities causing the harassment. Ultimately, the family left Iran again. They had secretly begun to attend a house church.**

**Concerning the consequences for an individual upon return to Iran after having converted abroad, CSW said that any convert who wishes to practice his or her faith upon return, would face serious risk. Whether an individual has been baptized in a nearby country or in Europe or the US, would not make any difference. If an individual returns**

**to Iran and is not actually promoting Christianity, the fact still remains that such an individual has left the 'faith' (Shia Islam) and thus threatens the order of the regime.**

*When asked about the consequences of returning to Iran after having been baptized abroad, **Elam Ministries said that many Iranians do go abroad and return to Iran after a while. If the authorities in Iran become aware of the fact that a person has been baptized abroad such an individual may risk interrogation and repercussions. The source considered that the authorities may find out that an individual has been baptized through informers and telephone/internet tapping.***

*When asked about how persons who have been baptized abroad carry on with a Christian life upon return to Iran, it was considered that Iranian converts need baptism because of their Islamic background. It is easier mentally to live as a Christian after baptism has taken place. After baptism an individual will often display a greater change in behavior that will be obvious to others. Talking from experience, an Iranian network leader said that after he had turned Christian, he no longer used profanity or was angry as he used to be and that **this change in behavior was of course noticed by his family members and the people around him. Also, after having become a Christian one is given the command to share one's faith with others. Part of the teachings of the Bible is evangelism and the gospel of Matthew is that one should go and tell people about Jesus.** Converts wish to obey this and it is those who evangelize that the authorities want to stop.*

*It was considered that persons who return from Western countries after converting would have to be very careful about doing any evangelizing. **When considering the situation of an individual who has converted in Europe who then returns to Iran, their situation would be much the same as that of Iranians who convert in Iran. Such individuals would have to lay low and not speak openly about their conversion. If their conversion is uncovered and the authorities are notified, there is a risk that such an individual will be suspected of links with foreign organizations much the same as a convert who has been living in Iran.***

*The source added that those who are outside of Iran for extended periods of time may be more at risk in that the authorities may suspect them of spying. It was further added that **this counts not only for Christian converts but also for other Iranians.***

*Asked about the situation of Christian converts who return to Iran after coming to Turkey or another country, and meeting with other believers, the representatives of the Union Church informed the delegation that if the converts stay "quiet"; i.e., they do not associate with other believers, they may not be discovered and the visits to a foreign country will then not make a lot of a difference for them.*

*The source did not consider that there would be less risk to an individual who returns to Iran after being baptized in a Western country, if the individual renounces the baptism and explains it to be part of a strategy for coming to the West. This would work for their families, but maybe not for the government authorities. Converts in Iran are subject to arrest, torture and execution; they would normally not be declaring their religion on job or school applications. According to the representatives of the Union Church, even if not known to authorities, converts can face shunning and even "honor killing" by their families. Ethnic Christian minorities (Armenians, Syriacs) are allowed to meet and worship*



*in strictly regulated conditions. The source said that we hear that they also have difficulties, some of which are reported in the media. (...)*

**Elam Ministries explained that the internet in Iran is controlled by the authorities and many websites with Christian content are filtered or blocked. Additionally, cyber cafés operate under strict regulations and control. (...)**

**Regarding the use of the Internet in Iran, AIIIS said that the Internet is highly controlled by the authorities and that a special Cyber police is monitoring the Internet (...)**

**An international organisation in Turkey also offered the view that that the authorities have established mechanisms to monitor and to control the Internet.** When asked whether a convert who uploads Christian content on a website or creates his own website with Christian content will risk being arrested by the authorities, the source is aware that the authorities have access to information on internet use on the individual level, but would likely monitor individual internet usage if there are reasons highlighting a user's profile, such as links with a person who is already under supervision. An internet traffic between an Iranian user and foreign church groups may be such factor that highlights the user's profile. (...)

Elam Ministries said that it is very difficult to give a figure on how many Iranians, with a Muslim background, that have converted to Christianity. (...)

**Although it is difficult to know the exact figures of numbers of converts in Iran, Elam estimates that around 500,000 to 1.5 million Iranians have converted in the last 30 years and that the number of Christian converts is growing. (...)**

The authorities are believed to be monitoring those who gather in house churches and people who participate may be at risk of arrest and detention by the authorities according to AIIIS. It was added that even if the authorities were not going after ordinary members of house churches, it is highly likely that they have many members under surveillance. **In terms of the authorities' surveillance efforts, reference was made to the case of an Iranian Ph.D. student in Belgium who travelled back to Iran for summer vacation. He was summoned by the Ministry of Intelligence and was allegedly asked to spy on Iranian students in Belgium. When he refused, he was sentenced to six years in prison on the charge of "acting against national security by communicating with hostile governments".** Such a case, in AIIIS's view, is illustrative of the efforts the Iranian authorities are putting into monitoring individual's activities domestically as well as abroad. (...)

**According to the source, the authorities are trying to create an atmosphere of fear by raiding (house) churches.** Within the last two years, there has been an increase in arrest and detention of house church members and especially an increase in the arrest of female members according to the source. (...)

It was added that it seems as though quite a few house church networks may have been infiltrated and that the authorities monitor those who are attending house churches. **Concerning the raids on house churches, the authorities are quite often looking for specific people, asking for specific details, obtaining personal information about others in the network. The authorities are also confiscating computers and cell phones and in this way extracting as much information as possible from the network. (...)**

**Regarding the consequences for families of converts who are arrested, CSW said that in the situation where bail, often exorbitant (£120,000 was mentioned as an example), has been set, the family is often economically impacted.** Often a deed to the family's property will be given up for bail. **The fees set appear designed to financially cripple the family.** Sometimes family members to detained converts are also harassed by the authorities as a means of intimidation. **Another form of intimidation from the government towards converts who are in prison, is cancellation of family visits for no reason.** On the subject of conditions for converts in prison, **CSW has heard reports of use of torture and severe beatings from both prison personnel and inmates. Denial of or delayed medical treatment was mentioned by CSW as another example of the harsh conditions.** It was added that on the other hand, it may be difficult to get accurate information on the real harshness conditions in prison as Christians who have been imprisoned on account of their faith do not go into detail regarding such type of information as they see themselves as 'suffering for the gospel' in much the same way as early Christians did and thus stay quiet about such issues. This phenomenon is not limited to Iranian Christians alone. (...)

Mansour Borji explained that the authorities had difficulties in dealing with arrests of members from the official/registered churches, for instance the AOG church, concerning how to charge them. **For members of house churches, the charges are different and it's easier for the authorities to accuse them of breaking the law. For instance they could be charged with having an illegal assembly or with consumption of alcohol consumed in connection with communion at a house church gathering.** (...)

Regarding the consequences for converts who are arrested by the authorities in connection with a raid on a house church gathering for example, CSW explained that the authorities are interested in keeping certain individuals for a longer period and may charge such individuals. Charges would typically be put against more prominent individuals, like perceived leaders of groups or networks, and he or she may risk being charged with acting against the Islamic order or of espionage or collaborating with foreign groups, all charges with political underpinnings to them. By charging the leaders, the authorities intend to intimidate the whole group. **In the case of the recent arrest of a picnic gathering in March of 2014** (ref. note 12), the source explained that of the ten people arrested, eight were released with a warning shortly after arrest while two persons are still being held. (...)

**Regarding the activities involving risks of legal consequences in Iran, the representatives of the Union Church mentioned that house church leaders risk being charged with proselytizing, conversion/apostasy and for operating an unregistered church.** As an example, the source referred to Saeed (Abedini, who is serving a prison sentence of eight years). The members of a house church may come and go, however the leader of a church is a constant which is why the authorities are intent on stopping the leader's activities. (...)

Elam explained that underground house churches in Iran are growing due to the fact that most Christians with a Muslim background are unable to go to the (Evangelical and Protestant) churches that exist over ground. For some years the authorities have been putting more and more pressure on the Evangelical and Protestant churches that exist over ground. Beforehand the authorities would focus their resources on targeting the pastors of those churches. Now, in the course of the past two or three years, the authorities have become more focused on restricting the churches themselves and shutting them down and therefore preventing Christians from congregating. **In this effort, the pastors of these churches have first of all had to**



**register their members on a list for the authorities and been compelled to limit their churches' congregation to this list. No new member was allowed to enter the church. Secondly, the churches were ordered not to carry out any activities outside of the church or activities directed at Persian - speaking persons. Only under these circumstances have these churches been able to exist during the last years. (...)**

**When asked if an international organisation in Turkey considered it would make a difference if a person had been trained or baptized in Turkey or in an European country, the source said that if it only concerns conversion, there would probably be no difference. If baptism is uncovered, it could pose problems for the individual. The person's link to a network abroad would also raise the profile. However, there are no reports of persons who have been detained and officially charged with conversion - related offences after returning to Iran from Turkey.**

Regarding risks to individuals who return to Iran after having received religious training in Turkey, **AIIS said that it was possible that Iranian security officials were monitoring activities that take place in Turkey.** It was considered that generally, it is probably easier to monitor what goes on in Turkey due to the geographical proximity and the ease with which Iranians can travel to Turkey.

**Elam Ministries stated that the organization knows of many cases of individuals who came for training in Turkey who upon return to Iran, were immediately arrested. Over 500 individuals that were connected to Elam have been arrested and interrogated for shorter or longer periods, within the past three years, and within the past year, the number has been about 200 individuals. The reason behind this high number is that the authorities have obtained quite a bit of information about how the house churches operate. It also seems that the Iranian authorities have agents in Turkey that know of what work Elam is doing there.**

**According to the source, there are reports of Iranian authorities having agents or informants in some of the churches in Turkey. (...)**

**When asked when people who return from training or other activities in Turkey are taken in by the authorities, Elam Ministries said that it could be at the airport or on the road after passing back into Iran or a few days after returning. (...)**

**When asked what obstacles a convert to Christianity faces in Iran, the representatives of the Union Church considered that if a convert returns to Iran, he or she lives in fear of being discovered. A convert can also risk losing his or her assets if their conversion is disclosed. They can be arrested for apostasy.»** Source: Danish Immigration Service (DIS), Update on the Situation for Christian Converts in Iran; Report from the Danish Immigration Service's fact-finding mission to Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey and London, United Kingdom, 23. juin 2014, p. 5-6, 10-17, 20-26, 30-34, 38-39: [www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/1226\\_1403600474\\_rapportiranffm10062014ii.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1226_1403600474_rapportiranffm10062014ii.pdf).

Danish Immigration Service (DIS), Danish Refugee Council (DRC) und Landinfo, février 2013:

#### **« 1.7 Possession of the Bible**

*A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran mentioned that a Catholic Catechism has been translated into Farsi in Iran, apparently in Qom for the educational purposes for an institute of religious instruction. Bibles in Farsi are however not commonly available, and if someone has a Protestant Bible it has probably been smuggled into the country. **To possess a bible in itself should not be a problem. But if someone is caught with several Bibles, he or she might have some explaining to do. Additionally, if a person somehow has attracted the attention of the authorities and the police therefore are trying to build a case, possession of a bible could be used against him or her.** In general, Farsi-speaking Christians make the regime nervous.»* Source: Danish Immigration Service (DIS), Danish Refugee Council (DRC) und Landinfo: Iran; On Conversion to Christianity, Issues concerning Kurds and Post-2009 Election Protestors as well as Legal Issues and Exit Procedures; Joint report from the Danish Immigration Service, the Norwegian LANDINFO and Danish Refugee Council's fact-finding mission to Tehran, Iran, Ankara, Turkey and London, United Kingdom; 9 November to 20 November 2012 and 8 January to 9 January 2013, février 2013, p. 32: [www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdon-lyres/A8C2C897-1CA9-49D1-BA32-EC3E599D646D/0/Iranendeligudgave.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/NR/rdon-lyres/A8C2C897-1CA9-49D1-BA32-EC3E599D646D/0/Iranendeligudgave.pdf).

Danish Refugee Council und Danish Immigration Service (DRC/DIS), 23 février 2018:

#### **«1.1 Control with the house churches and converts**

***It is difficult for the authorities to control house churches as they are dispersed, not structured and unknown.** The closure of churches affiliated with the "Assembly of God" in 2013 has resulted in the **spread of house churches**, as people who were attending the Church services began to go to house churches instead. One source noted that house churches are quite common in Iran and **their numbers are growing**. According to the source, the increasing number of house churches show that they have space to operate, even though they are illegal. The authorities fear the expansion of the house churches phenomenon in Iran.*

***The authorities use informers to infiltrate the house churches. The infiltrators are identified and selected by the authorities.** To prevent infiltration and intervention, house churches organise themselves as a mobile group consisting of a small number of people. A source mentioned that the prevention of external infiltration is difficult, **as the authorities use informers who pretend to be converts.** One source explained that it would be a strategy for the authorities to either monitor or arrest and release members of a house church to make an informant out of them. The authorities could use information on the person's background to put pressure on them.*

***House churches are monitored by the authorities.** If the authorities receive a report about a specific house church, a monitoring process will be initiated, one source noted. **However, the authorities will not act immediately, as the authorities want to collect information about both the members and who is doing what in the community.** Flourishing house churches are more in danger, as the authorities see these churches as a bigger threat. **Whether the authorities will intervene depends on the activities of the house church and the size of the group.** A source said that the house churches are systematically raided. There have not been any significant changes in the authorities' control with house churches recently.*

*One source pointed out that there has been a change in the authorities monitoring of social media and online activities. Another source added that there is a widespread monitoring of*

telecommunication and electronic communication if a Christian has caught the interest of the authorities. **Certain keywords serve as base for the electronic surveillance e.g. “church”, “Jesus”, “Christian” and “baptism”.** As it is wellknown that the authorities are tapping phones, the house members are cautious and turn off their phones long before they reach their meeting place. Furthermore, the authorities are more alerted to activities threatening the established system.

**There has been a change in the way the Iranian authorities look at Christians in general.** The change started after the green revolution in 2009, as **the Christians are perceived to bring ideas of freedom.**

It is unknown to what extent the Iranian authorities have the capacity to monitor everybody. The authorities do not monitor everyone all the time; what the authorities want is to create a fear among people that they are being monitored all the time, a source highlighted.

### **1.2 Follow-up activities of the authorities in cases related to members of house churches and converts**

Neighbours, who have become aware of unusual activities around a house, can cause a house church to be revealed for the authorities. A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran added that otherwise, the authorities do not have the possibility to know about the house church as members are discrete about it. **It is unlikely that a family member will report to the authorities on a converted family member. However, it occurs in cases where the family member is a government employee or whose professional and/or social status is affected by the Christian family member. One source added that many families are loyal to the regime and have a Basij member within the family. If there are children in the family, they could also inform their teachers about activities in their homes, at school.**

**The authorities are primarily targeting the house church leaders and secondary the members and converts.** Two other sources stated that the authorities target both the leaders of the house churches and the members.

**The typical pattern of targeting is by arresting and releasing the house church leaders, as the authorities want to weaken the house church. Ordinary members of house churches also risk arrest in a house church.** However, they will be released again on the condition that they stay away from proselytizing. If they stop proselytizing, the authorities will stop gathering information about them, a source added. One source mentioned that it would be possible for an arrested convert to pay his/her way out of an arrest. The source added that even if it is known that the person is a converted Muslim, it would be a question of the amount of money paid to be released. **Whether a house church member is targeted also depends on his/her conducted activities and if he/she is known abroad, the same source noted.** Ordinary house church members risk being called in for interrogation on a regular basis as the authorities want to harass and intimidate them, a source explained.

If a house church member is arrested for the first time, he/she will normally be released within 24 hours. If he/she has been detained in prison, he/she will receive his charge within 24 hours and come to court within ten days, a source mentioned.

*A conversion and an anonymous life as a converted Christian in itself do not lead to an arrest, but if the conversion is followed up by other activities as for instance proselytising and training others, the case differs; the same applies if family members report the convert to the authorities. One source highlighted that if a convert does not proselytize or promote a house church, the authorities will not know about him/her. **Middle East Concern, however, did not consider a life as an anonymous Christian as sustainable, as converts, in this case, have to lie about their faith and act against their religion. Amnesty International added that a conversion might be revealed to the surrounding community if the convert does not participate in Islamic events as many social norms and cultural activities are connected to Islam. (...)***

***Converts who tell their family about their conversion risk getting into trouble; they risk exclusion and threats from the family who might think that the converted family members will create a problem for them. According to one source many converts do not tell their families about the conversion.***

***Several sources addressed the issue regarding Iranian converts returning from Europe. According to two sources, converted returnees who do not carry out activities related to Christianity upon return will not be of interest to the authorities.<sup>45</sup> Middle East Concern made the distinction whether the converted person was known before leaving Iran or not; returning will cause problems if the convert has been known by the authorities before leaving. (...) Converts who announce their conversion in public may face serious problems. If the returned convert has been very outspoken about his/her conversion on social media, including Facebook, the authorities might become aware of it and arrest and interrogate the convert upon return. A Western embassy (3) said that the subsequent process would depend on what the returnees inform the authorities about. The embassy did not consider that the converts would receive harsh punishment if they are not high-profiled and are not involved in propagating Christianity or activities perceived as a threat to national security. Declaring conversion on Facebook in itself does not lead to persecution but likely to monitoring. One source explained that a photo indicating a conversion posted on the internet would be evaluated by the authorities along with the profile and activities of the converted person. If the person did not have any previous affiliation with Christianity before leaving the country, he/she will not be persecuted. (...)***

***A baptism in itself will not have significance, according to two sources. A foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran noted that it is doubtful whether it would make a difference for the authorities if the convert is baptized. Middle East Concern source considered that a baptism, which is documented, could alert the authorities and prove to be problematic. (...)***

### *1.3 Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts*

***Christian converts are typically not charged with apostasy; convert cases are usually considered as national security matters which are handled by the Revolutionary Court. A source added that the authorities perceive activities related to conversion as political activities. Death penalty in cases related to conversion is not a common punishment. (...)***

**Group formation in Iran is punishable, a source noted. According to Article 498 of Iran's Islamic Penal Code, "forming a group composed of more than two people with the purpose of disrupting national security" can carry a 10-year prison sentence. As an example where this accusation has been made, two sources highlighted a case from March 2017 where a Christian convert named Ebrahim Firouzi was issued a five years sentence for "forming a group for disrupting national security". (...)**

*Meeting with a foreigner interacting with Christians in Iran (...)* **There has been a change in the way the Iranian authorities look at Christians in general. The paranoia started after the green revolution in 2009, as the Christians are perceived to bring ideas of freedom. Since the country has opened more up, the authorities have cracked more down on thoughts of freedom. Most Iranians are not very religious, but they might see conversion as a way to come closer to Western values, and as a protest against the system. Activities related to conversion are cracked down by the authorities as the authorities see it as a political activity. (...)**

**Converts who return from Europe after a rejected asylum claim, and tell their families that their asylum claim was conversion, will probably get in trouble. Even if you keep a low profile upon return, you might have a problem with your family who might think you will create trouble for the family. They would probably not report it to the authorities. The source did not have any specific information on families in Iran who got into troubles, because of a family member being openly converted in Europe.**

*Meeting with a Western Embassy (4)(...)* 48. **The implementation of the death penalty in Iran is related to drug and murder cases, and more rarely high profile political cases. Most of the implemented cases are related to drug cases. The source stated that organisers of house churches might risk accusations of "Crimes against God" which would carry the death penalty but the source did not know of any cases where this accusation has resulted in actual execution of the accused.**

*Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts* 49. **As an example of a case of conversion from Islam, in which the death penalty has been sought, the embassy referred to the Taheri case. (...)**Mr. Taheri (founder of the Erfan e-Halgheh ) was initially sentenced a five-year prison sentence for blasphemy in 2011, while further investigations against him were going on. **He was ultimately convicted of "spreading corruption on earth" in 2015 and sentenced to death, but acquitted on appeal in 2016.** He was not released, and in late 2016, was charged with "spreading corruption on earth" for the same activities that formed the basis of his 2011 conviction. **On 27 August 2017, a Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced Ali Taheri to death for "spreading corruption on earth" for establishing the spiritual group Erfan-e Halgheh. (...)**

*Meeting with Amnesty International (...)*52. **Whether it makes a difference for the authorities if a convert is baptized or not, the source did not assume that baptism was the key issue; it is rather the convert's connections, including those abroad. The source did not have a specific example in this regard.**

53. **On the question about returned converted Iranian asylum seekers, the source stated they might be interrogated and added that Iran for the last two years, has been sensitive about Iranian nationals with ties abroad. The source assumed it would be an issue if Iranian nationals**



have claimed that they have converted abroad. Generally, many of this type of cases tend to be related to national security offenses, meaning people face prosecution for conversion to Christianity under national security and other criminal offenses when, in fact, the issue is the denial of freedom of religion. The source assumed the Iranian authorities are very active in monitoring Iranians, also those abroad. (...)

**As regards Christian converts the source mentioned the Nadarkhani case. Naderkhani was sentenced to death in 2012, but was later released. He has been rearrested in May 2017 and sentenced to ten years in prison for propagating house churches and “Zionist Christianity”. His case has been appealed by his lawyer. 60. When asked about recent death sentences issued in other conversion cases, Amnesty International mentioned the Mohammad Ali Taheri case. Taheri, who is founder of the spiritual group, Erfan-e Halgheh, was arrested in 2011 and sentenced to death for “spreading corruption on earth” in August 2017 on charges of founding a spiritual group. 93 In October 2017, the Supreme Court of Iran overturned the death sentence and sent the case back to the lower court for further investigations (on the charge of “spreading corruption on earth”). (...)**

Meeting with Middle East Concern(...) 107. **If a house church member or leader is arrested, usually the bail set in the case, is very high. The bail set can range from 20.000 to 200.000 USD. If someone who is out on bail flees, the authorities can then confiscate their property. According to the source, there are cases of people, who have been encouraged to leave Iran by the authorities, as a trial case with a death sentence will attract international attention. In these cases where the converts leave the country, the authorities can collect the bail; thereby leaving those who choose to flee nothing to come back to. Converts would often lose their jobs, without a reason given. If you are never formally charged, and the process before the court is put on hold – you would still have the case over your head. (...)**

**110. The arrests of Christians have not decreased in recent years. There is a constant threat. If you are member of a flourishing house church, you could be more in danger, because the authorities see the flourishing house churches as a bigger threat. (...)**

**122. It could be a problem to return to Iran if you are a convert, and if you were a known Christian before leaving. If you were not known to the authorities before leaving, it would not be problematic to get back into Iran but once you begin to live in Iran and attend Church, you would be identified and perhaps targeted. (...)**

**123. When you return to Iran the authorities can see at the airport, when you left, and how long you have been away from Iran – that is the case if you had originally left Iran via the airport/by airplane and legally. If you had left Iran illegally, the government will not have an exact date of when you had originally left the country. As regards the baptism MEC informed the delegation when a person is baptized by a Church, there is hard evidence of the conversion to Christianity and a certificate is issued and there is often photos etc. That could alert the authorities and prove problematic when the individual is back in Iran.**

**124. If someone has announced his/her Christianity on Facebook while abroad, the person would probably be surveyed by the Iranian authorities. However, declaring your conversion on Facebook in itself does not mean that you will be persecuted but monitored,**

*if returning to Iran. If you are open about your activities, an arrest or interrogation by the government upon return is not unlikely. But declaring you are a Christian when you return to Iran, will cage you into a life of no rights, and put you at risk. Being a Christian is considered a political opposition to the regime.*

**125. According to MEC, it does not make sense to talk of the concept “silent Christians”. People who are Christians are forced to educate their children in a Muslim way, and to change or lie about their religious identity. You cannot just be low-profiled but would have to act against your faith in so many ways; you would have to lie about your religion e.g. on job-applications, school-registration etc. where you are always asked about your faith and religion. You would have to celebrate Eid and other Muslim traditions, like going to the Mosque at burials. Otherwise it would be very odd. Islam is a community-religion integrated into the Iranian culture, so even if the major part of the Iranian population is not very religious, many customs and traditions in the country are Muslim. It would be noticed if you do not participate, and you would easily be stigmatized. If you die a Christian, you would not be able to get a Christian burial.(...)**

Meeting with Middle East Consultancy Services (...) Recent trial cases related to house churches and converts. **The source informed there is no legislation on apostasy in the Penal Code; however, many converts are prosecuted.** 136. Of recent trials related to converts, the source mentioned several cases, including the **Sina Dehghan case from May 2016. Dehghan was charged of conducting teachers protest campaign and blasphemy through writings online and sentenced to death by execution. He was arrested in October 2015 and the court decision was declared by the Revolutionary Court of Arak in May 2016.** 101 **The sentence has been upheld by the country’s Supreme Court.** 102 **Another case from June 2015 is regarding Hesameddin Farzizadeh who was sentenced to death for apostasy by the Criminal Court of Meshkinshahr in Ardabil province. He was arrested in November 2014 in a raid on his house by the lebas shakhsiha (plain clothed agents). He was sentenced for his book From Islam to Islam. The charge of apostasy stems from the mentioned book, in which he examines the history of Shi’a Islam and raises questions about certain facets of Shi’a beliefs. Maryam Naghash Zargaran was arrested on November 5, 2012 for conversion to Christianity and was sentenced to four years in prison by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court for “assembly and collusion against national security” in 2013. The sentence was upheld by the Appeals Court.»** Source: Danish Refugee Council (DRC) et Danish Immigration Service (DIS), Iran: House Churches and Converts, 23 février 2018, p. 5-11, 13; 20-22, 31, 34, 36: [www.ecoi.net/en/file/lo-cal/1426255/1788\\_1520517773\\_house-churches-and-converts.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/en/file/lo-cal/1426255/1788_1520517773_house-churches-and-converts.pdf).

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), 30 juillet 2014:

*«Both apostasy and swearing at the Prophet are capital offenses. While the latter has been specifically criminalized in the Islamic Penal Code, the former has not been explicitly mentioned as a crime. Nevertheless, provisions in the Islamic Penal Code and the Iranian Constitution state that Shari’a, or Islamic religious law, applies to situations in which the law is silent. As a result, the Iranian judiciary is empowered to bring apostasy charges based on its interpretation of Shari’a law.*

**While the Qur’an does not explicitly state that apostasy should be penalized, the majority of Islamic jurists agree that an apostate is to be put to death.»** Source: Iran Human Rights

Documentation Center (IHRDC), Apostasy in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 30 juillet 2014, p. 1:  
[www.iranhrdc.org/files.php?force&file=reports\\_en/Apostasy\\_in\\_the\\_Islamic\\_Republic\\_of\\_Iran\\_104287928.pdf](http://www.iranhrdc.org/files.php?force&file=reports_en/Apostasy_in_the_Islamic_Republic_of_Iran_104287928.pdf).

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), 5 décembre 2001:

*«The signing of the marriage contract is performed at the same time as the religious ceremony, both of which pre-date the actual wedding celebration by between six to twelve months (ibid.). **Following the religious ceremony (but before the wedding reception), the marriage contract is recorded by a representative of the Civil Registration Organization (ibid.).** The civil registration of a marriage has been law in Iran since 1930. (...) According to a representative of the Action Committee for Women's Rights in Iran - Canada (ACWRI), a woman who married in a civil ceremony in Cyprus and subsequently returned to Iran and married another man would be considered guilty of adultery. Civil marriages performed outside of Iran are never recognized by the Iranian authorities, and **an Islamic ceremony in Iran is essential to deem the marriage valid.** Therefore, obtaining a divorce would not be relevant, as the marriage would be considered illegal by the Iranian authorities (...). A representative of the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation stated that a **civil ceremony performed in Cyprus would have no legal standing in Iran, and that the parties would be deemed guilty of adultery unless they participated in an Islamic ceremony before living as man and wife.**» Source: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), Legal consequences for a woman in Iran married via a civil marriage in Cyprus who later marries in Iran before obtaining a divorce for the marriage in Cyprus; recognition of the marriage in Cyprus by Iran; likelihood of adultery charges in Iran (1995-2001), 5 décembre 2001: [www.refworld.org/docid/3df4be48c.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4be48c.html).*

Minority Rights Group International (MRG)/Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights und Centre for Supporters of Human Rights (CSHR), 13 mars 2018:

*«**Christians in Iran include Armenians, the largest Christian group in Iran, whose presence dates back four centuries, and Chaldo-Assyrians, who are among the oldest settled groups in Iran. In addition, there are large numbers of Protestants and Evangelicals in Iran, many of whom are converts and are treated harshly by the government. According to the results of the 2011 government census, which only counts Armenians and Chaldo-Assyrians, there were 117,704 Christians in Iran, although other sources give estimates closer to 300,000, including converts. Estimates for the number of converts vary widely, with some ranging between 66,000 to as many as 500,000.***<sup>24</sup> *The cities of Tehran and Isfahan are both home to substantial Christian populations. (...)*

Figure 7: Christian churches in Iran

Denomination	Number
Armenian Churches	160
Assyrian Churches of the East	61
Assyrian Bible Churches	12
Assyrian Presbyterian Churches	11
Armenian Evangelical Churches	8
Chaldean Assyrian Catholic Churches	7
Adventist Churches	6
Churches of the Assemblies of God	6
Latin Catholic Churches	5
Armenian Catholic Churches	5
Persian-speaking Evangelical Churches	2
Episcopal Churches	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>284</b>

Source: Iranian High Council for Human Rights, 2016

Converts, for the most part, are not officially considered Christian and are treated harshly by the authorities. **Although conversion is not a codified crime in Iran, judicial authorities have used national security laws to impose harsh sentences on converts, including imprisonment and floggings. In January 2017, a Tehran appeals court confirmed a five-year prison sentence for Ebrahim Firoozi, a Christian convert allegedly involved in missionary activities. Between May and August 2016, Iranian authorities reportedly arrested 79 Christian converts across Iran. The government has also shut down formally recognized churches offering services in Persian and prevented Iranians who are not Christians from entering churches.** » Source: Minority Rights Group International (MRG), Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights und Centre for Supporters of Human Rights (CSHR), Rights Denied: Violations against ethnic and religious minorities in Iran, 13 mars 2018, p. 10, 25-26: [www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1426937/5351\\_1521379677\\_rights-denied-violations-against-ethnic-and-religious-minorities-in-iran.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1426937/5351_1521379677_rights-denied-violations-against-ethnic-and-religious-minorities-in-iran.pdf)

Mohabat News, 21 octobre 2017:

«The Iranian intelligence service has launched a new campaign to crackdown on Christian converts in the south-western city of Dezful, resulting in many Christians in this city to be arrested and interrogated. (...)

On October 10, 2017, security authorities **arrested Mohamad Ali Torabi, a Christian convert, in his workplace** in the south-western city of Dezful. He was immediately transferred to an unknown location and his family has not been made aware of his whereabouts ever since.

**After arresting him at his workplace, plain-clothed security authorities took the 39 year old Christian convert, Mohammad Ali Torabi, to his house, where they confiscated all of his Christian material including Bibles and textbooks.** » Source: Mohabat News, A Group of Christian Converts Arrested in South-Western Iran, 21 octobre 2017: <http://mohabat-news.com/en/?p=3760>.

Mohabat News, 30 août 2016:

**«Iranian police raided a family party on Thursday August 26, 2016, held in a garden in Firouz-Kouh county, north of Tehran, and arrested a group of Christian converts who had gathered there. (...)**

According to Article 25 of the Iranian constitution, “searching, intercepting delivery of mails, wiretapping and recording of telephone conversations, publicizing, censorship and interruption of private telegraph and fax communication is illegal, unless permitted through a court order”. Despite this article, Iranian police, security forces and the Revolutionary Guard, do not respect this law and violate Iranian citizens’ privacy and personal space. With this group of Christian believers arrested in their family party, not only will they be charged with having a non-Islamic party, they will be charged with **possession of Bibles and Christian material, which is a crime in the country**. Even though they were not having a worship session in their gathering, **the mere possession of Christian material among them is considered an offence.**»  
Source: Mohabat News, Iranian Christian Converts Arrested in Family Party, 30 août 2016: <http://mohabatnews.com/en/?p=3091>.

NOAS, Norges Kristne Råd, Den Norske Kirke et Stefanus Alliansen, 2017:

**«Ikke nødvendigvis religiøse møter**

**Den samlingen som blir raidet behøver nødvendigvis ikke være et spesifikt kristent møte.** Mansour Borji i Article 18 fremhever at også sosiale sammenkomster med konvertitter kan oppfattes som ulovlig. To av våre informanter var sammen med andre, flere av dem medlemmer i en husmenighet, ved et rent sosialt samvær da politiet slo til. (...)

**Bruk av vold**

**Våre informanter forteller at politiet kan være rimelige hardhendte, særlig hvis noen stiller spørsmål eller ikke samarbeider. Da et av medlemmene i et raid nektet å oppgi koden til sin PC og stilte spørsmål ved at politiet ikke hadde noen ransakelsesordre, ble han slått og sprayet med pepperspray. Vår informant er overbevist om at hans motstand bidro til en enda hardere behandling. Andre som ble arrestert mens de var hjemme eller på andre plasser, forteller også om voldsbruk både mot seg og i et tilfelle mot kone og barn. Flere oppgir at etterretningstjenesten og politiet brukte truende og nedsettende språkbruk.**

**Mobiltelefoner, PC'er, nettbrett og annet elektronisk utstyr blir beslaglagt.**

**Alt som kan være av interesse blir tatt, til og med barns elektroniske spill. Alle ble tvunget til å oppgi koder til utstyret og til sosiale medier. (...)**

**Bruk av isolat**

**Gjennomgående rapporteres det om utstrakt bruk av isolat, helt opptil perioder på 75 dager, som et av flere «verktøy» for å få tilståelser og informasjon, ofte i kombinasjon med lange og intense forhørsperioder. En av våre informanter var nettopp kommet ut fra Iran. Han ble i to omganger satt på isolat som inkluderte lange og tøffe forhørssekvenser preget både av trusler om represalier mot nær familie og menighet, inklusive trusler om selv å bli tatt av dage. Han var sterkt preget av det han hadde opplevd og ble frigitt etter**



**å ha skrevet under på en erklæring hvor han blant annet tok avstand fra sin tro. To informanter, som for noen år siden ble tvangssendt tilbake til Iran fra Norge, ble også satt i isolat over lengre tid.**

#### **Usikre fengselsopphold**

**Forhørene i fengselet er harde og de rettsprosessuelle forholdene svært uklare. Det skaper stor usikkerhet og utrygghet. Det kan ta lang tid før man vet hva man er anklaget for og før det blir formell rettsbehandling. Informantene oppgir at konvertitter sjeldent får lov til å ha en advokat etter eget ønske. Mange ganger får ikke advokaten tilgang til klienten sin eller nødvendige saksdokumenter. I løpet av forhør og fengselsopphold blir konvertitter ofte utsatt for sterkt psykologisk press, trusler om henrettelse og grovt krenkende språkbruk. Noen opplever også vold og fysisk mishandling. Informanter forteller at de blir plassert sammen med tungt kriminelle og farlige fanger, selv om de egentlig skulle vært plassert blant politiske fanger med tanke på anklagene mot dem, at de blir utsatt for at de ikke får tilgang til nødvendig medisinsk behandling, at de blir nektet besøk fra familie eller å ringe hjem. (...)**

#### **Krav for å bli frigitt**

**Det oppgis at konvertitter blir tilbudt løslatelse og at anklagene trekkes hvis de blir informanter for myndighetene. Flere påpeker at det er vanlig at man beskrive under en erklæring om at man ikke lenger vil oppsøke husmenigheter eller delta i andre kristne aktiviteter. Hvis man blir tatt i enda et «lovbrudd eller får nye anklager rettet mot seg, økes straffen betydelig. (...)**

#### **Pålegg om å forlate landet**

**Flere informanter forteller også at det er en forutsetning for å bli frigitt at en skal forlate landet. Det er ikke tvil om at myndighetene anser det mer tjenlig at konvertitter befinner seg utenfor Irans grenser. (...)**

#### **Vanskeligheter etter frigivelse**

**En av våre informanter fortalte at både han og flere han kjente mistet jobbene sine etter arrestasjoner, og at de også hadde store problemer med å få nødvendige offentlige dokumenter for å kunne starte egen virksomhet. Det gjorde det svært vanskelig å overleve. En annen uttrykte det på følgende måte: «Once you are arrested – they make sure that you're out of job.» Kausjonspenger kan gjøre det nødvendig å selge hus og eiendom. Dette, sammen med den store usikkerheten som uavsluttede rettsprosesser og muligheten for nye arrestasjoner innebærer, bidrar til at mange konvertitter forlater Iran. (...)**

#### **«4.8 Returnerte konvertitter**

##### **Risiko ved retur**

**Hva skjer med konvertitter som blir returnert til Iran? Vi har ikke mange slik eksempler, men det er noen. Vi forholder oss til to dokumenterte returtilfeller fra Norge hvor begge senere ble innrømmet flyktningsstatus av UNHCR. Den ene er intervjuet over telefon, den andre har selv beskrevet sine erfaringer etter å ha flyktet til Tyrkia. Uten at de har hatt noe kjennskap til**

*hverandre forteller de detaljert om samme mønster fra iranske myndigheters side fra ankomst etter å ha blitt overlevert av norsk politi. Mønsteret er i hovedtrekk som følger:*

*a) Den ene forteller at han må vente i tre timer på flyplassen siden han ikke hadde pass. Da han går ut for å ta en taxi, tvinger flere sivilkleddede personer ham inn i en bil. Her begynner de å spørre ut om hvorfor han har vendt islam ryggen og blitt en kristen. Den andre forteller noe tilsvarende. Med bind for øynene blir de kjørt til et sted de antar er i Teheran.*

*b) De blir satt på enecelle i lengre perioder og gjenstand for harde forhør. Den ene tvinges blant annet til å stå oppreist i timevis. Språkbruken kan tidvis være nedverdiggende og ydmykende. De er begge utsatt for fysisk vold.*

*c) De oppfatter begge hovedpunktene i anklagene mot dem er knyttet til frafallet fra islam og underkjenningen av den islamske staten. Politiet kjenner overraskende godt til hva en av dem har skrevet på sosiale medier i Norge. Politiet viser også interesse for norske nummere og navn som kommer fram på hans mobiltelefon.*

*d) De blir begge truet med hva som kan skje med familien.*

*e) Begge blir truet med å bli tatt av dage. Den ene blir flere ganger utsatt for «skinnhennrettelser», at en blir tatt med ut for å skulle avlives, men i siste øyeblikk blir eksekusjonen avbrutt, noe som oppleves som svært psykisk belastende.*

*f) De blir tilbudt fritt leide hvis de vil fortsette som angivere. Den ene hadde medisinske problemer før fengselsoppholdet uten at det ble tatt hensyn til.*

*g) Den ene mener oppholdet varte i sju uker. Den andre i to måneder. De tror begge de ble hjulpet av kjente i «systemet» slik at de ble frigitt, men da på betingelse av å fortsette som angivere. Belastningene ble for store og begge legger etter en stund ut på en kostbar, strabasjøs og farlig flukt over fjellet til Tyrkia hvor de til slutt blir registrert hos UNHCR - og etter en lang vanskelig ventetid får status som flyktninger.*

*h) Begge har fått varige men av den brutale behandlingen og de psykiske belastningene de ble utsatt for i iransk fengsel og av den påfølgende flukten.*

*En av de organisasjonene vi møtte i London slo også fast at de som returnerer etter en konvertering i utlandet vil som regel utsettes for streng overvåking. Enkel kommunikasjon med naboer og familie om tro, og ikke minst eventuell kontakt med det kristne fellesskapet man har hatt i landet der konverteringen skjedde, vil være direkte farlig. En organisasjon i Tyrkia, som jobber tett med iranske flyktninger, strekker seg så langt som å si at bare det å komme tilbake som en «failed asylum seeker» er nok til å tiltrekke seg myndighetenes interesse. Hvis det ikke allerede er kjent, vil konverteringen snart komme for dagen. Flere påpeker at det ikke er lett for returnerte konvertitter å komme inn i en husmenighet hvis man ikke har kontakter og nettverk, men at det vil være mulig over tid og når tillit er etablert.» Source: NOAS, Norges Kristne Råd, Den Norske Kirke und Stefanus Alliansen, Har kristne konvertitter fra Iran behov for beskyttelse? Tro, håp og forfølgelse II, 2017, p. 44-48, 52-53: [www.noas.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Tro-haap-og-forfolgelse-II.pdf](http://www.noas.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Tro-haap-og-forfolgelse-II.pdf).*

Chancellerie fédérale suisse, 14 février 2018:

« **Verbotener Nachrichtendienst**

**Der Bundesrat stellt fest, dass:**

- **in der Schweiz weiterhin verbotener Nachrichtendienst betrieben wird;**

- **insbesondere Spionage mit elektronischen Mitteln ein grosses Ausmass angenommen hat.**

Politik, Wirtschaft und Militär der Schweiz, aber auch **hier domizillierte ausländische Vertretungen und internationale Organisationen sind Ziel von verbotenem Nachrichtendienst. Ausserdem stehen auch Exilgemeinschaften im Visier der Nachrichtendienste ihrer Heimatländer.** Die Zielsetzungen variieren je nach Potenz und Interesse des angreifenden Staats. Verbotener Nachrichtendienst wird zudem nicht nur mit gezielten Angriffen betrieben. Nachrichtendienste arbeiten auch mit Schlüsseltechnologiefirmen zusammen; die Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologie bleibt grundsätzlich korrumpierbar. In manchen Ländern bestehen Rechtsgrundlagen, mit denen eine solche Kooperation erzwungen werden kann.» Source: Schweizerische Bundeskanzlei, Geschäftsbericht des Bundesrates 2017, Band I, 14 février 2018, p. 151: [www.bk.admin.ch/bk/de/home/dokumentation/fuehrungsunterstuetzung/geschaeftsbericht.html](http://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/de/home/dokumentation/fuehrungsunterstuetzung/geschaeftsbericht.html). (version française: <https://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/fr/home/documentation/aide-a-la-conduite-strategique/rapport-de-gestion.html>)

UK Home Office, mars 2018:

« *The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Factbook, noted that Iran has an estimated population of 82,021,564 million (July 2017 est.). **The estimated number of Christians living in Iran varied greatly. UN data from 2011 suggests that the number is 117,704.** The United States Religious Freedom report quote the figures from the World Christian database as stating there are approximately 285,000 Christians in Iran. Open Doors, interviewed by the UK Home Office on 8 August 2017, stated that many converts do not publicly report their faith due to persecution so it is difficult to record the exact numbers of Iranian Christian converts. **Open Doors believes the number to be 800,000, although this is a conservative estimate. Other estimates put the number between 400,000- 500,000 right up to 3 million.** (...)*

*When asked about if there was any difference in treatment between Church 'leaders' and others and what constitutes a 'leader' within the Church, Open Doors told the UK Home Office that there is some difference in treatment, depending on the person's role, between Christians. Christian leaders are monitored very closely, but the Iranian authorities have a problem with all Christians, and mainly Farsi-speaking Christians, ethnic Christians and Believers from a Muslim Background (BMB). **A person organising/arranging a House Church, even if it only consists of 4 or 5 people, can be thought of as a 'leader', as can anyone who takes on any role or responsibility, for example the leadership of women's ministry.** A leader is not just someone who has studied theology. For example, a person who has come to Christ (through conversion), say six months ago, will be evangelising and starting discipleship groups. (...)*

**5.1.8 Open Doors informed the UK Home Office on 8 August 2017 that the Revolutionary Guard and the intelligence services are mainly responsible for the ill treatment of Christians in Iran. Both are very much controlled. These organisations often interview Christians, who**

*are believed to be spies from the West. Additional charges are loaded onto Christians when arrested. There is a clear structure to how the authorities persecute Christians.*

**5.1.9 Elam ministries, informed the UK Home Office on 6 September 2017 that those who store and distribute Bibles, evangelise, lead house churches etc, face more pressure from the authorities. The authorities might let them carry on for a while or watch them but their goal would be to stop them.**

**5.1.10 When asked by the UK Office about the likely treatment Christian converts may face Elam Ministries stated that the pressure will be built up - they might get called in for questioning and then let go at first. If a person doesn't stop their Christian worship, then the phone calls will start. Depending on how much information the authorities have on a person, the strategy may change, with arrests without warrants, huge bails, charges of politically-related or security crimes, floggings and exiles to remote areas of Iran. Within the last ten years, thousands of Iranians have converted to Christianity. In this time the Iranian authorities have arrested hundreds of people and built up a good database of activities and developed an idea of the different levels of activity. Those who watch satellite TV are considered a lower threat; those who open a house church or evangelise are in a different category. (...)**

*Article 18, interviewed by the UK Home Office on 12 July 2017 stated that apostasy charges are rarely stated on court documents although individuals are verbally charged, questioned, intimidated and threatened with apostasy.*

**5.3.10 Article 18, further stated that legally a person must be summonsed first and then arrested (if a person has not responded to the summons). But this usually doesn't happen. Often when a person is arrested, no one shows an arrest warrant which legally should have their name, basic details and the reason for arrest. The person should then know his/her charges immediately and before interrogations. The person could then refuse to answer questions not connected to his/her under law. But this rarely happens. The arrest, detention and charge are therefore illegal all the way through. It's also highly likely that by the time a person gets to court, the charges which are raised are not the ones mentioned (if at all) earlier in proceedings. People who are arrested are threatened with apostasy. But this doesn't appear on the charge sheet or court verdicts.**

**5.3.11 Article 18 stated that some people are detained for three months and one day – to ensure they have a criminal record. Another trend, on top of the person's sentence is two years' 'exile' to a place in southern Iran which is difficult to live in. People sent there also must report weekly to the authorities.**

**Elam ministries, interviewed by the UK Home Office on 6 September 2017, stated that when the authorities raid a house church they will arrest everyone in the room. They might not hold those who are new or who are clearly not active as long as they would hold the leaders. House churches are much smaller now than before. Two to three years ago there would have been 20- 30 members. Leaders have been arrested which means that other members of the group have to step up and become the leaders. There is not a set structure - the situation is very fluid. Those in House churches are threatened by the government as they are seen as the most passionate evangelists.» Source: UK Home Office, Country Policy and Information Note Iran: Christians and Christian converts, März 2018, S. 7, 16-24: [www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1426113/1226\\_1520429972\\_iran-christians-cpin.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1426113/1226_1520429972_iran-christians-cpin.pdf).**

UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), mars 2017:

**«The Special Rapporteur is also concerned about the targeting and harsh treatment of Christians from Muslim backgrounds and members of various Sufi groups, including the Nematollahi Gonabadi order and the Yarsan (also known Ahl-e Haqq), which are considered “deviant faiths” by the authorities and some members of the clerical establishment. These groups continue to face arbitrary arrest, harassment and detention, and are often accused of national security crimes such as “acting against national security” or “propaganda against the State”. Under Iranian law, individuals, including Christians of Muslim backgrounds, can be prosecuted for apostasy, although it is not specifically codified as a crime in the Islamic Penal Code. The Special Rapporteur notes that laws against apostasy clearly contravene the State’s obligation to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief.»**  
Source: UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Advance edited Version, 17 mars 2017, p. 17: [www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session34/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_34\\_65\\_AEV.docx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session34/Documents/A_HRC_34_65_AEV.docx).

US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), 26 avril 2017:

**«Since President Hassan Rouhani was elected in 2013, the number of individuals from religious minority communities who are in prison because of their beliefs has increased, despite the government releasing some religious prisoners of conscience during the reporting period. (...)**

*Despite publicly releasing in December 2016 a nonbinding Charter on Citizens’ Rights—which includes provisions to respect freedom of thought and religious belief for all citizens—President Rouhani has not delivered on his promises to strengthen civil liberties for religious minorities. Even some of the constitutionally recognized non-Muslim minorities—Jews, Armenian and Assyrian Christians, and Zoroastrians—face official harassment, intimidation, discrimination, arrests, and imprisonment. (...)*

#### **Christians**

*Since 2010, authorities arbitrarily have arrested and detained more than 600 Christians throughout the country. Over the past year, there were numerous incidents of Iranian authorities raiding church services, threatening church members, and arresting and imprisoning worshipers and church leaders, particularly Evangelical Christian converts. **According to reports, nearly 80 Christians were arrested between May and August 2016; the majority were interrogated and released within days, but some were held without charge for months, and several remain in detention. As of December 2016, approximately 90 Christians were in prison, detained, or awaiting trial because of their religious beliefs and activities. Christian leaders of house churches were the particular focus of Iranian authorities, and often were charged with unfounded national-security-related crimes.**»* Source: US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2017 Annual Report; 2017 Country Reports: USCIRF Recommended Countries of Particular Concern (CPC): Iran, 26 avril 2017, p. 44-49: [www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/5250\\_1494427334\\_iran-2017.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/5250_1494427334_iran-2017.pdf).

US Department of State (USDOS), 20 avril 2018:



«**The Basij, a volunteer paramilitary group with local organizations across the country, sometimes acted as an auxiliary law enforcement unit subordinate to IRGC ground forces.** Basij units often engaged in repression of political opposition elements or intimidation of civilians accused of violating the country's strict moral code, without formal guidance or supervision from superiors. The supreme leader holds ultimate authority over all security agencies. (...)

The government restricted and disrupted access to the internet, **monitored private online communications**, and censored online content. Individuals and groups practiced self-censorship online.

The Ministries of Culture and of Information and Communications Technology are the main regulatory bodies for content and internet systems in the country. The supreme leader's office also includes the Supreme Council of Cyberspace (SCC) charged with regulating content and systems. **The government collected personally identifiable information in connection with citizens' peaceful expression of political, religious, or ideological opinion or beliefs.**»

Source: US Department of State (USDOS), Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2017 - Iran, 20 avril 2018: [www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2017/nea/277241.htm](http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2017/nea/277241.htm).

US Department of State (USDOS), 15 août 2017:

«**“Within the limits of the law,” the constitution states Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians (excluding converts from Islam) are the only recognized religious minorities permitted to worship and to form religious societies.** (...)

**The penal code specifies the death sentence for proselytizing and attempts by non-Muslims to convert Muslims**, as well as for moharebeh (“enmity against God”) and sabb al-nabi (“insulting the prophet”). (...)

According to World Christian Database statistics, there are approximately 285,000 Christians, although some estimates suggest there may be many more Christians than actually reported. While the government's Statistical Center of Iran reports there are 117,700, Elam Ministries, an Iranian Christian organization, estimates that there could be between 300,000 and one million Christians. The majority of Christians are ethnic Armenians concentrated in Tehran and Isfahan. Estimates by the Assyrian Church of the total Assyrian and Chaldean Christian population put their combined number at 7,000. **There are also Protestant denominations, including evangelical groups, but there are no authoritative data on their numbers. Christian groups outside the country estimate the size of the Protestant community to be less than 10,000, although many Protestants and other converts to Christianity from Islam reportedly practice in secret.** (...)

The constitution states the investigation of an individual's ideas is forbidden, and no one may be “subjected to questioning and aggression for merely holding an opinion.” **The law prohibits Muslim citizens from changing or renouncing their religious beliefs. The only recognized conversions are from another religion to Islam. Apostasy from Islam is a crime punishable by death.** Under the law, a child born to a Muslim father is considered to be Muslim. (...)

**The constitution states Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognized religious minorities. “Within the limits of the law,” they have permission to perform religious**

**rites and ceremonies and to form religious societies. They are also free to address personal affairs and religious education according to their own religious canon. The government does not recognize evangelicals as Christian. Because the law prohibits citizens from converting from Islam to another religion, the government only recognizes the Christianity of citizens who are Armenian or Assyrian Christians, since the presence of these groups in the country predates Islam, or, reportedly, of citizens who can prove that they or their families were Christian prior to 1979 revolution. The government also recognizes Sabeen-Mandaeans as Christian, even though the Sabeen-Mandaeans do not consider themselves to be Christians. Any citizen who is not a registered member of one of these three groups or of Judaism or Zoroastrianism or who cannot prove that his or her family was Christian prior to 1979 is considered Muslim. Citizens who are members of one of these recognized religious minorities must register with the authorities.**

**Registration conveys certain rights, including the use of alcohol for religious purposes. Failure of churchgoers to register and attendance at churches by unregistered individuals may subject a church to closure and arrest of its leaders by the authorities. Christian converts are not recognized as Christian under the law; they cannot register, and are not entitled to the same rights as recognized members of Christian communities.**

**The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security monitor religious activity, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) also monitors churches. (...)**

**By law, non-Muslims may not serve in the judiciary, the security services (separate from regular armed forces), or as public school principals. (...)**

**Christians who were arrested were reportedly subject to severe physical and psychological mistreatment. The Christian news website, Mohabat News, said the mistreatment sometimes included beatings and solitary confinement. (...)**

**Christians, particularly evangelicals and converts from Islam, continued to experience disproportionate levels of arrests and detention, and high levels of harassment and surveillance, according to reports from exiled Christians. Numerous Christians remained imprisoned at year's end on charges related to their religious practices. Prison authorities reportedly continued to withhold medical care from prisoners, including some Christians, according to human rights groups. According to human rights NGOs, the government also continued to enforce the prohibition on proselytizing. (...)**

**The government continued to regulate Christian religious practices closely. The authorities prevented Muslim converts to Christianity from entering Armenian or Assyrian churches, according to UN Special Rapporteur Shaheed. According to Christian community leaders, if the authorities found Armenian or Assyrian churches were baptizing new converts or preaching in Farsi, they closed the churches. The authorities reportedly also barred all unregistered or unrecognized Christians from entering church premises, closed churches that allowed them to enter, and arrested Christian converts. Christian advocacy groups stated the government, through such pressure and through church closures, had eliminated in recent years all but a handful of Farsi-language church services, restricting services to the Armenian and Assyrian languages. The government continued to ban Farsi-language**

*churches, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide. Security officials monitored registered congregation centers to perform identity checks on worshippers to confirm non-Christians or converts did not participate in services. In response, many citizens who had converted to Protestantism or other Christian faiths practiced their religion in secret. (...)*

*Government restrictions on published religious material continued. Government officials frequently confiscated Bibles and pressured publishing houses printing Bibles or unsanctioned non-Muslim materials to cease operations. Books about the Yarsan religion remained banned. Books published by religious minorities, regardless of their topic, were required to carry labels on the cover denoting their non-Shia authorship. (...)*

*Official reports and the media continued to characterize Christian house churches as “illegal networks” and “Zionist propaganda institutions.” (...)*

*According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide, converts from Islam faced societal pressure and rejection by family or community members.»* Source: US Department of State (USDOS), 2016 Report on International Religious Freedom - Iran, 15 août 2017, p. 1-22: [www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016/nea/268890.htm](http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2016/nea/268890.htm).

World Watch Monitor, 17 octobre 2017:

*«Meanwhile, Mehrdad Houshmand and his wife Sarah were arrested, interrogated and then detained in the capital, Tehran, for participating in a Christian funeral service, including “reading prayers based on Christian teachings”.»* Source: World Watch Monitor, Iran: arrests of Christian converts continue, 17 octobre 2017: [www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/iran-arrests-christian-converts-continue/](http://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/iran-arrests-christian-converts-continue/).