



## COI QUERY

<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Iran</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Situation of returnees from Western countries who converted from Islam to Christianity, including those who have a family with a Christian spouse and children; treatment by the state</b>
<b>Reference period</b>	July 2022 to 8 August 2024
<b>Topic(s)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><a href="#">Situation of returnees from Western countries who converted from Islam to Christianity, including those who have a family with a Christian spouse and children</a></li><li><a href="#">Treatment by state</a></li></ol>
<b>Date of completion</b>	9 August 2024
<b>Query Code</b>	Q54-2024
<b>Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)</b>	N/A



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Cite as: EUAA, Country of Origin Information Query, Iran, Situation of returnees from Western countries who converted from Islam to Christianity, including those who have a family with a Christian spouse and children; treatment by the state, 9 August 2024, [url](#)



## COI QUERY RESPONSE – Iran

### Situation of returnees from Western countries who converted from Islam to Christianity, including those who have a family with a Christian spouse and children; treatment by the state

#### 1. Situation of returnees from Western countries who converted from Islam to Christianity, including those who have a family with a Christian spouse and children

Information on the situation of returnees from Western countries who converted from Islam to Christianity was scarce among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query. However, the following information may be relevant.

Conversion from Islam to another religion is prohibited in Iran.<sup>1</sup> According to the 2023 United States Department of State (USDOS) annual report on religious freedoms in Iran, ‘Sharia as interpreted by the government considers conversion from Islam to be apostasy, a crime punishable by death, and ‘the only recognized conversions are from other religions to Islam’.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the same source illustrated that ‘the government only recognizes the Christianity of citizens who are Armenian or Assyrian Christians, because the presence of these groups in the country predates Islam, or of citizens who can prove they or their families were Christian prior to the 1979 revolution’.<sup>3</sup>

Christians in Iran who ‘actively express their faith – and especially converts from Islam – are subject to arrest and prosecution by the State’.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Christian converts have also been reported to be subjected to coercion to return to Islam, and some have reported that family members were approached by the Iranian authorities ‘to try to persuade them to return to Islam’.<sup>5</sup>

According to the key findings from a report by OpenDoors, an organisation working on supporting Christians who suffer from religious discrimination,<sup>6</sup> ‘the government sees Iranian Christians as an attempt by Western countries to undermine Islam and the Islamic regime of Iran’ and leaders of Christian convert groups ‘have been arrested, prosecuted and have received long prison sentences for “crimes against national security”’.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Iran International, Cleric says some Iranian Muslims converting to other religions, 11 March 2023, [url](#); USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 30 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 30 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 30 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> Article18, Faceless Victims, rights violations against Christians in Iran, 19 February 2024, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>5</sup> Article18, Faceless Victims, rights violations against Christians in Iran, 19 February 2024, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>6</sup> Open Doors, About, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> Open Doors, World watch list 2024, situation of religious freedom for Christians, 13 September 2023, [url](#), p. 1



Further information on the situation of Christian converts within Iran can be found in the EUAA, [Iran – Country Focus](#) (sections 4.10.1 - Conversion and 4.8.2 - Christians), published in June 2024.

## 2. Treatment by the state

According to sources, on 13 February 2024, Christian convert, Laleh Saati, who had returned to Iran in 2017, was arrested by the Iranian authorities in Tehran, and taken to prison after being summoned several times before her arrest.<sup>8</sup> Saati, who was baptised in a church in Malaysia, ‘had been sentenced to two years in prison in Iran for “acting against national security by connecting with ‘Zionist’ Christian organisations”’.<sup>9</sup> Sources further added that Saati was reportedly interrogated for around three weeks during which time photographs and videos of her Christian activities and baptism in Malaysia were ‘brought before her as evidence of her “crime”’.<sup>10</sup> A local news source in May 2024 added that Saati was denied access to medical facilities and specialized examinations in prison.<sup>11</sup> Further information on specific incidents of the treatment by the state towards Christian convert returnees could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

Furthermore, a 2024 article by OpenDoors, noted that a ‘Christians’ decision to return to Iran often means risking persecution, imprisonment and even death’.<sup>12</sup> Further, the same source noted on ‘the terrifying reality facing active Christians who are returning/deported back to Iran’ and indicated that these ‘individuals face severe persecution, including imprisonment and torture, simply for practicing their faith’.<sup>13</sup> A 2018 report by the Danish Immigration Service and the Danish Refugee Council added that ‘converts who announce their conversion in public may face serious problems’.<sup>14</sup>

On Iranian Christians outside of Iran, a September 2023 report from OpenDoors reported that ‘informers in Western countries report back to Iranian intelligence on the activities of Iranian Christians abroad’.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, USDOS added that Iranians from religious minority groups ‘reported they sometimes received threats from apparent Iranian regime officials while abroad – either to themselves or to their family members’.<sup>16</sup> Article18, a UK-based non-profit organisation dedicated to the protection and promotion of religious freedom in Iran,<sup>17</sup> noted that some Iranian Christians with Christian family members outside the country experienced problems from the Iranian authorities, and were questioned concerning their family member’s activities abroad.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Article18, Christian convert baptised in Malaysia given prison sentence on return to Iran, 26 March 2024, [url](#); AsiaNews, Easter in Iran: convert asylum seeker sentenced to two years after returning home, 30 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> Article18, Christian convert baptised in Malaysia given prison sentence on return to Iran, 26 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> Article18, Christian convert baptised in Malaysia given prison sentence on return to Iran, 26 March 2024, [url](#); AsiaNews, Easter in Iran: convert asylum seeker sentenced to two years after returning home, 30 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> Iran International, Jailed Iranian Christian Denied Medical Care, 11 May 2024, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> Open Doors, Iranian Christian sentenced to two years in Evin Prison, 27 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> Open Doors, Iranian Christian sentenced to two years in Evin Prison, 27 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>14</sup> Denmark, DIS and DRC, Iran: House Church and Converts, 23 February 2018, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>15</sup> Open Doors, World watch list 2024, situation of religious freedom for Christians, 13 September 2023, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>16</sup> USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Iran, 30 June 2024, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> Article18, About us, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> Article18, 2023 Annual Report: Rights Violations Against Christians in Iran, 19 February 2023, [url](#), p. 10



Article18 also described that ‘the Iranian regime continually harasses and pursues any individual identified as engaging in Christian activity’.<sup>19</sup>

Confidential sources from the September 2023 Country of Information report on Iran by the Netherland’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the matter of the Iranian authorities approaching or questioning returnees, illustrated that that this could occur if the Iranian authorities were aware that ‘someone has changed religion while abroad’.<sup>20</sup> However, the same source further added that usually ‘religious background does not play a role on return’<sup>21</sup> and ‘authorities at the airport tend not to ask about religious beliefs’.<sup>22</sup> On Christian returnees, according to another confidential source cited, ‘in some cases, the authorities ask questions of the returnee if they know that the person has converted to Christianity or if they know that the person has used conversion to Christianity as a motive for applying for asylum [abroad]’.<sup>23</sup>

Further Information on the treatment by the state of Christian converts that have returned to Iran and information on those with a Christian spouse and children could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

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<sup>19</sup> Article18, Faceless Victims, rights violations against Christians in Iran, 19 February 2024, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>20</sup> Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran, September 2023, [url](#), p. 110

<sup>21</sup> Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran, September 2023, [url](#), p. 110

<sup>22</sup> Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran, September 2023, [url](#), p. 110

<sup>23</sup> Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Iran, September 2023, [url](#), p. 110

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## ADDITIONAL SOURCES CONSULTED



Canada– Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB); Deutsche Welle; ECOI.net; Equality Now; EuroNews; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides (OFPRA); Freedom House; Free Voice; Human Rights Activists in Iran; International Crisis Group; Iran – Islamic Parliament Research Center; Islamic Republic News Agency; Mehr News Agency; Middle East Institute; Minority Rights International; Norway – Landinfo; Norwegian Refugee Council; United Nations Women; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United States – Department of Justice; United States Institute of Peace