

A Web of Forces: Open Doors 2023 Report on Gender-Specific Religious Persecution

Open Doors UK & Ireland is part of an international NGO network which has for more than 65 years supported and strengthened persecuted Christians. We work in over 70 countries worldwide, in close consultation with church leaders and other Christians who experience first-hand the denial of their religious liberty, as upheld by Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We believe that this right must be taken seriously in global affairs to the benefit of Christians and others across the world who are persecuted for their faith or belief.

Every year at Open Doors, we collate in-depth research to compile a World Watch List, which ranks the countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution. Based on this research, we publish further reports on trends in global persecution, including how men and women are affected in different ways. The most recent of these reports on gender-specific religious persecution, entitled [A Web of Forces](#), is now available.

Key findings:

- Our report describes how distinct forms of persecution (or 'pressure points') interact in the persecution of Christian men and women. These can combine in a web of forces which may overwhelm individual Christians, their families and support networks. Sexual violence is often one of many other pressure points such as psychological violence, abduction, forced marriage and enforced religious dress code that target Christian women in particular.
- The report features a detailed examination of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, highlighting the complex needs of Christian women. Those who are also converts are at particular risk of being trapped in a web of oppression due to their gender, their faith or other socio-cultural and legal factors which create vulnerability to persecution.
- For example, the report gives the example of Sahar, an Iranian woman thrown out of her home by her husband and denied access to her children following her conversion to Christianity. While the family subsequently reconciled, the report also details Sahar's persecution at the hands of the Iranian state, and how she was forced to flee the country.
- The report also highlights several specific ways in which persecutors may control the lives of women from religious minorities, including converts. For example, religious dress codes are widespread in the MENA region, and are enforced on women from all religious backgrounds. Likewise, women's use of digital devices can be strictly controlled by family members.

Recommendations

We are urging the UK Government to:

- Ensure a gender perspective is integrated into programmes designed to protect and promote Freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and that sensitivity to FoRB is integrated into gender-focused anti-discrimination programmes.
- Include religion as a factor of vulnerability in any assessment made in planning and programming, and include targeted programming and aid for women and girls who face compound vulnerabilities as members of minority faiths.

For a full copy of the Open Doors [A Web of Forces](#) report on gender-specific religious persecution or for additional information on the persecution of Christians around the world, please contact the Open Doors advocacy team at advocacy@opendoorsuk.org.

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