



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Egypt: Christians

Version 4.0

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Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- The general humanitarian situation is so severe as to breach Article 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC (the Qualification Directive) / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules
- The security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that it would breach Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- A claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

5th Floor

Globe House

89 Eccleston Square

London, SW1V 1PN

Email: chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk

Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

Updated: 27 October 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm at the hands of the state and/or non-state actors because the person is a Christian.

1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 Generally, the term 'Coptic' is used to describe all Egyptian Christians. This includes members of the Coptic Orthodox Church but extends to other denominations such as evangelicals and Catholics.

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).

2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Convention reason(s)

2.2.1 Actual or imputed religion.

2.2.2 Establishing a convention reason alone is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed in each case is whether the particular person will face a real risk of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.

2.2.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.3 Exclusion

2.3.1 Decision makers must consider whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses applies. If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.

2.3.2 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#).

2.4 Risk

a. State treatment

2.4.1 Christians are an established and significant minority in Egypt with an estimated population of roughly 10%, around 10 to 15 million people. They reside throughout the country but are mostly concentrated in Upper Egypt and major urban areas such as Cairo and Alexandria (see [Background](#)).

2.4.2 In the country guidance case of [MS \(Coptic Christians: Egypt CG \[2013\] UKUT 611 \(IAC\)](#), heard on 17 and 18 September 2013 and promulgated on 3 December 2013, the Upper Tribunal (UT) found that:

‘Coptic Christians in Egypt... are not at a general risk of persecution or serious harm ill-treatment contrary to Article 3, ECHR, ‘However, on current evidence there are some areas where Coptic Christians will face a real risk of persecution or ill-treatment contrary to Article 3. In general these will be (a) areas outside the large cities; (b) where radical Islamists have a strong foothold; and (c) where there have been recent attacks on Coptic Christians or their churches, businesses or properties.

‘On the evidence before the Upper Tribunal, the following are particular risk categories in the sense that those falling within them will generally be able to show a real risk of persecution or treatment contrary to Article 3, at least in their home area:

- (i) converts to Coptic Christianity;
- (ii) persons who are involved in construction or reconstruction/repair of churches that have been the target for an attack or attacks;
- (iii) those accused of proselytising where the accusation is serious and not casual;
- (iv) those accused of being physically or emotionally involved with a Muslim woman where the accusation is made seriously and not casually.

‘Coptic Christian women in Egypt are not in general at real risk of persecution or ill-treatment, although they face difficulties additional to other women, in the form of sometimes being the target of disappearances, forced abduction and forced conversion.

‘However, depending on the particular circumstances of the case, Coptic Christian women aged between 14-25 years who lack a male protector may be at such risk.

‘If a claimant is able to establish that in their home area they fall within one or more of the risk categories identified in 3 (i)-(iv) above or that they come from an area where the local Coptic population faces a real risk of persecution, it will not necessarily follow that they qualify as refugees or as beneficiaries of subsidiary protection or Article 3 ECHR protection. That will depend on whether they can show they would not have a viable internal relocation alternative. In such cases there will be need for a fact-specific

assessment but, in general terms, resettlement in an area where Islamists are not strong would appear to be a viable option.

'None of the above necessarily precludes a Coptic Christian in Egypt from being able to establish a real risk of persecution or ill-treatment in the particular circumstances of their case, e.g. if such an individual has been the target of attacks because he or she is a Coptic Christian.' (paras 151 (1-7)).

- 2.4.3 The UT in MS considered evidence largely based on events in the first half of 2013 and in the immediate aftermath of President Morsi's ousting by the military in July 2013, which was followed by a rise in sectarian violence. Morsi was replaced by President Al-Sisi who, in the years since, has consolidated his and the military's hold over government and the country more generally and taken a hardline against armed groups, including those that have targeted Christian communities (see country policy and information note on [Egypt: Opposition to the State](#)).
- 2.4.4 While some laws reportedly discriminate against Christians – Copts appear more likely to face prosecution and conviction for blasphemy than Muslims. According to DFAT, some Christians have faced prosecution under blasphemy laws and harassment from the security forces. The Al-Sisi Government has sought to improve law and order, and has taken several highly visible steps towards bettering state relations with, and to provide support for, the Coptic community. These include making public statements in support of inter-faith co-operation, the increase approval of churches and the prosecution of those who have targeted churches and Christians. However, while Christians are represented in government and the civil service, they face some official discrimination, including in obtaining senior positions in government and security forces. There continues to be a reluctance by the state to deal with mob attacks and a slow process of approving churches (see [Legal framework](#), [State treatment](#) and [Societal treatment](#)).
- 2.4.5 Government initiatives have been taken to combat discrimination and intolerance on the basis of religion or belief, such as changes made to the educational system and working with Islamic Institutions to promote co-existence (see [State treatment](#)).
- 2.4.6 However, Christians are not generally at risk of persecution or serious harm from the state.
- 2.4.7 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- b. Societal treatment
- 2.4.8 Following the UT's findings in the case of [MS](#), which relied on evidence up to the end of 2013, the political, security and social situation for Christians has changed. During 2016 and early 2017 there was an increase in non-state sectarian violence against Christians. However, the number of reported attacks by radical Islamists and anti-Christian mobs reduced between 2018 and 2019 and has continued to decline since. High profile incidents resulting in deaths or churches being attacked are no longer a frequent occurrence, and varies considerably from place to place (see [Societal treatment](#)).

- 2.4.9 However, despite positive trends, Christians continue to face societal discrimination and, occasionally, violence, including by armed groups, although this is largely confined to rural areas. There is limited information about those Christians who proselytise or the treatment of Christian men involved with Muslim women, but Christian converts face high levels of societal discrimination. The UT's findings in MS that in general Christians are not at risk of persecution or serious harm continue to apply.
- 2.4.10 The country evidence does not, however, indicate that those who are involved in construction or reconstruction/repair of churches continue to face frequent ill-treatment. Therefore, given the improvements in the situation and the decline in frequency of incidents which are largely confined to rural areas, The Home Office considers there are very strong grounds supported by coherent evidence (in this instance a lack of evidence) that those involved in the construction of churches are not, in general, likely to be at risk of treatment amounting to persecution.
- 2.4.11 However, risks faced by individual Christians are likely to vary considerably from place to place. Evidence suggests that risks arise more frequently in Upper Egypt (see [Societal attitudes and treatment](#)).
- 2.4.12 Christians are in general not at risk of persecution or serious harm by non-state actors in urban areas, including in Cairo and Alexandria. However, Christians in some rural or poorer areas, particularly those with a strong extremist presence, where there have been recent attacks on churches and Christian properties, continue to face discrimination and ill-treatment by non-state actors that may amount to persecution (see [Societal attitudes and treatment](#) and [State treatment](#)).
- 2.4.13 While Christians remain generally unlikely to be at risk of serious harm or persecution, each case will need to be considered on its merits with the onus on the person to demonstrate why they would be at risk.
- 2.4.14 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, they are unlikely to be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.5.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, including 'rogue' state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.5.3 In [MS](#), the UT found that while the security forces had been both willing and able to provide, overall there had been and continued to be at the time of the determination inadequate state protection for Christians (paragraphs 121-123, and 151(1)).
- 2.5.4 The available information does not indicate that the situation has changed since [MS](#) was heard on 17 and 18 September 2013.

- 2.5.5 Decision makers must therefore consider the circumstances of each case on its facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate that protection is not available.
- 2.5.6 For more information and guidance on protection within Egypt, see the country policy information and note on [Egypt: Actors of protection](#).
- 2.5.7 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 The UT in MS found that if a person
'... is able to establish they come from an area where the local Coptic population faces a real risk of persecution, it will not necessarily follow that they qualify as refugees or as beneficiaries of subsidiary protection or Article 3 ECHR protection. That will depend on whether they can show they would not have a viable internal relocation alternative. In such cases there will be need for a fact-specific assessment but in general terms... resettlement in an area where Islamists are not strong [that] would appear to be a viable option. In general Coptic Christians at real risk of persecution or ill-treatment in their home area will be able to relocate in safety to large cities such as Cairo or Alexandria or areas where radical Islamists do not have a significant presence, but (it must be emphasised) that is not to say in particular cases where there are relevant circumstances creating undue hardship that individuals will have much difficulty in establishing that it would be unreasonable to expect them to relocate.' (para 139)
- 2.6.2 There is no legal impediment to internal movement within Egypt, including for single women, and Copts do relocate for a variety of security, economic and social reasons (see [Freedom of movement](#)).
- 2.6.3 Since MS the general situation has improved, violence has reduced and is largely confined to rural areas. However, the country situation indicates that the UT's findings in MS continue to apply.
- 2.6.4 Some Egyptian Copts have internally relocated because of sectarian tension either voluntarily or as a result of Reconciliation Committees. If means allow, families will usually help with finding shelter and financial assistance. The Church can also sometimes assist. It has been reported that rural and poor Coptic women will find it more difficult to find shelter and employment. Women, and especially single women, with no support network, may be particularly vulnerable and face destitution (see [Freedom of movement](#)).
- 2.6.5 Whether in general, those with a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from non-state actors can seek effective state protection and/or internally relocate within an area where religious extremists do not have a strong presence such as Cairo or Alexandria. However each case will need to be considered on its individual facts taking into account the particular circumstances of the person, the nature of the threat and how far it would extend, and whether or not it would be unduly harsh to expect the person to relocate.

- 2.6.6 For more information on relocation generally within Egypt, see the country policy information and note on [Egypt: Background Note](#).
- 2.6.7 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 27 October 2020

3. Background

3.1 Terminology

- 3.1.1 Encyclopaedia Britannica stated 'Copt [is] a member of Egypt's indigenous Christian ethno-religious community. [However] The terms Copt and Coptic are variously used to denote either the members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the largest Christian body in Egypt, or as generic terms for Egyptian Christians....'¹
- 3.1.2 The BBC explained that 'The Coptic Orthodox Church is the main Christian Church in Egypt, where it has between 6 and 11 million members'² and that most Coptic Christians live in Egypt³.
- 3.1.3 As a generic term Copt or Coptic Christians are all the Christians of Egypt, including members of the Coptic Orthodox Church as well as other groups such as Evangelicals and Catholics⁴.

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3.2 Christian community

- 3.2.1 The Australian Department for Foreign Affairs country report on Egypt of May 2019 (2019 DFAT report) stated:

'Christianity was established in Egypt in the first century and is one of the oldest centres of Christianity in the world. Although there are twelve officially recognised Christian denominations in Egypt (four Orthodox, seven Catholic and one Protestant), the vast majority of Christians in Egypt are members of the Coptic Orthodox Church. All those belonging to recognised Christian denominations are identified as Christian on their national ID cards. While Christians reside throughout the country, they are particularly concentrated in Upper Egypt (the southern part of Egypt) and in major cities such as Cairo and Alexandria. Suburbs in Cairo and other cities and some villages are sometimes regarded or described as 'Christian areas', but few are exclusively Christian (or Muslim). Egyptian Christians are politically and socio-economically diverse: they hold varied professions; range from the very poor to the very rich; and have attained a range of education levels.

'Christians generally dress similarly to Muslim Egyptians. In urban areas, however, Christian women are more likely than Muslim women to leave their hair uncovered. Christian women living in rural or conservative areas are more likely to cover their hair, but generally do not wear the Islamic hijab. Christians tend to have identifiable names. Some Christians tattoo small crosses on the inside of their wrists or between their thumb and forefinger as

¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, '[Copt](#)', undated

² BBC, '[Coptic Orthodox Church](#)', 25 June 2009

³ BBC, '[Coptic Orthodox Church](#)', 25 June 2009

⁴ Christianity Today, '[Who are the Copts?](#)', 15 June 2012

a mark of their identity, often following visits to monasteries or holy sites. Not all Christians have these tattoos and it is not a mandatory religious practice.⁵

- 3.2.2 The report continued ‘Local sources report that Christians generally remain strong supporters of Sisi, although (like other Egyptians) their initial enthusiasm has waned due to the lack of economic improvement and ongoing social difficulties in Egypt.’⁶

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3.3 Demography

- 3.3.1 Human Rights Watch noted in its 2020 World Report that Christians are the largest religious minority in Egypt⁷.
- 3.3.2 Encyclopaedia Britannica stated ‘Copts [as a Christian sect] constitute up to 10 percent of the population of Egypt.’⁸
- 3.3.3 The US State Department (USSD) report on International Religious Freedom for Egypt, covering events in 2019 stated ‘...Most experts and media sources state that approximately 90 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim and approximately 10 percent is Christian (estimates range from 5 to 15 percent). Approximately 90 percent of Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church, according to Christian leaders.’⁹
- 3.3.4 The same report noted:
- ‘Other Christian communities together constitute less than 2 percent of the population and include Anglican/Episcopalian and other Protestant denominations, Armenian Apostolic, Catholic (Armenian, Chaldean, Melkite, Maronite, Latin, and Syrian), and Orthodox (Greek and Syrian) Churches. The Protestant community includes Apostolic Grace, Apostolic, Assemblies of God, Baptists, Brethren, Christian Model Church (Al-Mithaal Al-Masihi), Church of Christ, Faith (Al-Eyman), Gospel Missionary (Al-Kiraaza bil Ingil), Grace (An-Ni’ma), Independent Apostolic, Message Church of Holland (Ar-Risaala), Open Brethren, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Revival of Holiness (Nahdat al-Qadaasa), and Seventh-day Adventist. Jehovah’s Witnesses account for 1,000-1,500 persons, according to media estimates, and there are also an estimated 150 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), the vast majority of whom are expatriates. Christians reside throughout the country, although the percentage of Christians is higher in Upper Egypt and in some sections of Cairo and Alexandria, according to religious and civil society groups.’¹⁰
- 3.3.5 The 2019 DFAT report noted:
- ‘No official statistics exist in relation to the breakdown of Egypt’s religious population. While estimates vary, most observers agree that Sunni Muslims comprise approximately 90 per cent of the population, Coptic Christians

⁵ DFAT, [‘Country information report Egypt’](#) (section 3.31, 3.32), 17 June 2019

⁶ DFAT, [‘Country information report Egypt’](#), (section 3.34), 17 June 2019

⁷ HRW, [‘World report 2020 – Egypt’, 14 January 2020](#), (freedom of religion...), 14 January 2020

⁸ Encyclopaedia Britannica, [‘Copt’](#), undated

⁹ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (section 1), 10 June 2020

¹⁰ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (section 1), 10 June 2020

make up between eight and ten per cent, and the remainder consists of small numbers of other religious minorities, including Shi'a Muslims, Sufi Muslims (officially considered Sunni) non- Coptic Christians, Baha'i, and Jews. The government officially recognises three religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.¹¹

- 3.3.6 The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) also stated in a 2018 report that Egypt Christians 'make up roughly 10 percent of the population'¹² and further stated that 'The majority of Egypt's Christians are Coptic Orthodox, with some Catholics (a mixture of Eastern and Latin rites), Protestants, and other Orthodox.'¹³
- 3.3.7 DFAT reported 'Minority Rights Group International estimates that there are between 1000 and 1500 Jehovah's Witnesses living in Egypt.'¹⁴

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Section 4 updated: 27 October 2020

4. Legal framework

4.1 Constitution

- 4.1.1 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:

'The constitution specifies Islam as the state religion and the principles of sharia as the main source of legislation. The constitution states that "freedom of belief is absolute" and, "the freedom of practicing religious rituals and establishing worship places for the followers of Abrahamic religions is a right regulated by law." The constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion and makes "incitement to hate" a crime. It describes freedom of belief as absolute. The constitution limits the freedom to practice religious rituals and establish places of worship to adherents of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The constitution prohibits the exercise of political activity or the formation of political parties on the basis of religion.'¹⁵

- 4.1.2 The same report noted:

'The constitution also stipulates the canonical laws of Jews and Christians form the basis of legislation governing their respective personal status, religious affairs, and selection of spiritual leaders. Individuals are subject to different sets of personal status laws (regarding marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc.), depending upon their official religious designation. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) issues national identity cards that include official religious designations. Designations are limited to Muslim, Christian, or Jewish citizens. Since a 2009 court order, Baha'is are identified by a dash. The minister of interior has the authority to issue executive regulations determining what data should be provided on the card.'¹⁶

- 4.1.3 Furthermore, the report observed:

¹¹ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.2), 17 June 2019

¹² TIMEP, '[Brief: Christians in Egypt](#)', 10 October 2020

¹³ TIMEP, '[Brief: Christians in Egypt](#)', 10 October 2020

¹⁴ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.35), 17 June 2019

¹⁵ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (section 2), 10 June 2020

¹⁶ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (section 2), 10 June 2020

‘Islamic, Christian, and Jewish denominations may request official recognition from the government, which gives a denomination the right to be governed by its canonical laws, practice religious rituals, establish houses of worship, and import religious literature. To obtain official recognition, a religious group must submit a request to MOI’s Religious Affairs Department. The department then determines whether the group poses a threat to national unity or social peace. As part of this determination, the department consults leading religious institutions, including the Coptic Orthodox Church and Al-Azhar [“the main authority in theology and Islamic affairs”¹⁷]. The president then reviews and decides on the registration application.’¹⁸

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4.2 Blasphemy law

4.2.1 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated that ‘According to the penal code, using religion to promote extremist thought with the aim of inciting strife, demeaning or denigrating Islam, Christianity, or Judaism, and harming national unity carries penalties ranging from six months’ to five years’ imprisonment.’¹⁹

4.2.2 The 2019 DFAT report noted:

‘Article 98(f) of the Egyptian Criminal Code provides for prison sentences of up to five years and/or fines of up to EGP1000 (\$AU145) [GBP 49.00²⁰] for “exploiting and using religion in advocating and propagating extremist thoughts with the aim of instigating sedition and division or disdaining and contemplating any of the heavenly religions, or prejudicing national unity or social peace”. Articles 160 and 161 proscribe various acts connected with religion, including disturbing religious ceremonies, violating the sanctity of religious buildings or cemeteries, printing adulterated versions of holy books, or imitating religious ceremonies for the purpose of ridicule.

‘Courts of general jurisdiction...hear defamation of religion cases. While the Misdemeanour Courts hear most cases, the Criminal Courts may have jurisdiction if the charge is serious enough to involve a potential term of imprisonment. It is common for cases to last over a year, and for proceedings to be postponed repeatedly. The Public Prosecution Office places charges, which may occur after a lawsuit is filed, a private citizen files a complaint, or the state itself files a case. A conviction under Article 98(f) can result in a prison sentence of up to five years, and/or a fine.

‘Before the 2011 Revolution, defamation of religion cases were rare. The number and frequency of charges rose considerably under the Morsi government, and this trend has continued under Sisi. A January 2015 decree permitted the government to ban any foreign publications deemed offensive to religion, and Article 98(f) has been used against an increasingly wide

¹⁷ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (Section 2), 10 June 2020

¹⁸ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (Section 2), 10 June 2020

¹⁹ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (section 2), 10 June 2020

²⁰ Xe, [currency converter](#), last updated 22 July 2020

range of groups across the country, including atheists [and] Christians (including converts from Islam)....

'DFAT understands that those accused of blasphemy rarely have an adequate defence counsel. Penalties include fines and/or imprisonment ranging from six months to five years. In some cases, families have reportedly had to leave their homes due to threats received because of defamation of religion cases.'²¹

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4.3 Christian conversion and proselytising laws

4.3.1 The 2019 DFAT report observed:

'There is no statutory prohibition in Egypt on converting from one religion to another. In order to convert to Christianity, authorities require documents from the receiving church, identity documents and fingerprints. Checks are also made on criminal history as conversion often requires a change in name. Converts to Islam will generally have their conversions recognised and their identity cards changed accordingly without difficulty or delay. However, courts and government officials have generally interpreted sharia as prohibiting conversion from Islam. Authorities have at times reportedly refused to recognise such conversions, including through failing to amend a convert's national identity card (and corresponding record) to reflect their chosen faith. This has significant ramifications for personal status issues, such as marriage and divorce, and the state's view of the religious identity of any children born to a convert. Egyptian children obtain a national identity card at age 16, with their religious identity matching that of their parents (their Muslim parent, in the case of a mixed marriage between a Muslim man and Christian woman).

'A 2011 court ruling allowed Christians who converted to Islam and then back to Christianity (generally in order to more easily access divorce) to amend their identity cards to reflect their return to their original faith. DFAT understands, however, that only a small number of such individuals have been permitted to do so, and that several thousand others are still waiting to have their cards changed back.'²²

4.3.2 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:

'Neither the constitution nor the civil or penal codes prohibit apostasy from Islam, nor efforts to proselytize. The law states individuals may change their religion; however, the government recognizes conversion to Islam but not from Islam to any other religion. In a 2008 ruling on a lawsuit against the government for not recognizing a Muslim's conversion to Christianity, the Administrative Court ruled in favor of the government, stating its duty to "protect public order from the crime of apostasy from Islam." The government recognizes conversion from Islam for individuals who were not born Muslim but later converted to Islam, according to an MOI decree pursuant to a court order. Reverting to Christianity requires presentation of a document from the receiving church, an identity card, and fingerprints. After a determination is made that the intent of

²¹ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.12, 3.13, 3.14), 17 June 2019

²² DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.7), 17 June 2019

the change – which often also entails a name change – is not to evade prosecution for a crime committed under the Muslim name, a new identity document should be issued with the Christian name and religious designation. In those cases in which Muslims not born Muslim convert from Islam, their minor children, and in some cases adult children who were minors when their parents converted, remain classified as Muslims. When these children reach the age of 18, they have the option of converting to Christianity and having that reflected on their identity cards.²³

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4.4 Anti-discrimination laws

4.4.1 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:

‘The penal code criminalizes discrimination based on religion and defines it as including “any action, or lack of action, that leads to discrimination between people or against a sect due to...religion or belief.” The law stipulates imprisonment and/or a fine of no less than 30,000 pounds (\$1,900) [GBP 1,452²⁴] and no more than 50,000 pounds (\$3,100) [GDP 2,369²⁵] as penalties for discrimination. If the perpetrator is a public servant, the law states that the imprisonment should be no less than three months, and the fine no less than 50,000 pounds (\$3,100) [GDP 2,369²⁶] and no more than 100,000 pounds (\$6,300) [GDP 4,815²⁷].’²⁸

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4.5 Personal status law

4.5.1 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:

‘Consistent with sharia, the law stipulates Muslim women are not permitted to marry non-Muslim men. Non-Muslim men who wish to marry Muslim women must convert to Islam. Christian and Jewish women need not convert to marry Muslim men. A married non-Muslim woman who converts to Islam must divorce her husband if he is not Muslim and is unwilling to convert. A woman in this situation can continue to live with her husband until she has a legal need to prove her marriage, at which time the marriage may be considered void. If a married man is discovered to have left Islam, his marriage to a woman whose official religious designation is Muslim is dissolved. Children from any unrecognized marriage are considered illegitimate.

‘A divorced mother is entitled to custody of her son until the age of 10 and her daughter until age 12, unless one parent is Muslim and the other is not, in which case the Muslim parent is awarded custody.

‘The law generally follows sharia in matters of inheritance. In 2017, however, an appellate court ruled applying sharia to non-Muslims violated the section of the

²³ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (Section 2), 10 June 2020

²⁴ Xe, [Currency converter](#), undated

²⁵ Xe, [Currency converter](#), undated

²⁶ Xe, [Currency converter](#), undated

²⁷ Xe, [Currency converter](#), undated

²⁸ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (Section 2), 10 June 2020

constitution stating the rules of the Christians and Jewish communities govern in personal status matters.²⁹

4.5.2 The same report stated, 'In matters of family law, when spouses are members of the same religious denomination, courts apply that denomination's canonical laws. In cases where one spouse is Muslim and the other a member of a different religion, both are Christians but members of different denominations, or the individuals are not clearly a part of a religious group, the courts apply sharia.'³⁰

4.5.3 The 2019 USSD human rights country report stated:

'On November 26 [2019], a court ruled that Huda Nasrallah, a Coptic woman, was entitled to a share of her father's estate equal to those of her brothers. Nasrallah had challenged a lower court ruling that granted each of her brothers double her share. Nasrallah's appeal reportedly cited Article 245 of the Orthodox personal status bylaws, issued in 1938, which grants Coptic Christian women equal inheritance to men, and argued that sharia does not apply to her as a Copt.'³¹

4.5.4 The report continued: 'The Coptic Orthodox Church permits divorce only in rare circumstances, such as adultery or conversion of one spouse to another religion. Other Christian churches sometimes permitted divorce on a case-by-case basis.'³²

4.5.5 The 2019 DFAT report observed:

'Religious institutions of the three recognised religions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) are responsible for personal status issues such as marriage, divorce and inheritance. Muslim personal status laws derived from sharia are reflected in legislation. Family Courts apply this legislation to Muslim couples; Muslims married to Christians, and married couples who belong to different Christian denominations.... For Christians and Jews, the religious authorities themselves adopt personal status rules, based on relevant religious doctrine. These rules are considered equivalent to administrative decisions, and are subject to review in Egyptian courts. The Personal Status Laws are currently undergoing a review process, but it is unclear whether this will result in any significant change from the status quo.'³³

4.5.6 The report further noted:

'Egypt is a socially conservative country, and very few couples live together outside of marriage in both urban and rural areas...Christians...must seek marriage under their respective religious institutions before obtaining a marriage contract from the state. All marriages must be registered with the Ministry of Justice, which issues official marriage certificates. According to sharia (as interpreted by Egyptian courts), a Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman without her having to convert to Islam. A Muslim woman, however, can only marry a non-Muslim man if he converts to Islam. Some

²⁹ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (Section 2), 10 June 2020

³⁰ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (Section 2), 10 June 2020

³¹ USSD, '[2019 country report...](#)', (section 6), 11 March 2020

³² USSD, '[2019 country report...](#)', (section 6), 11 March 2020

³³ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.3), 17 June 2019

Christian denominations will reportedly marry Christians from different denominations without requiring one party to convert, but most, including the Coptic Orthodox Church, will generally only marry couples from the same denomination.³⁴

- 4.5.7 In regards to civil marriages, the 2019 DFAT report stated that ‘there is no civil marriage in Egypt, and all religious authorities are strongly opposed to the concept. Civil marriages of Egyptians abroad are recognised in Egypt only when they comply with Egyptian personal status laws. For example, if a Muslim woman married a Christian man in a civil marriage in Australia, it would not be recognised in Egypt.’³⁵
- 4.5.8 Regarding divorce, DFAT stated ‘Christian women married to Christian men are only able to access divorce if their husband converts to another religion or is unfaithful, which results in many women being unable to leave abusive relationships.’³⁶
- 4.5.9 DFAT stated that ‘Christians... can register marriages with documentation from a cleric.’³⁷

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4.6 Banned Christian denominations

- 4.6.1 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:
‘...Although the government lists “Christian” on the identity cards of Jehovah’s Witnesses, a presidential decree bans all Jehovah’s Witnesses’ activities. The law does not stipulate any penalties for banned religious groups or their members who engage in religious practices, but these groups are barred from rights granted to recognized groups, such as having their own houses of worship or other property, holding bank accounts, or importing religious literature.’³⁸
- 4.6.2 The 2019 DFAT report stated that ‘recent court rulings have allowed Egyptians belonging to...unrecognised Christian sects...such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, to have a dash (-) recorded against the religion field in their identity documents. Members of these groups, however, may still face difficulties in relation to personal status issues due to the lack of a civil alternative.’³⁹
- 4.6.3 In regards to Jehovah Witnesses, the report also stated ‘Although the denomination is not officially recognised, authorities permit its members to meet privately in gatherings of fewer than 30 people. Jehovah’s Witnesses are banned from importing religious literature such as Watchtower publications, which are a key part of religious instruction and practice for Witnesses.’⁴⁰

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³⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country information report Egypt](#)’, (section 3.5), 17 June 2019

³⁵ DFAT, ‘[Country information report Egypt](#)’, (section 3.6), 17 June 2019

³⁶ DFAT, ‘[Country information report Egypt](#)’, (section 3.77), 17 June 2019

³⁷ DFAT, ‘[Country information report Egypt](#)’, (section 5.43), 17 June 2019

³⁸ USSD, ‘[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’, (Section 2), 10 June 2020

³⁹ DFAT, ‘[Country information report Egypt](#)’, (section 3.5), 17 June 2019

⁴⁰ DFAT, ‘[Country information report Egypt](#)’, (section 3.35), 17 June 2019

4.7 Church building law – permits, licenses, construction and renovation of churches

4.7.1 The 2019 DFAT report observed:

‘In August 2016, the parliament passed law 80/2016 required by Article 235 of the constitution to allow Christians to build and renovate churches. The law requires the size of a church to be “commensurate with” the number of Christians in the area. Because there are no official statistics in relation to the size of religious communities, determining the size of local Christian communities is difficult and most likely arbitrary. The power to approve requests is exercised by local governors, who must respond to a request to build or renovate a church within 120 days. Refusals must include a written justification. There are no appeal mechanisms.’⁴¹

4.7.2 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:

‘A 2016 law delegates the power to issue legal permits and to authorize church construction or renovation to governors of the country’s 27 governorates rather than the president. The governor is required to respond within four months of receipt of the application for legalization; any refusal must include a written justification. The law does not provide for review or appeal of a refusal, nor does it specify recourse if a governor does not respond within the required timeframe. The law also includes provisions to legalize existing unlicensed churches. It stipulates that while a request to license an existing building for use as a church is pending, the use of the building to conduct church services and rites may not be prevented. Under the law, the size of new churches depends on a government determination of the “number and need” of Christians in the area. Construction of new churches must meet stringent land registration procedures and building codes and is subject to greater government scrutiny than that applied to the construction of new mosques.’⁴²

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Section 5 updated: 27 October 2020

5. State treatment

5.1 State attitude

5.1.1 The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) observed that ‘While public displays of support for Christians such as Sisi’s attendance at mass and the reconstruction of churches destroyed in 2013 are welcome signs, the tangible situation for Christians has remained relatively unchanged in the past decade.’⁴³

5.1.2 TIMEP observed that ‘Pope Tawadros II, the patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church, aligned himself with Sisi since before Morsi’s deposal, and the two share a closer relationship than any pope or president in memory...’⁴⁴

5.1.3 The DFAT report noted:

⁴¹ DFAT, ‘[Country information report Egypt](#)’, (section 3.18), 17 June 2019

⁴² USSD, ‘[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’, (Section 2), 10 June 2020

⁴³ TIMEP, ‘[Brief: Christians in Egypt](#)’, 10 October 2018

⁴⁴ TIMEP, ‘[Brief: Christians in Egypt](#)’, 10 October 2018

‘Egyptian leaders are sensitive to the impact of communal violence. President Sisi has repeatedly denounced attempts to create rifts among Egyptians and called for national unity, most recently in relation to the displacement of Christians from northern Sinai. In December 2018, the government announced it would form a higher committee tasked with developing a general strategy to prevent and confront communal incidents. While acknowledging Sisi’s personal engagement on the issue, Church officials have questioned the commitment of some local officials and law enforcement to upholding the law equally for Christians and Muslims.

‘DFAT assesses that while Egyptian authorities are generally committed to preventing communal violence, this commitment may vary between individuals and locations. Occasional violent incidents of communal violence are likely to continue to occur, especially in Upper Egypt and in Minya in particular. Most cases are likely to be the result of small-scale localised disputes that take on a religious dimension.’⁴⁵

5.1.4 The report further observed:

‘Many Christians and representatives of other minority faiths report that while things could always improve, they generally consider themselves better protected under President Sisi than previous Egyptian leaders. Christian religious authorities have consistently expressed appreciation for Sisi’s public messaging which has called upon Egyptians to place national unity above religious differences, and for his personal example: in 2015, Sisi became the first Egyptian head of state to attend Christmas mass at the St. Mark’s Cathedral in Cairo and has attended every year since. Sisi has actively engaged with the Christian community, declaring days of national mourning or calling personally on Pope Tawadros to express his condolences following terrorist attacks against Christians...’⁴⁶

5.1.5 Crux, a news site covering the Vatican and Catholic Church⁴⁷, reported that President Sisi attended the Coptic Christmas Eve Mass in January 2020⁴⁸.

5.1.6 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:

‘The president established a Supreme Committee for Confronting Sectarian Incidents in 2018, tasked with devising a strategy to prevent such incidents, addressing them as they occur, and applying the rule of law. The committee, headed by the president’s advisor for security and counter terrorism affairs, is composed of members from the Military Operations Authority, the Military and General Intelligence Services, the National Security Sector (NSS), and the Administrative Oversight Agency. TIMEP [Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy] said the committee did not include representatives of the judiciary, legislature, human rights groups, or of any minority communities. According to press, however, the committee is entitled to invite ministers, officials, and religious leaders to its meetings when considering topics relevant to them. The committee held its inaugural meeting on January 16 [2019] to look into a January 11 attack by a crowd of approximately 1,000 Muslim villagers on Coptic

⁴⁵ DFAT, [‘Country information report Egypt’](#), (section 3.23), 17 June 2019

⁴⁶ DFAT, [‘Country information report Egypt’](#), (section 3.34), 17 June 2019

⁴⁷ Crux, [‘About Crux’](#), undated

⁴⁸ Crux, [‘Egypt’s president says interfaith bond saved country’](#), 7 January 2020

villagers of Manshiyet Zaafarana in Minya. Coptic parliamentarian Emad Gad observed the committee did not issue any statement on the incident, even though it was formed to combat sectarian violence. Since the inaugural meeting, EIPR [Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights] reported the committee had not announced any subsequent meetings.¹⁴⁹

5.1.7 The report also noted:

'In August [2019] the Ministry of Awqaf gave Yasser Borhami, the deputy head of the Salafist Call, the umbrella organization of the country's Salafi movements, approval to deliver sermons during Friday prayers at an Alexandria mosque. Borhami had previously stated Muslims should not send holiday greetings to Christians or watch soccer games and had described Christianity as polytheism, said churches should not be allowed in the country, and Muslim taxi and bus drivers should not transport Christian clergy. Critics said Borhami's past comments reflected hostility towards Christians and non-Salafi Muslims; they condemned the ministry's decision allowing him to return to preaching.'¹⁵⁰

5.1.8 However, the report observed: 'In June [2019] President al-Sisi delivered a speech during a ceremony in Cairo for Laylat al-Qadr (the 27th day of Ramadan that commemorates the first revelation of the Quran) in which he said, "When we wish our Christian brothers a happy feast and (congratulate them) on building new churches, we represent our religion." President al-Sisi added that the country's main goal was to preserve the essence of religion [and] to raise religious awareness...'¹⁵¹

5.1.9 The report added:

'The quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights, whose members are appointed by parliament, is charged with strengthening protections, raising awareness, and ensuring the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom. It also is charged with monitoring enforcement and application of international agreements pertaining to human rights. The council's mandate includes investigating reports of violations of religious freedom.'¹⁵²

5.1.10 The USSD 2019 International Religious Freedom report noted that 'The constitution mandates the state eliminate all forms of discrimination through an independent commission to be established by parliament. However, by year's end, parliament still had not yet established such a commission.'¹⁵³

5.1.11 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2020 annual report, covering events in 2019, noted that the 'Egyptian government sources reported to USCIRF on the launch of a new program by the Supreme Committee for Confronting Sectarian Incidents to promote religious tolerance in sectarianism-plagued Minya Province, including a door-to-door messaging campaign in 44 villages.'¹⁵⁴

⁴⁹ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (section 2), 10 June 2020

⁵⁰ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (section 2), 10 June 2020

⁵¹ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (section 2), 10 June 2020

⁵² USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (section 2), 10 June 2020

⁵³ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (section 2), 10 June 2020

⁵⁴ USCIRF, '[Annual report on religious freedom – Egypt](#)', (page 66), April 2020

5.1.12 The report continued:

‘Other government initiatives sought to support ...ongoing projects to restore Christian monasteries in the Sinai and Naga Hammadi.

‘Despite those positive signs, religious discrimination remained pervasive, including a disparity in policies regarding places of worship, a lack of opportunities for non-Muslims to work in key areas of government service, state security harassment of former Muslims, and recurring incidents of anti-Christian violence, particularly in rural areas.’⁵⁵

5.1.13 Furthermore, the USCIRF reported that in 2019 Egypt saw “the launch of a government program to address religious intolerance in rural areas. However, systematic and ongoing religious inequalities remain affixed in the Egyptian state and society, and various forms of religious bigotry and discrimination continued to plague the country’s Coptic Christians and other religious minorities.’⁵⁶

5.1.14 The USCIRF report covering events in 2019 2020 observed:

‘In 2019, religious freedom conditions in Egypt continued to trend tentatively in a positive direction. The country saw a decrease in radical Islamist violence and anti-Christian mob attacks, some progress in implementing the registration process for unlicensed churches and related buildings, and the launch of a government program to address religious intolerance in rural areas. However, systematic and ongoing religious inequalities remain affixed in the Egyptian state and society, and various forms of religious bigotry and discrimination continued to plague the country’s Coptic Christians and other religious minorities.

‘In terms of positive trends, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and other high-ranking government officials continued to advocate publicly for religious inclusivity, including again attending Coptic Orthodox Christmas Mass in January and remarking during an Islamic holiday in June on the need for mutual respect between Muslims and Christians. Grand Imam Ahmed El-Tayeb of al-Azhar, Egypt’s renowned institution of Sunni Islamic learning, joined with Pope Francis and other religious leaders in signing a landmark statement on interfaith co-existence, “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” in Abu Dhabi in February. Egyptian government sources reported to USCIRF on the launch of a new program by the Supreme Committee for Confronting Sectarian Incidents to promote religious tolerance in sectarianism-plagued Minya Province, including a door-to-door messaging campaign in 44 villages. The Ministry of Education continued efforts, previously reported to USCIRF, to reform public school curriculum to eliminate intolerant references and promote inclusivity and respect, although how much progress the ministry made during 2019 was unclear.’⁵⁷

5.1.15 The US Congressional Research Service reported, ‘Since taking office, President Sisi has publicly called for greater Muslim-Christian coexistence

⁵⁵ USCIRF, ‘[Annual report on religious freedom – Egypt](#)’, (page 66), April 2020

⁵⁶ USCIRF, ‘[Annual report on religious freedom – Egypt](#)’, (page 66), April 2020

⁵⁷ USCIRF, Egypt Chapter – 2020 Annual Report’, (p1),

and national unity. In January 2019, he inaugurated Egypt's Coptic Cathedral of Nativity in the new administrative capital east of Cairo saying, "This is an important moment in our history... We are one and we will remain one."⁵⁸

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5.2 Protection from and prosecution of actions against Christian

5.2.1 TIMEP observed in 2018:

'In the official judicial system, justice has been elusive as well. In response to the October 2011 Maspero massacre, in which dozens of mostly Christian protesters were killed and hundreds injured, only two cases were brought to trial. One case before the military court system tried three officers, ultimately sentencing two of the men to two years in prison and one to three years. In the other case before the criminal court system, two Coptic men were sentenced to three years in prison for reportedly stealing weapons from the armed forces. Despite dozens of witness testimonies and video footage documenting armored vehicles running over protesters and the use of tear gas and live ammunition during the Maspero massacre, no high-ranking military or security officials have been held accountable.'⁵⁹

5.2.2 DFAT reported, 'Christians, particularly in rural areas, may face difficulty in obtaining justice through legal means.'⁶⁰

5.2.3 The 2019 USCIRF report stated that, 'Several high-profile court cases resulted in the conviction of perpetrators of religiously motivated violence, including the April conviction of a police officer for killing two Coptic men in front of a church in Minya in late 2018.'⁶¹

5.2.4 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:

'In December [2019] the Prisons Authority carried out the death sentence of Ibrahim Ismail, who was convicted in April of killing eight Christians and a policeman in December 2017.

'In May [2019] the Supreme Court of Military Appeals upheld 17 of 36 death sentences that an Alexandria military court issued for the bombings of Coptic churches between 2016 and 2017 in Cairo, Alexandria, and Tanta, resulting in the deaths of more than 80 persons. The court commuted the sentences of 19 other defendants to life imprisonment, eight to 15 years, and another to 10 years. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attacks. International human rights organizations expressed concern about these mass convictions and said the proceedings did not meet international fair trial standards.

'In May [2019] the Cairo Criminal Court sentenced two defendants to death, two to life imprisonment, and six others to prison terms ranging from three to six years for killing 11 persons in December 2017 in an attack on a Coptic church and Christian-owned shop in Helwan, a suburb south of Cairo.

⁵⁸ USCRS, '[Egypt: Background and US relations](#)', 27 May 2020

⁵⁹ TIMEP, '[Brief: Christians in Egypt](#)', 10 October 2018

⁶⁰ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.36), 17 June 2019

⁶¹ USCIRF, '[Annual report on religious freedom – Egypt](#)', (page 66), April 2020

‘On July 1 [2019], the Court of Cassation upheld a death sentence issued against a suspect convicted of killing two Copts, terrorizing the Christian community of Shamiya village in Assiut, and imposing taxes on the village in 2013-14.

‘On March 30 [2019], a Cairo court sentenced 30 men to prison terms of 10 years to life for planning a suicide bombing of a church in Alexandria as well as other charges, including the bombing of a liquor store in Damietta. Eighteen defendants received life terms, eight received 15 years in prison, and four received 10 years. Ten of those convicted remained at large, and the court sentenced them in absentia. Authorities said the defendants had embraced ISIS ideology.’⁶²

5.2.5 Furthermore, the report observed:

‘On February 7, Christian activists circulated a video depicting a group of Al-Azhar students mocking Christian religious practices. Al-Azhar University referred the students to a disciplinary board at the university and in a statement said Al-Azhar strongly condemned such actions. On February 9, authorities arrested the students for “inciting sectarian strife” and subsequently released them on bail on February 27. At year’s end the case was still pending...

‘The government prosecuted some perpetrators of crimes targeting Christians and instances of sectarian violence. Authorities transferred to a court in Beni Suef for prosecution the 2016 case against the attackers of Souad Thabet, a Christian who was paraded naked through her village of Karm in Minya in response to rumors that her son had an affair with the wife of a Muslim business partner. Authorities charged four individuals with attacking Thabet and another 25 with attacking Thabet’s home and six other homes owned by Christians. In June, after the court in Beni Suef referred the case to the Minya Criminal Court, the Minya court postponed hearing the case, which was still pending at year’s end. On February 17, the Ain Shams Misdemeanors Court sentenced a man who had stormed a church and attacked security officers in November 2018 to three years’ imprisonment.’⁶³

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5.3 State treatment

5.3.1 In 2018, TIMEP reported that Christians ‘face...forms of discrimination at the hands of the state’⁶⁴ and that:

‘Although the Egyptian Constitution recognizes freedom of belief as absolute and protects the “freedom of practicing religious rituals and establishing places of worship for the followers of revealed religions”—i.e., Islam, Christianity, and Judaism—a number of legal and institutional provisions and policies contribute to discrimination against the country’s Christian population. Egypt requires that its citizens carry national identification cards; these cards, which have a required religion field (though a recent change now allows a dash instead of selecting from Islam, Christianity, or Judaism),

⁶² USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (section 2), 10 June 2020

⁶³ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#),(section 2), 10 June 2020

⁶⁴ TIMEP, [‘Brief: Christians in Egypt’](#), 10 October 2018

create room for possible discrimination against citizens who are stopped by the police or are attempting to get government services.¹⁶⁵

5.3.2 Freedom House reported in November 2019:

'In October 2011, thousands of Coptic Christians staged a sit-in in front of the Maspero television building in Cairo to protest a church demolition in Upper Egypt, which allegedly occurred because the church was constructed without the required license. Security forces responded to this peaceful demonstration with violence, firing on the protesters with live ammunition and running over some with armored personnel carriers. More than 20 people were killed, and hundreds of others were injured.

'Eight years after what became known as the Maspero massacre, violence against Coptic Christians and other religious minorities in Egypt has continued unabated, and the conditions of marginalization and discrimination that motivated the Christians' sit-in in the first place have not been addressed. Coptic Christians and other minority confessional groups, including atheists, Shia Muslims, and Bahai's, endure regular violations of their religious freedom and physical security by state and nonstate actors alike. Destruction of houses of worship, forced conversions to Islam, lengthy prison sentences under antiblasphemy legislation, and targeted mass killings have all been reported. Just last month, a church burned down in the city of Mansoor; authorities immediately declared, without any police investigation, that the fire was caused by an electrical malfunction.¹⁶⁶

5.3.3 The DFAT report stated, 'Large-scale anti-Christian violence ended with the declaration of a nationwide state of emergency and curfew in August 2013, combined with a security crackdown on protest activity by Brotherhood supporters. In December 2014, 40 perpetrators found responsible for attacks on churches in Upper Egypt received prison terms ranging from one to 15 years.'¹⁶⁷

5.3.4 The DFAT report continued, 'While anti-discriminatory laws and legal protections exist, these are not always enforced fairly and Christians may experience some discrimination, particularly in rural areas.'¹⁶⁸

5.3.5 The USSD report on International Religious Freedom 2019 stated:

'According to June press reports, a mob attacked the homes of a Christian and his two relatives in the village of Ashnin in Upper Egypt. The mob forced its way into the homes and destroyed furniture and appliances before being dispersed by local police. Following an investigation, police arrested three Christians but none of the attackers. After a customary reconciliation session, the Christians were released and charges were dropped. According to the NGO International Christian Concern, on April 30, a customary reconciliation meeting was held in the Upper Egypt village of Nagib after threats of a potential mob attack by Muslim villagers led security officials to close the village's church.'¹⁶⁹

⁶⁵ TIMEP, '[Brief: Christians in Egypt](#)', 10 October 2018

⁶⁶ Freedom House, '[To protect religious freedom in Egypt...](#)', 21 November 2019

⁶⁷ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.23), 17 June 2019

⁶⁸ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.32), 17 June 2019

⁶⁹ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)',(section 2), 10 June 2020

- 5.3.6 In December 2019, the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner ‘called on Egypt to end the arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of Ramy Kamel Saied Salid, who works to defend the human rights of the country’s Coptic Christian minority.’⁷⁰ The report stated:

‘Mr. Ramy Kamel, who had documented attacks on Coptic churches, was arrested, questioned and allegedly tortured on 4 November and 23 November 2019. He is currently in pre-trial detention in the Tora Prison in Cairo on reported charges of membership of a terrorist organisation and use of social media to spread “false news threatening public order”, although neither he nor his lawyers has seen documentation relating to the charges.

‘Both arrests coincided with Mr Kamel’s application for a Swiss visa so he could speak at the UN Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva on 28 and 29 November 2019. He has interacted with UN human rights mechanisms in the past, particularly regarding the forced displacement of Coptic Christians...

“Mr. Kamel’s alleged arbitrary detention and torture fall into a pattern of raids, arrests and travel bans against human rights defenders, journalists, dissidents and their family members. Individuals who have cooperated or tried to cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms have been repeatedly the target of reprisals...

‘The experts also raised serious concerns about Mr. Kamel’s treatment after special forces officers broke into his home at 01.45 on 23 November, without an arrest warrant, confiscated personal documents, a laptop, camera and mobile phone, and took him to an unknown location. He was allegedly beaten to coerce him into disclosing the passwords for his electronic devices, deprived of asthma and blood pressure medication, and not able to contact his family or lawyers until the following day.’⁷¹

- 5.3.7 Amnesty International reported in its 2019 Middle East and North Africa report, ‘On 23 November, Coptic Christian activist Ramy Kamel was arbitrarily arrested days before his participation in a session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva, Switzerland. He was detained on “terrorism”-related charges for speaking out about the rights of religious minorities in Egypt and for his previous engagement with the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing during her visit to Egypt in 2018.’⁷²

- 5.3.8 Human Rights Watch reported in its report covering events in 2019 that Christians ‘continued to face systematic discrimination on...institutional levels.’⁷³

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5.4 Prosecution for blasphemy and defamation

- 5.4.1 The USSD 2019 country report on human rights practices noted that ‘Local and international rights groups reported several cases of authorities charging

⁷⁰ UNOHCHR, [‘Egypt must free Coptic Christian rights defender...’](#), 11 December 2019

⁷¹ UNOHCHR, [‘Egypt must free Coptic Christian rights defender...’](#), 11 December 2019

⁷² AI, [‘Human Rights in the Middle East and...’](#), (Freedom of religion and belief), 18 February 2020

⁷³ HRW, [‘World Report 2020 – Egypt’](#), (Freedom of belief and religion), 14 January 2020

and convicting individuals with denigrating religion under the so-called blasphemy law, targeting primarily Christians but also Muslims.⁷⁴

5.4.2 Freedom House reported in November 2019 that ‘Too often, these laws are invoked to punish individuals for expressing their beliefs, silence criticism of the country’s powerful religious establishment, or settle personal vendettas. Religious minorities, especially Christians, are disproportionately targeted in blasphemy cases.’⁷⁵

5.4.3 TIMEP stated:

‘A disproportionate number of all blasphemy charges are brought against the country’s Christian population... A study by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights found that 41 percent of all blasphemy cases brought between January 25, 2011, and December 31, 2012, were against Christian defendants; the same report found that sentences were significantly harsher in cases against Christian defendants. Blasphemy charges have continued to be brought during the Sisi presidency. In May 2015, for example, four Coptic students and their teacher were arrested and charged with blasphemy after making a video mocking the Islamic State. In February 2016, the Idku Criminal Court sentenced three of the students to five years in prison, the maximum sentence for blasphemy charges, and referred the fourth to a punitive juvenile institution. The teacher was sentenced to three years’.⁷⁶

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5.5 Church building law – permits, licenses, construction and renovation of churches in practice

5.5.1 TIMEP observed in 2018:

‘After the ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood-backed president, Muhammad Morsi,... 115 incidents of sectarian violence were documented against the country’s Christian population, including 82 attacks on churches. The reconstruction of these religious buildings became a major campaign pledge and talking point for Sisi and his governments, and all of the destroyed churches have reportedly been reconstructed —the majority by the military and the remainder by the churches themselves...

‘...despite some calls for a unified law to govern the construction of all houses of worship, in August 2016, the House of Representatives passed the Church Construction Law, which maintains distinct construction procedures for churches and delegates the authority of approving building, renovation, and expansion permits to provincial governors, contributing to a number of procedural hurdles.’⁷⁷

5.5.2 The 2019 DFAT report observed:

‘Church building is one of the most sensitive communal issues in Egypt. It has traditionally been very difficult to build a new church in Egypt, as local authorities have imposed convoluted processes to request permission and

⁷⁴ USSD, [‘2019 country report...’](#) (section 2a), 11 March 2020

⁷⁵ Freedom House, [‘To protect religious freedom in Egypt...’](#), 21 November 2019

⁷⁶ TIMEP, [‘Brief: Christians in Egypt’](#), 10 October 2018

⁷⁷ TIMEP, [‘Brief: Christians in Egypt’](#), 10 October 2018

then ultimately refused the building permit. In contrast, the law does not stipulate any government role in reviewing the number or size of mosques, and no approval is required for mosque renovation. DFAT understands that there are approximately 2,800 registered churches throughout Egypt, compared to nearly 110,000 mosques.⁷⁸

5.5.3 The same report noted:

'Local contacts have reported that the 2016 law was welcome, but that implementation at the local level had been problematic in some areas. These contacts reported that the Coptic Church had presented requests for over 2,500 existing unlicensed churches and affiliated buildings following the passing of the law, but (as of October 2018) authorities had only approved around 200 applications. Local sources report that authorities had refused to grant permits in sensitive areas (including the Upper Egypt cities of Minya, Luxor, and Esna) due to strong opposition from local Muslims, and had closed up to 12 churches in these cities in defiance of the new law. In less sensitive areas, however, authorities had granted permits for around 50 new churches to be built and had made large areas of previously uninhabited land available. The Ministry of Housing also reportedly issued an order in January 2018 permitting Christians to practice their religious rites at unlicensed churches pending the legislation of their status. Local media and some international religious publications have reported that the government has recently approved the construction of up to 170 new churches. President Sisi inaugurated a new cathedral outside Cairo in January 2019 (the largest cathedral in the Middle East).

5.5.4 'The government has rebuilt a number of churches and other church-owned properties destroyed or damaged in mob violence in 2013. The Saints Peter and Paul Church in Cairo was also repaired after a December 2016 suicide bombing that killed 29 people... The government has funded a church in al-Our village in Minya in honour of 20 Copts beheaded by an Islamic State-affiliated militant in Libya.'⁷⁹

5.5.5 Al Arabiya, 'the leading source of news and opinion from the Middle East for English-speaking audiences around the world'⁸⁰, reported in May 2020 '...el-Sisi's move to open the Middle East's largest cathedral, as dubbed by the government, was seen as a symbolic message of tolerance in the predominantly Muslim nation, and a glimpse of hope for Christians in the country.'⁸¹

5.5.6 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:

'There were multiple reports of the government closing unlicensed churches following protests and sometimes failing to extend procedural safeguards or rights of due process to members of minority faiths, particularly in Upper Egypt. On January 7, following a Mass celebrating Coptic Christmas, a crowd of Muslims protested the presence of the unlicensed Mar Girgis Church in the village of Manshiyet Zaafarana in Minya in Upper Egypt. On January 11, a

⁷⁸ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.17), 17 June 2019

⁷⁹ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.20), 17 June 2019

⁸⁰ Al Arabiya, '[About Al Arabiya English](#)', undated

⁸¹ Al-Arabiya, '[Egypt builds Middle East's largest cathedral...](#)' last updated 20 May 2020

crowd reportedly gathered again and chanted anti-Christian slogans until police and security forces intervened to disperse the crowd and closed the church. The Coptic Diocese of Minya subsequently released a video and statement that indicated security forces aided Muslim residents seeking to close the church. The Wall Street Journal quoted the Coptic Diocese of Minya, “Every time, the extremists are able to impose their demands.”

‘In February press reported local Christians had conducted three funerals of church congregants in the streets of Kom el-Raheb due to their continued denial of access to the church, which authorities closed in 2018. In July press reported Copts from Kom el-Raheb stormed into the closed church and staged a sit-in protesting the church’s continued closure. According to press reports, unknown persons burned down three Christian-owned properties following the sit-in. According to press reports, the church and individual church members blamed local government authorities and security forces for siding with anti-Christian “hard-liners.”

‘On April 12, a mob protesting the unlicensed expansion of the Anba Karas Church in the village of Nagaa el-Ghafir in Sohag Governorate attacked the church with rocks and wounded two Christians. Security forces intervened to stop the attack and ordered the church closed. In April EIPR [Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights] condemned the involvement of the security services in the closure of the church and called for the reopening of churches closed since the implementation of the 2016 church construction law. EIPR reported there had been 32 sectarian incidents between 2016 and April 2019 and stated security forces were responsible for the closure of 22 unlicensed churches, with up to four closed during the year.

‘According to official statistics, the government approved 814 applications to license churches and related buildings during the year [2019], and, since September 2017, approved 1,412 of the 5,415 pending applications to license of churches and related buildings. The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) quoted Coptic Orthodox Bishop Makarios of Minya as saying his diocese had approximately 150 villages and neighborhoods in need of a church or other religious buildings.’⁸²

5.5.7 Furthermore, the report added ‘The UN Human Rights Council began its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the country’s commitments under the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] ICCPR in November... In submissions for the UPR, NGOs stated...the law on the Construction and Reparation of Churches placed many restrictions on Christians attempting to restore or build new churches, while defining them as a “sect,” contrary to their right to equal citizenship’⁸³

5.5.8 The 2019 USCIRF also stated:

‘In 2019, the Cabinet committee charged with implementing the registration of informal churches and church-related buildings under Law 80/2016 made some limited progress in approving applications—a process for which Coptic Orthodox and Protestant leaders alike have expressed their support, including Pope Tawadros II. The committee had approved only 627

⁸² USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (section 2), 10 June 2020

⁸³ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (section 2), 10 June 2020

applications by the end of 2018; in 2019, it cleared an additional 725—bringing the total to 1,412 approved applications, or just over 25 percent of 5,515 currently in process. However, most of these approvals have been conditional, pending security, safety, and other forms of review; only around 200 church properties have received final approvals for registration. Furthermore, this progress has only taken place for preexisting, de facto churches, mainly for rural Christian communities that had no other access to local places of worship. The governing authorities have issued few to no permits for new churches in previously inhabited communities while shuttering around 25 churches since the passage of the law, including several in 2019. At its root, Law 80/2016 also avoids addressing the long-term, systematic disparity between religious communities. Muslim worshippers face no such registration restrictions, so even with the recent church approvals, there is approximately one mosque for every 820 Muslims and one church for every 2,430 Christians—roughly a 320 percent disparity.’⁸⁴

5.5.9 The same report also observed:

‘In June [2019] in the village of Naga al-Ghafir in Sohag governorate... Muslim rioters surrounded a Coptic Orthodox church, chanted sectarian slogans, and beat congregants with sticks. The violence led local security forces to close the church in direct violation of Law 80/2016, commonly known as the Church Building Law, which mandates the continuing operation of such facilities as they await approval for formal registration. Such violations have become commonplace; local government authorities have closed at least 25 churches and church-related facilities since the passage of the law in 2016, including three in 2019—one of which was reopened in January 2020—while the government has issued few permits for new churches in previously occupied residential areas. Instead, authorities have granted nearly all such permits or pledges in planned satellite cities rather than in Upper Egypt, where thousands of Christians have no local churches in which to worship, such as Copts in the Qena-area village of Faw Bahari whose de facto place of worship police shuttered in December.’⁸⁵

5.5.10 Amnesty International reported:

‘The authorities continued to restrict in law and practice the right of Christians to worship. Christians’ right to build and repair churches remained restricted under a 2016 law requiring approval from state bodies, including security agencies. According to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, such bodies granted full legal registration to less than 200 churches, out of a total of 5,540 that had made applications, while only 1,412 churches received preliminary conditional approvals. Security forces closed at least 25 churches on the grounds of their illegal status or on the pretext of avoiding sectarian tensions. In April, security forces closed Naga al-Ghafir church in Sohag and prohibited collective worship in it.’⁸⁶

5.5.11 Human Rights Watch in its report covering events in 2019 noted:

⁸⁴ USCIRF, [‘Annual report on religious freedom – Egypt’](#), (page 66), April 2020

⁸⁵ USCIRF, [‘Annual report on religious freedom – Egypt’](#), (page 66), April 2020

⁸⁶ AI, [‘Human Rights in the Middle East and...’](#), (Freedom of religion and belief), 18 February 2020

‘Christians still face discrimination and obstacles when it comes to building new churches...

‘Discriminatory laws continue to impede building and renovating non-Sunni Muslim houses of worship. Egypt’s 2016 discriminatory church building law has achieved little in removing obstacles and sectarian violence around building churches. According to pro-government newspapers, of about 6,000 churches and service buildings that lack legal recognition, only 1,027 were given conditional permits as of July, three years after passage of the law.’⁸⁷

5.5.12 BBC Monitoring reported:

‘Several Egyptian Coptic churches have held their first masses in more than four months since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in the country.

“Many Coptic churches in Alexandria [northwest of Cairo] and Minya [south of Cairo] governorates resumed masses for the first time in over four months,” the privately-owned website Youm7 reported on 3 August [2020]...

‘This comes after the Coptic Orthodox Church announced on 1 August the procedures of the gradual reopening of churches after their closure in March [2020]...

‘According to the procedures, the masses will be performed every day except for Fridays and the gradual reopening will continue over the coming weeks in case the infection cases and deaths will continue to decrease...

‘On 27 June [2020], the Coptic Orthodox Church opted to continue closing its churches in Cairo and Alexandria governorates, despite being given the green light by the prime minister to reopen, citing high Covid-19 infections in the two governorates.’⁸⁸

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5.6 Treatment of Jehovah’s witnesses

5.6.1 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:

‘According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, authorities interrogated several of their members due to their status as a “banned group” during the year. In February security officials twice “violently interrogated” a Jehovah’s Witness in Upper Egypt, threatening, blindfolding, and beating him and confiscating his cell phone and personal identification. In April, October, and November, police officials in Cairo summoned individual Jehovah’s Witnesses to their office for questioning. In April officials summoned a Jehovah’s Witness in Minya for interrogation. In September security officials allowed more than 200 Jehovah’s Witnesses to hold a religious meeting in a private home.’⁸⁹

5.6.2 The report added that:

‘The government continued to ban the importation and sale of ... Jehovah’s Witnesses literature and to authorize customs officials to confiscate their personally owned religious materials. According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, on

⁸⁷ HRW, [‘World Report 2020 – Egypt’](#), (Freedom of religion and belief), 14 January 2020

⁸⁸ BBC Monitoring, [‘Covid-19 responses: Egypt churches...’](#), (subscription only), 3 August 2020

⁸⁹ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (section 2), 10 June 2020

March 23 [2019], the High Administrative Court rejected an appeal by the Witnesses to overturn a 1985 law that prevents their members from registering property ownership and marriages. The court ruled the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses contradict the public order and morals in the country.⁹⁰

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5.7 Reconciliation committees

5.7.1 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:

'Customary reconciliation is a form of dispute resolution that predates modern judicial and legal systems. Customary reconciliation sessions rely on the accumulation of a set of customary rules to address conflicts between individuals, families, households, or workers and employees of certain professions. Parties to disputes agree upon a resolution that typically contains stipulations to pay an agreed-upon amount of money for breaching the terms of the agreement.

'Al-Azhar and the Coptic Orthodox Church formed the Family House (Beit Al-A'ila) in 2011 to address sectarian disputes through communal reconciliation. With Family House branches throughout the country, Al-Azhar, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and other Christian denominations convene opposing parties to a sectarian dispute with the goal of restoring communal peace through dialogue. The Family House, however, is not uniformly active. Sources say in some areas, such as Assiut, the Family House is quite active, while in others, such as Cairo, it has become inactive.⁹¹

5.7.2 The same report stated that 'Local authorities continued to periodically rely on customary reconciliation sessions instead of the official judicial system to resolve sectarian disputes.'⁹²

5.7.3 The report continued:

'While the Coptic Orthodox Church does not bar participation in government-sponsored customary reconciliation sessions, according to its spokesman, reconciliation sessions should not be used in lieu of application of the law and should be restricted to "clearing the air and making amends" following sectarian disputes or violence. While at least one Coptic Orthodox diocese in Upper Egypt refused to participate in reconciliation sessions due to criticism that they frequently were substitutes for criminal proceedings to address attacks on Christians and their churches, Orthodox Church leaders took part in two customary reconciliation sessions in other dioceses, according to EIPR [Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights]. Although other Christian denominations continued to participate in customary reconciliation sessions, human rights groups and many Christian community representatives said the practice constituted an encroachment on the principles of nondiscrimination and citizenship and pressured Christians to retract their statements and deny facts, leading to the dropping of formal criminal charges.'⁹³

5.7.4 DFAT reported:

⁹⁰ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (section 2), 10 June 2020

⁹¹ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (section 2), 10 June 2020

⁹² USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (executive summary), 10 June 2020

⁹³ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (section 2), 10 June 2020

'Reconciliation committees are a form of traditional justice that authorities use to resolve communal incidents between Muslims and Christians. Reconciliation committees are particularly common in rural and poorer areas, where people may have no other form of access to justice. The reconciliation committee process typically involves victims of crimes accepting a negotiated apology and compensation and abandoning any claim to legal remedy. Authorities have strongly promoted the process, based on the belief that reconciliation committees are more likely than a formal judicial process to resolve issues at the local level, preventing revenge attacks and vendettas. Local sources report that authorities often pressure victims of crimes to abandon criminal complaints and participate in the process, regardless of the victim's personal wishes. The Prosecutor-General generally accepts verdicts issued by reconciliation committees and closes the relevant legal files.

'Local sources report that in the majority of cases involving violence by Muslims against Christians, the compensation offered through the reconciliation court process is insufficient to meet the cost of the damage caused. In serious cases where one party is required to relocate in order to avoid ongoing violence, the Christian party is generally the one moved. Church authorities are strongly opposed to reconciliation committees, arguing that the practice undermines the protection of the law for all Egyptians. They have consistently called on state authorities to intervene to ensure that judicial processes are followed, but with limited success to date.

'DFAT assesses that Christians involved in communal violence with Muslims are unlikely to receive a fair outcome through a reconciliation committee process. However, the negotiated settlement of the reconciliation committee process may provide some guarantee against future violence.'⁹⁴

5.7.5 TIMEP observed:

'Accountability for much of Egypt's Christian population has been lacking. In numerous cases of sectarian violence against Christians, authorities have often opted to participate in customary reconciliation sessions rather than investigate and litigate the case before the official judicial system. Because of a lack of set procedures, these sessions have resulted in numerous due-process violations throughout the years; at times, rather than punish perpetrators of sectarian violence, these sessions have forced Christian victims to vacate a village in order to ease sectarian tension.'⁹⁵

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Section 6 updated: 27 October 2020

6. Societal treatment

6.1 Societal violence and discrimination 2011 to 2018

6.1.1 TIMEP noted in October 2018:

'Since Sisi's assumption of office, however, Christians continue to face sectarian violence. The government has increased security measures in

⁹⁴ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 5.26, 5.27, 5.28), 17 June 2019

⁹⁵ TIMEP, '[Brief: Christians in Egypt](#)', 10 October 2018

churches, particularly prior to large Christian celebrations or religious ceremonies, though on Palm Sunday in 2017, simultaneous bombings in two cathedrals killed 47 people. In December 2017, a gunman attacked a Coptic Orthodox church and a Christian-owned shop near Cairo and killed 11 people before he was arrested. The Islamic State in Egypt claimed responsibility for those attacks, along with the December 2016 attack on St. Peter and St. Paul's Church on the main Coptic cathedral compound in Cairo. Since emerging in mainland Egypt, its four attacks on Christians have killed 96.'⁹⁶

6.1.2 The US CRS reported that 'suicide bomber attacks against Coptic cathedrals in 2011, 2016, and 2017 collectively killed over 95 people and injured hundreds of others.'⁹⁷

6.1.3 The DFAT report noted:

'Over 150 Christian families fled the northern Sinai town of al-Arish in early 2017 after militants killed seven Coptic Christians in a series of separate attacks...

'In December 2016, a suicide bomber targeted a church service at a chapel adjoining St Mark's Cathedral in Cairo, killing 29 and injuring 49. Following ... February 2017 attacks in el Arish, IS claimed responsibility for two major attacks against Palm Sunday church services on 9 April 2017. The first attack occurred at a service in Tanta, killing 27 people and injuring over 70. The second attack occurred at a cathedral in Alexandria. At least 16 people were killed and 66 people were injured in the Alexandria attack: Pope Tawadros was saying mass at the cathedral at the time, but escaped unharmed. In May 2017 in Minya, a gunman opened fire on a bus and killed 29 people who refused to renounce their faith. In November 2018, militants ambushed three buses carrying Christian pilgrims to a remote desert monastery south of Cairo, killing seven and wounding 19. In addition to these attacks, security services have reportedly thwarted a number of attempted attacks'⁹⁸

6.1.4 Furthermore, the report stated:

'A general breakdown in law and order nationwide occurred in the years following the 2011 Revolution, peaking in the period leading up to and immediately following the July 2013 military intervention, and again in the aftermath of the August 2013 dispersals of pro-Morsi protests in Cairo. On these occasions, Muslim Brotherhood members and supporters attacked Christian targets across the country, including churches, schools, and private property. A November 2014 government report into the anti-Christian violence found that 29 people had died in communal-related killings, 52 churches had been completely razed, another 12 damaged, and numerous Christian-owned properties destroyed. Most, but not all, of the incidents were marked by a slow police response, which may have been in part the result of

⁹⁶ TIMEP, '[Brief: Christians in Egypt](#)', 10 October 2018

⁹⁷ USCRS, '[Egypt: Background and U.S Relations](#)', 27 May 2020

⁹⁸ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.21), 17 June 2019

police and security personnel being otherwise engaged in protecting government institutions...'⁹⁹

6.1.5 In addition to this, the report noted:

'The majority of incidences of communal violence in recent years have taken place in the provinces of Upper Egypt. The province of Minya – which has a sizeable (approximately 40 per cent) and relatively assertive Christian population, high concentration of Islamists, high rate of poverty, and low rate of education – has been particularly notable in this regard. According to the National Council of Human Rights, around ten incidents of communal violence occur each month in Minya. In one particularly high profile incident in May 2016, an elderly Christian woman was stripped and assaulted by a 300-strong mob angered by rumours that her son was in a relationship with a divorced Muslim woman. In July 2016, eight men involved in the incident were released and ordered to pay a fine.'¹⁰⁰

6.1.6 The Foreign and Commonwealth and Development Office stated under its foreign travel advice to Egypt:

'There is a heightened threat of terrorist attacks in or around religious sites and during religious festivals, such as... the Christmas period (including Coptic Christmas), when terrorist groups have sometimes called for attacks. Terrorist attacks have occurred over local holiday weekends. Terrorists have attacked tourists in Egypt in the past. There is a heightened threat of terrorist attacks targeting Coptic Christians from extremists linked to Daesh-Sinai in Egypt...

'...on 2 November 2018, gunmen opened fire on a bus carrying Coptic Christians in Minya province, upper Egypt, killing 7 people. Daesh (formerly referred to as ISIL) claimed responsibility for the attack.'¹⁰¹

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6.2 Societal violence and discrimination 2019 - 2020

6.2.1 TIMEP reported that Christians 'face...forms of discrimination at the hands of ...fellow citizens'¹⁰².

6.2.2 TIMEP noted in October 2018:

'Sporadic sectarian violence flares up in addition to organized attacks. Such violence is often sparked by attempts to build churches, interfaith romances, or property disputes that become sectarian. In a recent example, on August 13, Copts in the village of Dimshaw Hashim in Minya were subject to sectarian attacks by Muslim villagers, a common occurrence in the province, which has a high percentage of Christians. The incidents included chants of hostile slogans against Copts and the proposed construction of a church, the injury of two Copts, and damage, theft, and burning of several Copts' houses.'¹⁰³

⁹⁹ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.23), 17 June 2019

¹⁰⁰ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.24), 17 June 2019

¹⁰¹ FCO, '[Foreign travel advice - Egypt](#)', updated 1 September 2020

¹⁰² TIMEP, '[Brief: Christians in Egypt](#)', 10 October 2018

¹⁰³ TIMEP, '[Brief: Christians in Egypt](#)', 10 October 2018

6.2.3 The 2019 DFAT report stated:

'Most Egyptians, especially those living in urban areas, work, live and socialise together with little regard to each other's religious identity. However, small-scale disputes such as neighbourhood disagreements can on occasion adopt religious overtones and escalate into community-level violence, particularly in poorer and rural areas. Most communal incidents in Egypt take the form of vandalism and destruction of property. The large-scale anti-Christian violence that occurred in 2011 and 2013 notwithstanding ...high-profile incidents in which people are killed or churches attacked are not a frequent occurrence.'¹⁰⁴

6.2.4 DFAT reported: 'DFAT assesses that Christians face a moderate risk of discrimination that is more likely to be societal than official in nature, and is likely to vary considerably according to geographic location.'¹⁰⁵

6.2.5 Human Rights Watch reported that Christians 'continued to face systematic discrimination on societal...levels'¹⁰⁶ and that '[t]errorist attacks against Christians continued. In January [2019], two days before [Orthodox Christian] Christmas celebrations, a bomb outside a Coptic church in Nasr City killed a policeman.'¹⁰⁷

6.2.6 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom reported, 'In 2019, religious freedom conditions in Egypt continued to trend tentatively in a positive direction. The country saw a decrease in radical Islamist violence and anti-Christian mob attacks...'¹⁰⁸

6.2.7 USCIRF reported

'Despite those positive signs, religious discrimination remained pervasive, including a disparity in policies regarding places of worship, a lack of opportunities for non-Muslims to work in key areas of government service, state security harassment of former Muslims, and recurring incidents of anti-Christian violence, particularly in rural areas. 'In June in the village of Naga al-Ghafir in Sohag governorate, for example, Muslim rioters surrounded a Coptic Orthodox church, chanted sectarian slogans, and beat congregants with sticks. The violence led local security forces to close the church in direct violation of Law 80/2016, commonly known as the Church Building Law, which mandates the continuing operation of such facilities as they await approval for formal registration. Such violations have become commonplace...'¹⁰⁹

6.2.8 USCIRF also reported:

'Anti-Christian mob attacks remain endemic in parts of rural Egypt despite a clear decline in the number of such incidents in 2019, but legal impunity for the perpetrators persisted as the systematic norm. Compared to eight mob attacks in 2018, only three were reported in 2019, although each incident resulted in the usual impunity for attackers and two resulted in illegal church

¹⁰⁴ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.22), 17 June 2019

¹⁰⁵ DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 3.36), 17 June 2019

¹⁰⁶ HRW, '[World Report 2020 – Egypt](#)', (Freedom of belief and religion), 14 January 2020

¹⁰⁷ HRW, '[World Report 2020 – Egypt](#)', (Freedom of belief and religion), 14 January 2020

¹⁰⁸ USCIRF, '[Annual report on religious freedom – Egypt](#)', (page 66), April 2020

¹⁰⁹ USCIRF, '[Annual report on religious freedom – Egypt](#)', (page 66), April 2020

closures. In January, a mob forced the closure of an informal church in Manshiyet Zaafarana, Minya; a similar incident occurred in Sohag governorate in April, as noted previously. In June, rumors circulated in the village of Eshnein al-Nasara, Minya, that a Coptic man, Fady Youssef Todari, had posted comments critical of Islam on Facebook, resulting in a group of Muslims from the village attacking his family's home. Police briefly detained several members of the victimized family and arrested Todari, and it is unclear whether he remains in detention. Furthermore, local authorities stood by as community leaders convened a "calming meeting" shortly after the incident—which, given the lack of any subsequent legal proceedings, implicitly absolved the attackers of responsibility.¹¹⁰

6.2.9 The US CRS reported:

'Despite ...public calls for improved interfaith relations in Egypt, the minority Coptic Christian community continues to face professional and social discrimination, along with occasional sectarian attacks...

'Major terrorist attacks against Christian places of worship also continue to threaten the Coptic community...In spring 2020, the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior broke up a terrorist cell planning attacks over Coptic Easter. One policeman and seven suspects were killed in the operation.'¹¹¹

6.2.10 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:

'On January 3 [2019], ISIS released a video statement threatening "bloody attacks during the upcoming (Orthodox) Christmas celebrations," and to "take revenge on Egypt's Christians." The statement included a threat on the life of Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros II. According to press reports, unidentified men suspected to be members of ISIS abducted a Christian at a checkpoint near Al-Arish in northern Sinai on January 17 [2019] based on his religious affiliation. The men had been checking the identification of motorists and abducted the man after learning he was Christian. On January 25 [2019], ISIS released a statement that read, "the soldiers of the Islamic State in Sinai set up an ambush to target the apostates." According to media reports, the man had still not been located at the end of the year and his fate was unknown.

'On January 5 [2019], a sheikh at a neighboring mosque alerted security at the Church of the Virgin Mary in Nasr City to possible explosives in the vicinity of the church, where police discovered an IED. One police officer died and two others were injured when the IED exploded while it was being defused. While there were no immediate claims of responsibility, in December the NSS arrested three students of Al Azhar University and accused them of planting the explosives. The investigation continued through year's end.'¹¹²

6.2.11 The same report noted that 'Esshad, a website that records sectarian attacks, documented a 29 percent reduction in intercommunal violence between 2018 and 2019.'¹¹³

6.2.12 The report continued:

¹¹⁰ USCIRF, '[Annual report on religious freedom – Egypt](#)', (page 66), April 2020

¹¹¹ USCRS, '[Egypt: Background and U.S Relations](#)', 27 May 2020

¹¹² USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)',(section 3), 10 June 2020

¹¹³ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)',(section 3), 10 June 2020

'Some religious leaders and media personalities continued to employ discriminatory language against Christians. In January Salafi cleric Wagdi Ghoneim posted a video in which he criticized Al-Azhar Grand Imam Ahmed El-Tayyeb for participating in the opening ceremony of the cathedral in the New Administrative Capital. Ghoneim said Islam considers Copts infidels, and that those who accept the Christian religion or assist them in practicing it are nonbelievers.'¹¹⁴

- 6.2.13 CPIT could not find information on persons who are involved in construction or reconstruction/repair of churches that have been the target for an attack.

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6.3 Interfaith relationships

- 6.3.1 Mada Masr, an Egypt-based media organisation¹¹⁵, reported in 2017:

'Ishaq Ibrahim, a researcher on religious freedoms at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) explains that, "The 'absence of impediment to marriage' document is mandatory for the civil registration of any marriage which involves a Christian party, even if it's to a non-Christian. It can only be procured through the diocese which the Christian party is affiliated with." He says that it acts as a statement from the Coptic Church that the person meets the criteria for marriage set by the Coptic Church in its code of personal affairs...

'...the ['absence of impediment to marriage'] document is extremely hard to obtain for a Christian woman planning to marry a muslim man.

'...“Marriage in Egypt is essentially religious,” Ibrahim says. “In practice, this translates into the possibility for a Muslim man and a woman belonging to any of the Abrahamic faiths to get married and register their union with the state. A Muslim woman, on the other hand, cannot get married to a non-Muslim man, even if she holds another passport, as it contravenes Islamic Sharia, and therefore it is not possible for such a couple to get married in Egypt, not to get the marriage recognized by the state.”...

“There remains a large segment of Christian society who perceives such marriages as a source of shame for the woman’s family,” researcher Ibrahim says. “Converting to Islam further deepens the stigma attached to such a marriage.”

'William Bekheet*, a lawyer and Coptic activist who helps families in Alexandria locate their “missing” daughters by checking the conversion lists in Al-Azhar, states that in most of the interreligious marriage cases he has been involved in, the woman has legally changed her religion. Bekheet adds that such marriages reflect badly on the family’s social standing within their local Christian community. “A daughter marrying outside of the faith is perceived as a moral failing on the part of the parents to raise their daughters piously, and may consequently affect other siblings, particularly sisters’ chances at marriage.”

¹¹⁴ USSD, '[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)', (section 3), 10 June 2020

¹¹⁵ MadaMasr, '[About Us](#)', 9 October 2019

‘Ibrahim believes that families often say that their daughters were kidnapped or tricked as a strategy to avoid being ostracized, presenting themselves or their daughters as victims rather than having to bear the shame and blame of failing to raise their daughters. “In my experience, it is seldom the case that a Christian woman is physically kidnapped, and then coerced into marriage.” Many Christians do, however, genuinely believe that Christian women are kidnapped and compelled to convert.

‘Bekheet, reflecting on his experience dealing mostly with families from lower middle-class and working-class neighborhoods in Alexandria, sees that marriages often offer the women a chance to improve their living standards and class position, or to cover up the shame attached to being involved in a premarital relationship with someone from a different religion. “Many women enter such marriages willingly, but in a social environment where agency is negotiated within a framework of oppression on account of poverty, as well as gender and religious identity.”¹¹⁶

6.3.2 The same report stated:

“Rumors of Muslim women being involved with Christian men are often the cause of conflict and violence as such relationships can be said to be a source of shame for the female party’s family,” says Ibrahim. Consequently, he states, often the man’s family, extended family and even non-familial Christian neighbors are subject to violence as collective punishment for one member of the group’s perceived transgression.

‘The two most common triggers for sectarian violence are rumors of interreligious romances and Christians building churches or using their homes for prayer...

‘According to Ibrahim, in these situations the state is invested in maintaining an image of social stability, so usually interventions are aimed at soothing the majority, which in Egypt is predominantly Muslim, at the expense of the Christian minority. Usually the cases do not reach court and reconciliation meetings occur in which it is generally agreed on to displace the family of the Christian man.

‘Some Muslim clerics charge that there is a Coptic plot to abduct Christian women converts to Islam to force them back to Christianity. These claims have been invoked in attacks on Coptic life, property and churches.’¹¹⁷

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6.4 Interfaith dialogue

6.4.1 TIMEP reported:

6.4.2 ‘Although there were quotas put in place in the last parliamentary elections to attempt to mitigate political underrepresentation, only six percent of the legislature is Christian, with 16 of the House’s 25 standing committees containing voting-eligible Christian members. Similarly, Sisi’s recently installed cabinet and newly appointed governors combined include only

¹¹⁶ MadaMasr, [‘A daughter marries outside the faith’](#), 8 December 2017

¹¹⁷ MadaMasr, [‘A daughter marries outside the faith’](#), 8 December 2017

three Christian officials, two from the cabinet and one Coptic governor; the cabinet consists of 30 ministers (seven percent Christian) while there are 27 governors nationwide (four percent Christian).¹¹⁸

6.4.3 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated that ‘On February 4, Grand Imam Ahmed El-Tayyeb and Pope Francis signed the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together during their visit to Abu Dhabi. The document condemned practices “detrimental to human life and freedom,” and pledged cooperation to combat extremism and promote peace.’¹¹⁹

6.4.4 In addition, the report observed:

‘Al-Azhar continued to host events to promote religious tolerance. On March 10 [2019], the Al-Azhar Center for Interfaith Dialogue and the Episcopal Church co-organized a conference on equal citizenship to promote interreligious tolerance and a shared sense of belonging, according to media reports. In May [2019] the Center for Interfaith Dialogue launched a new campaign entitled “God Hears Your Dialogue” to increase awareness among youth of the importance and necessity of dialogue to promote peaceful coexistence...’¹²⁰

6.4.5 Furthermore, the report noted:

‘Dar al-Iftaa and Al-Azhar issued several fatwas permitting and encouraging Muslims to congratulate Christians on their holidays. At the January 7 inauguration of the Cathedral of the Nativity, the largest church in the region, and the Al-Fattah Al-Aleem Mosque in the New Administrative Capital, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar said Islam obliged Muslims to safeguard houses of worship for Muslims, Christians, and Jews. President al-Sisi also attended the opening of the newly built mosque and the cathedral, where for the fifth consecutive year he celebrated Christmas services with Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros.’¹²¹

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6.5 Christians in the government, military and security services

6.5.1 The 2019 USSD country report stated:

‘...Voters elected a record number... 36 Christians...to parliament during the 2015 parliamentary elections, a substantial increase compared with the 2012 parliament. The House of Representatives law outlines the criteria for the electoral lists, which provides that the House of Representatives must include at least ... 24 Christians... The April constitutional amendments introduced...a requirement to better represent...Christians...In 2015 the president appointed 28 additional members of parliament, including...two Christians. The House of Representatives law grants the president the authority to appoint House of Representatives members, not to surpass 5 percent of the total number of elected members... Parliament included...38 Christians.

¹¹⁸ TIMEP, [‘Brief: Christians in Egypt’](#), 10 October 2018

¹¹⁹ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#),(section 2), 10 June 2020

¹²⁰ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#),(section 2), 10 June 2020

¹²¹ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#),(section 2), 10 June 2020

‘...There were two Christians among the appointed governors of the 27 governorates. In 2018 authorities appointed Manal Awad Michael, a Coptic woman, governor of Damietta, making her the country’s second female governor...Several senior judges were Christian.’¹²²

6.5.2 The 2019 USSD report on International Religious Freedom stated:

‘The minister of immigration and expatriate affairs was the only Christian in the cabinet. In 2018, as part of a nationwide governors’ reshuffle, President al-Sisi appointed Christian governors to the Damietta and Dakahliya governorates, the first such appointments since April 2011, when the government suspended the appointment of a Copt to Qena in Upper Egypt following protests. The new governor of Damietta was the country’s first-ever female Christian governor.

‘Christians remained underrepresented in the military and security services. Christians admitted at the entry level of government institutions were rarely promoted to the upper ranks, according to sources.

‘No Christians served as presidents of the country’s 25 public universities. The government barred non-Muslims from employment in public university training programs for Arabic language teachers, stating as its reason that the curriculum involved study of the Quran.’¹²³

6.5.3 The 2019 DFAT report stated:

‘There are no legal barriers to prevent Christians from being visible in public life, and a number of Christians have become prominent and influential in Egyptian politics and business. DFAT understands that the percentage of Christians in the Egyptian civil service is broadly representative of the religious breakdown of the population. However, Christians tend to be under-represented in senior civil servant roles, and in the upper ranks of the military and security services. It is very rare for Christians to be appointed as presidents, deans or vice-deans in public universities.’¹²⁴

6.5.4 The 2019 DFAT report stated ‘Despite the lack of any official policy of discrimination, Christians remain less likely than Muslims to be able to achieve senior positions in institutions such as the civil service, military and security services, and universities.’¹²⁵

6.5.5 Freedom House noted in its Freedom in the World 2020 report:

‘...Christians...face indirect forms of discrimination that limit their political participation to varying degrees.

‘Coptic Christians, who account for some 10 percent of the population, were allocated 24 of the unicameral parliament’s 120 party-list seats. Thirty-six Christians were elected in 2015, and some were also among the lawmakers appointed by the president.

¹²² USSD, [‘2019 country report...’](#), (section 3), 11 March 2020

¹²³ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#), (section 2), 10 June 2020

¹²⁴ DFAT, [‘Country information report Egypt’](#), (section 3.33), 17 June 2019

¹²⁵ DFAT, [‘Country information report Egypt’](#), (section 3.36), 17 June 2019

‘... As with the old parliament, some seats will also be set aside for Christians...’¹²⁶

- 6.5.6 TIMEP reported that ‘Christians are not able to advance to senior positions in the military’¹²⁷ and ‘are underrepresented in political life’¹²⁸.
- 6.5.7 USCIRF reported: ‘... religious discrimination remained pervasive, including... a lack of opportunities for non-Muslims to work in key areas of government service...’¹²⁹

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6.6 Employment

- 6.6.1 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated, ‘Discrimination in private sector hiring continued, including in professional sports, according to human rights groups and religious communities. According to a Coptic Christian advocacy group, of the 540 players in the top-tier professional soccer clubs, only one was Christian.’¹³⁰
- 6.6.2 The report further noted that ‘The UN Human Rights Council began its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the country’s commitments under the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] ICCPR in November. Previous UPRs took place in 2010 and 2014. In submissions for the UPR, NGOs stated...Christians still faced discrimination in...workplaces...’¹³¹

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6.7 Education

- 6.7.1 The USSD 2019 report on International Religious Freedom stated:
‘In public schools, Muslim students are required to take courses on “principles of Islam,” and Christian students are required to take courses on “principles of Christianity” in all grades. Determinations of religious identity are based on official designations, not personal or parental decisions. Students who are neither Muslim nor Christian must choose one or the other course; they may not opt out or change from one to the other. A common set of textbooks for these two courses is mandated for both public and private schools, including Christian-owned schools...’¹³²
- 6.7.2 The report further noted that ‘The UN Human Rights Council began its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the country’s commitments under the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] ICCPR in November...In submissions for the UPR, NGOs stated...Christians still faced discrimination in education...’¹³³

¹²⁶ Freedom House, [‘Freedom in the World 2020 – Egypt’](#), 4 March 2020

¹²⁷ TIMEP, [‘Brief: Christians in Egypt’](#), 10 October 2018

¹²⁸ TIMEP, [‘Brief: Christians in Egypt’](#), 10 October 2018

¹²⁹ USCIRF, [‘Annual report on religious freedom – Egypt’](#), (page 66), April 2020

¹³⁰ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#),(section 3), 10 June 2020

¹³¹ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#),(section 2), 10 June 2020

¹³² USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#),(section 2), 10 June 2020

¹³³ USSD, [‘2019 report on International Religious Freedom...’](#),(section 2), 10 June 2020

- 6.7.3 In addition, the report noted that the Ministry of Education ‘...continued to develop a new curriculum that included increased coverage of respect for human rights and religious tolerance. In the fall, second grade students began instruction using revised textbooks under the new curriculum after it was introduced in first grade and kindergarten in 2018.’¹³⁴
- 6.7.4 Furthermore, the report noted that ‘In a January 7 statement, the Al-Azhar Curricula Development Committee announced its introduction of new primary, secondary, and university textbooks that promote religious tolerance in the 11,000 schools under its purview. The statement read that the new texts would focus on unity between Muslims and Christians and would stress the concept of citizenship without distinction on the basis of religious belief.’¹³⁵
- 6.7.5 The report further added that ‘In July [2019] the state-run University of Alexandria and state-run University of Damanhour announced the establishment of centers of Coptic studies, in collaboration with the Coptic Orthodox Church. The institutes will include courses in the study of Coptic language, literature, history, and art.’¹³⁶
- 6.7.6 The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom reported that ‘The Ministry of Education continued efforts, previously reported to USCIRF, to reform public school curriculum to eliminate intolerant references and promote inclusivity and respect, although how much progress the ministry made during 2019 was unclear.’¹³⁷

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6.8 Christian converts

6.8.1 The 2019 DFAT report stated:

‘Converts from Islam to other religions are not generally subject to officially sanctioned violence, detention or surveillance. However, they face significant societal discrimination in the form of rejection, ostracism and sometimes violence from their families or communities. Such discrimination is worse in poorer and rural areas, which tend to be more socially conservative. The level of discrimination is likely to be higher if the convert engages in proselytization.

‘DFAT is aware of anecdotal reports of Christian women and girls being abducted and forcibly converted to Islam. Such reports have occasionally led to increased tensions and clashes between Christian and Muslim communities, particularly when the alleged abductions involve family members of Christian priests. However, there is little evidence to suggest that forced conversions occur as a regular phenomenon. DFAT assesses that most religious conversions in Egypt occur either to enable a person to marry someone from another faith, or to access divorce.

‘DFAT assesses that a person converting from Islam faces a moderate risk of official discrimination. They may experience difficulties in having their

¹³⁴ USSD, ‘[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’,(section 2), 10 June 2020

¹³⁵ USSD, ‘[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’,(section 2), 10 June 2020

¹³⁶ USSD, ‘[2019 report on International Religious Freedom...](#)’,(section 2), 10 June 2020

¹³⁷ USCIRF, ‘[Annual report on religious freedom – Egypt](#)’, (page 66), April 2020

conversion officially recognised, including on national identity cards, which may affect their ability to access government or religious services. DFAT assesses that a person converting from Islam faces a high risk of societal discrimination in the form of rejection, ostracism and possible violence from their families and communities.¹³⁸

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6.9 Female genital mutilation / cutting

6.9.1 DFAT reported ‘Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is a strongly held traditional practice in Egypt. It is widely practiced in both Muslim and Christian communities, and strong social pressure is placed on young women and girls to undergo the procedure in order to get married.’¹³⁹

6.9.2 For more information, please see Country Policy and Information Note: [Egypt - Women](#).

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Section 7 updated: 27 October 2020

7. Freedom of movement

7.1.1 The 2015 DFAT Thematic Report on Egyptian Copts noted:

‘...There is no legal impediment to internal movement within Egypt, including for single women, and many Copts do relocate for a variety of reasons. Some Copts have internally relocated because of communal tension, either as a result of reconciliation committee decisions, or voluntarily. If means allow, families will usually help with finding shelter and financial assistance. The church will also sometimes assist.’¹⁴⁰

7.1.2 The same report noted that:

‘There is also a large movement of Copts to live in cities for economic reasons. Major cities, such as Cairo and Alexandria, offer Copts greater opportunities for employment, as they do for other Egyptians. Some Copts from the poorer parts of Upper Egypt have moved to the north coast of the country for better economic opportunities.

‘DFAT assesses that urban middle class Coptic women will likely have a greater ability to find work and shelter than Coptic women from poor and more conservative areas, and will also likely have access to better support networks.’¹⁴¹

7.1.3 DFAT reported:

‘Article 62 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of movement, residence and emigration. There is no legal impediment to internal movement within Egypt, and Egyptians can and do relocate for a variety of reasons. Major cities, such as Cairo and Alexandria, offer Egyptians greater opportunities for employment. Some Egyptians from the poorer parts of Upper Egypt have

¹³⁸ DFAT, ‘[Country information report Egypt](#)’, (section 3.9, 3.10, 3.11), 17 June 2019,

¹³⁹ DFAT, ‘[Country information report Egypt](#)’, (section 3.79), 17 June 2019,

¹⁴⁰ DFAT, ‘Thematic Report Egyptian Copts’ (section 5.13), 24 November 2015, copy on request

¹⁴¹ DFAT, ‘Thematic Report Egyptian Copts’ (section 5.14, 5.15), 24 November 2015, copy on request

moved to the north coast of the country in search for better jobs and living conditions. Urban middle class Egyptian women will likely have a greater ability to find work and shelter, and will likely have better access to support networks, than Egyptian women from poor and more conservative areas.¹⁴²

- 7.1.4 For information on freedom of movement generally, see the country policy and information note on [Egypt: Internal relocation](#).

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¹⁴² DFAT, '[Country information report Egypt](#)', (section 5.32), 17 June 2019

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToRs, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Background
 - Terminology
 - Christian community
 - Demography
- Legal framework
 - Constitution
 - Blasphemy law
 - Christian conversion and proselytising laws
 - Anti-discrimination laws
 - Personal status law
 - Banned Christian denominations
 - Church building law – permits, licenses, construction and renovation of churches
- State treatment
 - State attitude
 - Prosecution from and prosecution of actions against Christians
 - State treatment
 - Prosecution for blasphemy and defamation
 - Church building law – permits, licenses, construction and renovation of churches in practice
 - Treatment of Jehovah's witnesses
 - Reconciliation committees
- Societal treatment
 - Societal violence and discrimination 2011 to 2018
 - Societal violence and discrimination 2019 to 2020
 - Interfaith relationships
 - Interfaith dialogue
 - Christians in the government, military and security services
 - Employment

- Education
- Christians converts
- Female genital mutilation/ cutting
- Freedom of movement

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **4.0**
- valid from **27 October 2020**

Changes from last version of this note

Update of country of information and assessment.

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