

4.7. Individuals (perceived as) transgressing Islamic norms

COMMON ANALYSIS
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This profile covers the situation of individuals whose actions, behaviours, or practices are seen as **transgressing Islamic norms or laws**. It addresses the situation of persons considered to have spoken sacrilegiously about God or sacred things (**blasphemy**), as well as persons who have or are considered to have abandoned or renounced the religious belief or principles of Islam (**apostasy**). It also includes individuals who disbelieve or lack belief in the existence of God (**atheists**) and **converts** from Islam. It also addresses other behaviours such as, but not limited to, interfaith marriages. Administering polio vaccines can also be seen as transgressing Islamic norms (see Individuals involved in polio vaccination campaigns).

The perception of practices as a transgression of Islamic norms depends on several factors, such as local context, actors involved and their interpretation of these norms.

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI products: COI Update 2026, 5.; Country Focus 2026, 5.4., 6.1.1., 6.1.2., 6.1.3., 6.1.10.; Country Focus 2024, 5.5.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

In Pakistan, apostasy, atheism and expressions perceived as critical of Islam are often considered blasphemous, with boundaries between these concepts frequently blurred in their interpretation and application. In some cases, the conduct may be criminalised under the Pakistan Penal Code.

This profile should be read in conjunction with Religious minorities. It may also overlap with Women and girls and Persons with diverse SOGIESC, as behaviours of individuals under both these profiles can be perceived as transgressing Islamic norms.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Some acts to which individuals under this profile could be exposed are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution.

More precisely, the Pakistan Penal Code provides for life imprisonment and the death penalty for persons formally charged with **blasphemy**. The expansion of cybercrime legislation has seen

individuals prosecuted for alleged blasphemy on social media. Although the death penalty has not been carried out in practice, there have been instances of individuals spending years on death row, serving life sentences, or being imprisoned on blasphemy charges. Individuals who have been arrested by private entities collaborating with state authorities have been subjected to torture both during apprehension and immediately afterwards. Prosecution for acts which are not considered criminal according to international standards (e.g. blasphemy) would amount to persecution.

There are also reports of public mobilisation, violence against individuals considered blasphemous, which at times was triggered by 'punitive' *fatwas* (non-binding religious opinion issued by an Islamic scholar endorsing punishment or violence).

While **apostasy** and **atheism** are not explicitly criminalised under statutory law, apostates and atheists can be prosecuted under Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Furthermore, apostasy is punishable by death under *hudud* crimes according to the *Sharia* law and most schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Comments on atheism, whether online or offline, may be perceived as blasphemous, and may lead to abduction, physical violence, or threats.

Consumption of alcohol by Muslims is prohibited under Pakistani law, with punishment including imprisonment for up to seven days. The consumption of alcohol is considered as *haram* in Islam.

Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and affiliated groups may target anyone they consider transgressing Islamic obligations, such as consumers of alcohol and other intoxicants, those who believe in democracy and secularism, and those using cryptocurrency.

The severity and/or repetitiveness of other acts that individuals under this profile could be subjected to and whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures, should also be considered. More specifically, individuals accused of and arrested for blasphemy have been subjected to duress to obtain statements and have faced systematic obstruction to legal aid. Individuals considered blasphemers and their families have faced harassment, intimidation, economic boycotts, unlawful evictions and land grabs by fundamentalist individuals and organisations. Atheists have often faced stigmatisation. Persons in an interfaith marriage also frequently face social stigma, family disputes, legal delays, and religious restrictions.

Step 2: What is the level of risk of persecution?

The mere fact for an individual of transgressing Islamic norms, or being perceived as such, does not in itself establish a risk of persecution.

A well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated for individuals formally charged with blasphemy, given the criminalisation of such acts and the severity of the punishments. This also includes, in practice, cases where charges of blasphemy are linked to apostasy and atheism.

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable likelihood of persecution for **individuals perceived to have committed blasphemy, to be apostates and/or atheists, or otherwise to have transgressed Islamic norms**, should take into account **risk-impacting circumstances**, such as:

- **Visibility and nature of the transgression:** the nature and visibility of the alleged transgressing behaviour is the crucial factor. The risk increases where the conversion or apostasy has become known, where the individual engages in missionary or other public religious activities, or where there are blasphemy allegations. Public, repeated, online or widely circulated conduct would significantly increase the level of risk, as it may trigger the involvement of authorities, religious actors, family members or the wider community.

- ***Fatwa*:** the issuance of a punitive *fatwa* for blasphemy is an indication that an individual has been seen as transgressing Islamic norms, and as such, it may increase the risk of persecution particularly when *fatwas* identify an individual by name.

- **Religious background**: persons from religious minorities (such as Hindus and Christians), as well as persons perceived as having abandoned Islam (i.e. apostates) may face an increased risk of blasphemy accusations and unlawful evictions.

- **Perceptions of religious codes in the family and/or the community:** individuals belonging to a family and/or a community that adheres to conservative religious norms face a higher risk of persecution. This factor may have a strong impact where family and/or community members are likely to report, threaten, punish, ostracise or otherwise expose the applicant because of the perceived transgression.

- **Gender**: being a woman or a girl increases the risk since they are subjected to stricter rules than men to comply with Islamic and family obligations. See Women and girls.

- **Home area**: individuals from areas of Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and affiliated groups operations face a higher risk.

- **Socio-economic situation**: this factor may increase the level of risk where it exposes the applicant to exploitation, extortion, pressure to reach informal settlements (such as the pressure exercised by the 'blasphemy businesses'), inability to access legal assistance, or reduced capacity to mitigate the consequences of an accusation.

It is recalled as per Article 10(3) QR that an applicant cannot be expected to adapt his or her behaviour, convictions or identity, or to abstain from certain practices, where such behaviour, convictions or practices are inherent to his or her identity, to avoid the risk of persecution in his or her country of origin.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Where a well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated for an applicant under this profile, this is highly likely to be for reasons of **religion** due to the (perceived) transgression of Islamic norms or the alleged blasphemy used to discriminate against religious minorities.

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